

Executive Power and Republicanism:

The Battle to Define Ulysses S. Grant's Presidency 1868-1880

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Thesis Summary

This thesis situates the presidency of Ulysses S. Grant (1869-1877) and the attempts to provide him with a third term in the republican political culture of Reconstruction. Exploring the period through the lens of the press, pamphlets, and archival material, it shows how republican ideas – especially hostility to partisan politics and fear of concentrated power – in the era had the capacity to both augment and detract from the president’s ability to secure the post-war settlement. Early interpretations of Grant’s presidency, written by scholars often hostile to Reconstruction, accused him of overzealous support for African-American civil rights. In contrast, revisionists blamed Reconstruction’s failure in part on Grant’s weak administration. However, when viewed through the prism of the republican political culture of the era, it is possible to see how Grant’s presidency could be simultaneously strong and weak. Republicanism enabled the portrayal of Grant as both a model republican and a tyrant-in-waiting. This thesis argues that the very qualities which made him a strong president – his antipartisanship, self-sacrifice, and honour – gave Grant the independence and support which many feared would be the undoing of the republic.

Republicanism had the power to define the parameters of the possible during Reconstruction. With the federal government in tumult and the boundaries of presidential power undefined, Americans’ fears over the safety of their liberties helped shape what could be achieved during Reconstruction. When Grant and his backers were able to portray the General as a model republican they helped to increase his political capital. But by painting Grant as a tyrant, political figures – beginning with his opponents and ending with his supporters – undermined his political capital to protect the fragile gains of Reconstruction. This thesis, by exploring several moments before, during, and after Grant’s presidency in which the question of presidential power came to the fore argues that a political culture shaped by republicanism contributed to the downfall of Reconstruction.

Contents

List of figures and tables	7
Figures Acknowledgements	7
Introduction	9
Chapter 1: The 1868 Presidential Election: The Republican Paradox of the Silent Man	65
Chapter 2: The One Term Principle: A Battle over Presidential Power	125
Chapter 3: ‘Even now we have all the tyranny and despotism of an empire, with the outward forms and semblance of a republic’: Caesarism and the Third Term Movement 1873	171
Chapter 4: ‘The most important event of the administration’: The President vetoes the 1874 inflation bill	220
Chapter 5: The Third Term Movement: ‘the unwritten law of the republic’ and the necessity of a ‘strong man’	273
Conclusion	324
Bibliography	340

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1.1 ‘Dignity and Imprudence’

Figure 3.1 ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’

Figure 3.2 ‘Our Modern Canute at Long Branch’

Table 4.1 Western responses to the veto

Table 4.2 Western Democratic responses to the veto

Figure 4.3 ‘The Nation’s tribute’

Figure 4.4 ‘The Cradle of Liberty Out of Danger’

Figure 4.5 ‘Stand Back!’

Figure 5.1 ‘The Third-Term Panic’

Figures Acknowledgement

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Introduction

When Andrew L. Slap published his book, *The Doom of Reconstruction*, many a sceptical eye was cast over his claim that the political beliefs – rather than the racial prejudices – of the Liberal Republicans doomed Reconstruction.¹ But Slap had a valid point. The dominant republican political culture of the nineteenth century, though beginning to splinter into what scholars have called pluralist liberalism, defined the parameters of the possible during Ulysses S. Grant's presidency of 1869 to 1877.² Republican ideas, such as hostility to partisan politics and fears over the centralisation of power, could both augment and detract from the President's political capital and thus his ability to enforce the gains of Reconstruction. The portrayal of Grant as a model republican – the antipartisan, self-sacrificing, and duty-bound civil officer – helped provide the President with enough political capital to enforce radical and unprecedented policies to support universal male suffrage. However, when his detractors succeeded in portraying both his character and these actions as those of an unrestrained, dishonourable, unrelenting tyrant, they had the ability to undermine the reach of federal power into state politics. Grant's willingness to put the Reconstruction settlement above his own political ends – to value antipartisanship, self-sacrifice, and honour above personal considerations – conversely gave rise to both his depiction as a model republican and tyrant-in-waiting. Given longstanding fears of centralised power, corruption, and the demise of the republic – no mere theoretical position considering the recent Civil War – his portrayal as the latter had the power to undermine efforts to entrench the Reconstruction settlement for future generations.

¹ Robert F. Engs, 'The Doom of Reconstruction: The Liberal Republicans in the Civil War Era by Andrew L. Slap', *Journal of American History* 94.4 (2008), pp. 1274-1274; and Charles W. Calhoun, 'The Doom of Reconstruction: The Liberal Republicans in the Civil War Era by Andrew L. Slap', *American Historical Review* 112.5 (2007), pp. 1547-1548.

² Philip J. Ethington, *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 6-14.

Over the last decade historians have increasingly noted that fears of centralised power, corruption, and the stability of the republic, seemed to dominate the Reconstruction era.³ The Civil War, in particular, invoked old fears of the possible demise of the republic, and furnished republicans with substantial evidence that corruption had pulled their country apart, which led to – admittedly partisan – calls for the infusion of purer principles in politics.⁴ But despite the revival of antipartisanship in Civil War politics, which sought to unite the country behind a single purpose (or rather, a single indivisible common good), anxieties over the safety of their republican experiment remained ever present during the war.⁵ Though historians have been reluctant to extend these anxieties into the Reconstruction era, especially beyond the turbulent administration of Andrew Johnson, they have begun to acknowledge that many Americans still feared that the end of the republic was nigh.⁶ This fear of centralised power, rooted in republican antecedents, would undermine the federal government’s ability to protect African-American suffrage. The following chapters argue that both the ideas of antipartisanship and a single public good, and the fears of centralised power and corruption, collected under the umbrella term of republicanism, would work to create uncertainty around the intentions of President Ulysses S. Grant and undermine his ability to protect the gains of Reconstruction.

Fears of centralised power had been around since the beginning of the republic, and indeed were a motivating factor in the American Revolution, yet their role in Reconstruction has been underexplored. Educated citizens were well versed in the examples of the Greek and

³ See Michael T. Smith, *The Enemy Within: Fears of Corruption in the Civil War North* (Charlottesville and London, 2011); Mark W. Summers, *A Dangerous Stir: Fear, Paranoia, and the Making of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill and London, 2009); and Gregory P. Downs, ‘The Mexicanization of American Politics: the United States’ Transnational Path from Civil War to Stabilization’, *American Historical Review* 117.2 (2012), pp. 387-409.

⁴ Smith, *The Enemy Within*, pp. 1-9, and Adam I. P. Smith, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (Oxford and New York, 2006), pp. 3-7, 9-10.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Downs, ‘The Mexicanization of American Politics’, *American Historical Review*, pp. 387-409; and Andrew Heath, ‘“Let the Empire Come”: Imperialism and Its Critics in the Reconstruction South’, *Civil War History* 60.2 (June 2014), pp. 152-189.

Roman republics, which, they believed, fell due to a lack of vigilance in guarding their liberties.⁷ As a result many Americans held onto their revolutionary republican ideology even as their country underwent dramatic changes.⁸ This ideology conditioned Americans to be suspicious of self-seeking politicians and to be ever-vigilant of challenges to their liberties which could endanger the republic. It emphasised the existence of a single public good, and the necessity of self-sacrifice in politics in order to privilege the nation above personal concerns. Plenty of Americans, of course, recognised – as James Madison had noted in the Federalist papers – that self-interest would shape politics, but even after the establishment of mass based party politics in the 1830s, parties continued to rally followers around the pursuit of a single common good.⁹ Republicanism encouraged Americans to ‘see politics as a struggle between good and evil, expressed as the eternal warfare between liberty and power, virtue and corruption.’¹⁰

Yet historians have been slow to appreciate how in the nineteenth-century corruption had multiple meanings – among them an anxiety over centralised power – and had a more encompassing definition than in later centuries.¹¹ Harry L. Watson has explained how it included ‘social, economic, and moral changes that could undermine the basis of republican society.’¹² In many respects, Americans’ interpretation of corruption was a warning against the rise of a modern society, which many believed would transform their country into a ‘state of decay’.¹³ In this sense Reconstruction, with its extension of the federal government, the retention of a standing army, the enlargement of the federal debt, the intrusion of the federal

⁷ Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York, 1990), p. 47.

⁸ Marc Kruman, ‘The Second American Party System and the Transformation of Revolutionary Republicanism’, *Journal of the Early Republic* 12.4 (1999), pp. 509-537; and Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill and London, 1998), pp. xii-xiii.

⁹ Kruman, ‘The Second American Party System and the Transformation of Revolutionary Republicanism’, *Journal of the Early Republic*, pp. 509-537; and James J. Connolly, *An Elusive Unity: Urban Democracy and Machine Politics in Industrializing America* (Ithaca and London, 2010), pp. ix-xi.

¹⁰ Watson, *Liberty and Power*, p. 47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 46. See also Smith, *The Enemy Within*, pp. 2-3.

¹³ Smith, *The Enemy Within*.

military into state affairs, and the extension of the suffrage could be, and by many Americans was, deemed corruption.¹⁴ These fears of centralised power, the demise of the republic, and corruption were part of the republican heritage of the United States which still played a pivotal role in United States politics, and, I will argue, helped to undermine Reconstruction.

Republicanism's roots stretched back to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English radical and oppositional thought and migrated to American shores in the colonial era.¹⁵ The discourse, which the colonials were well-versed in, evolved into a Revolutionary creed which transfused into practical politics.¹⁶ American republicanism transformed from ideas cultivated in Renaissance Europe and from the English Commonwealthmen into a much more diverse ideology which promised, as a kind of guide to political behaviour, to safeguard the republic against unrepublican impulses.¹⁷ Republicanism, as a fluid ideology, continued to inform politics as the dominant political culture at least until the 1830s when previously most historians would argue that the rise of the Second Party System resulted in the demise of the idea of a common good, self-sacrifice, and antipartisanship in politics, which were all crucial components of the concept.¹⁸ However, historians have increasingly acknowledged that the United States 'retained its republican conscience – long after it had become, at least in the North, the most liberal, individualistic, and capitalistic society in the world.'¹⁹ Furthermore, both the Democratic and Whig parties claimed the republican heritage of the nation for

¹⁴ Gregory P. Downs, *After Appomattox: Military Occupation and the Ends of War* (Cambridge, Mass, 2015).

¹⁵ Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787*; and Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787*, pp. 49-53; and Daniel T. Rodgers, 'Republicanism: The Career of a Concept', *Journal of American History* 79.1 (June 1992), p. 11. See also J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Political Tradition* (Princeton, 1975).

¹⁸ Rodgers, 'Republicanism', *Journal of American History*, pp. 11-38; Jean H. Baker, 'From Belief into Culture: Republicanism in the Antebellum North' *American Quarterly* 37.4 (1985), pp. 532-550; and Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton, 1971), pp. 76-78.

¹⁹ Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787*, p. xii.

themselves and attested that their party mandates represented a singular public good.²⁰

However, it was the Whig Party with its reluctance to engage in party politics and demand loyalty from its voters which has been identified more closely with this heritage.²¹ Though many historians argue that the importance of republicanism diminished in the 1830s, it is evident that in many ways, it continued to exert influence on the worldviews of many Americans.

The most significant example of this was the way in which Americans interpreted the basis upon which their republic operated. Crucially, when the republic was created it was not motivated by egalitarian principles, in the modern sense, but by notions of representation and the universal (and singular) interest of the whole nation.²² This led to the creation of a republic – a government ruled by laws subject to some democratic and institutional checks – but it did not create a democracy, which was seen as unrestrained majority rule.²³ The latter, of which, many Americans still struggled to accept as late as 1873, as Chapter Three illustrates in its analysis of the Caesarism scare: a brief episode which played to fears that electoral popularity could lead to tyranny. Anxieties over the likes of presidential third terms highlighted that many citizens, even after the Civil War, privileged the republic over democracy; though compatible, the two concepts are not one and the same. Though the idea of democracy was commonplace by the 1840s, it did not supersede the idea of the republic

²⁰ Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York and Oxford, 1999), p. 121. See also Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (Oxford and New York, 2004), pp. 219-254; and Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1998), pp. 144-158.

²¹ Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pp. 109-121; Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago and London, 1979), pp. 8-9, 75-81; and Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties*, pp. 71-80.

²² Ethington, *The Public City*, pp. 72-73, 77-85; Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, pp. 74-89; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, pp. 42-57; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, pp. 63-77; Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), pp. 74-78, 122-125; Thomas Brown, *Politics and Statesmanship: Essays on the American Whig Party* (New York, 1985), pp. 1-12, 46-48; and LaWanda Cox and John H. Cox, *Principle and Prejudice 1865-1866* (London, 1963), p. 58.

²³ Ethington, *The Public City*, pp. 77-85; and Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, pp. 76-91.

until the twentieth century.²⁴ Republicanism was for many Americans in the nineteenth century what democracy became in the twentieth century.

Republicanism was an ideology which provided ideas for how to organise a people-led government but also infused itself into culture thus providing widely held beliefs, values, and norms which shaped the nature of governance. By privileging the ideals of representation, federalism, and a singular public good, Americans created a government which protected liberties, guarded against tyranny, opposed corruption, but was not necessarily democratic. This allowed, initially at least, for suffrage to be limited to propertied classes but even after its broader expansion in the 1820s and the 1830s to nearly all white men, instances still occurred where democratic governance was restricted in order to govern in the interest of the public good.²⁵ One of the most salient examples of this practise occurred in San Francisco where Vigilance Committees were assembled twice in the 1850s to rule in place of the city's elected government. This belief, however questionable, in an indivisible public good could result in the pursuit of undemocratic actions while many Americans simultaneously believed republican government was being adhered to.

However, the outbreak of the Civil War saw a significant change in this ideology; while many Americans continued to privilege republican government above democratic government – evident in the continuing power of republican ideas such as fears of centralised power – the emancipation of the slaves and the rise of African-American civil rights led to a splintering in the republican ideology as many Americans increasingly saw themselves as interest groups with valid demands.²⁶ Yet the most significant thing about this change was that, as republicanism was still the dominant ideology, these interest groups had to posit their

²⁴ Ethington, *The Public City*.

²⁵ Brown, *Politics and Statesmanship*, pp. 6-7; and Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pp. 8-9.

²⁶ Ethington, *The Public City*.

interests within a discourse of republicanism in order to challenge it.²⁷ This meant that even as Americans began to accept that multiple public goods existed, there was still an overriding claim to the moral high ground of a universal public good, which these groups had to interact with to promote their interests.

This meant that republican fears were still widespread during the Reconstruction era as Americans continued to see politics in terms of a battle between the good of the nation and the destruction of the republic. In turn, this interpretation of power meant that the intrusion of federal power in state affairs – including the apparent centralisation of power in an individual – continued to determine how many Americans viewed Grant’s efforts to entrench the gains of Reconstruction for future generations of African Americans. This thesis explores how republicanism shaped the reach of executive power during the Grant presidency of 1869-1877, and influenced attempts to give him a third term in 1880. Through the use of newspaper articles, campaign literature, and personal papers I aim to illustrate that republicanism was not simply a language of legitimacy which provided a cover for the day to day transaction of interest group politics. Rather it was an ideology which transfused into political culture a set of widely shared beliefs, values, and norms which governed the nature of governance in this era.

Fears of centralised power, a strong independent executive, a large national debt, a standing federal army authorised to intervene in state institutions all worked to arouse the suspicions of many ever-vigilant Americans over the intentions of Grant in power. These fears inhibited his ability to work towards the equality of all men in the late nineteenth century. Increasingly Americans began to fear that Grant’s actions were endangering the very nature of the republic through the President’s willingness to take unprecedented actions to protect the Reconstruction settlement. I argue that the very qualities which made him a model republican

²⁷ Connolly, *The Elusive Unity*, pp. 19-27.

– his belief in antipartisanship, the public good, and self-sacrifice in politics – and led him to protect Reconstruction at great political cost to himself and the Republican Party also gave rise to an image of Grant as a tyrant who unnecessarily interfered in local politics and destabilised the republic.

Republicanism as Political Culture

This thesis revolves around the contention that republicanism, as an ideology, not only influenced the type of government created in the United States but also infused political culture with certain values, beliefs and norms through which Americans interpreted and understood the actions of their governing officials. Pivotal to a study of this kind is therefore an exploration of the relationship between ideology and political culture, which has been explored by many scholars. One of the most influential scholars to address this issue is Clifford Geertz, whose essay ‘Ideology as a Cultural System’ influenced a generation of historians and led to renewed interest in the ability of political culture to throw new insights on the nature of politics in the United States and elsewhere.²⁸

Geertz helped historians solve the problems facing them when examining ideology and culture. He successfully ‘fused ideas, interests, and behavior by treating ideology as a socially constructed ‘cultural system.’²⁹ Essentially, his thesis revolved around the theory that ‘ideology itself is a part of reality’; in this sense ideology became ‘a layer of culture that fuses sentiments into significant belief systems.’³⁰ By doing so, Geertz helped illuminate how ‘[i]deology ... affected how people perceived and acted on their material interests ... and shaped political ideas with unspoken assumptions that guided behavior.’³¹ He showed that ‘ideology was the overall context of ‘events, behaviors, institutions, or processes,’ rather than

²⁸ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (London, 1993), pp. 193-233.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-207; and Glen Gendzel, ‘Political Culture: Genealogy of a Concept’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28.2 (1997), p. 235.

³⁰ Baker, *Affairs of Party*, p. 147.

³¹ Gendzel, ‘Political Culture’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, p. 235.

the cause ... or the effect ... of social phenomena—including politics.’³² Geertz claimed that ‘[t]he link between the causes of ideology and its effects seems adventitious because the connecting element—the autonomous process of symbolic formation—is passed over in virtual silence.’³³ As Gendzel sufficiently summarised, ‘[t]he cultural context of politics encompassed perception of interest, intention for behavior, and assumption behind idea. It inscribed the words and deeds of participants with culturally symbolic meanings that analysts endeavoured to decipher.’³⁴

By focusing on cultural semiotics, which Geertz defined as ‘the interworked systems of construable signs’, and the physical practise of politics, historians were able to bring a new level of analysis to political history by focusing on political culture.³⁵ His statement that ‘[c]ulture is public because meaning is’ helped bring creditability to numerous untapped sources, such as newspapers, campaign literature, and campaign memorabilia.³⁶ Geertz highlighted that language – even something as hackneyed as partisan language – had meaning as it indicated the rules by which politicians had to play, and therefore what was meaningful to the society’s citizens, regardless of whether the politician used it with sincerity.³⁷ As Ward Goodenough has stated, ‘society’s culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members.’³⁸ Political rhetoric took on new significance with Geertz’s interpretation as it became a lens which historians could use to understand how politicians and citizens conceived and interacted with politics. Political language and symbols now shed new light on the meaning of government.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 207.

³⁴ Gendzel, ‘Political Culture’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, p. 235.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 234; and Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 14.

³⁶ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* p. 12.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11

Historians embraced Geertz's interpretation of culture enthusiastically as they sought to bring new insights to previously dismissed areas of politics, such as partisan language. They defined political culture as 'the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which defines the situation in which political action takes place' which includes 'the life histories of the individuals who make up the system ... [and] the public events and private experiences that become 'the collective expression of a political system.''³⁹ This approach utilised 'patterns of language, behavior, and thought drawn from large bodies of evidence' in order to gain awareness of how citizens understood and interacted with the process of politics.⁴⁰ As many historians of the United States have illustrated, a study of political culture provides the opportunity to understand how Americans in general viewed their government in any one period. Eric Foner's *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, in particular, used Geertz's approach to show how Republicans in the Civil War era interpreted and interacted with politics thus shedding new light on the coming of the Civil War.⁴¹ Even though Geertz's theory is a half century old, it continues to inform historians' methods for interpreting politics. As the historian Lynn Hunt had attested 'governing cannot take place without the stories, signs, and symbols that convey and reaffirm the legitimacy of governing in thousands of unspoken ways.'⁴² These emblems of political culture helped Americans to interact with and understand their politics. By exploring political culture – analysing language, symbols, and stories – American History scholars detected the continuation of the ideals of republicanism long after the Revolution, thus helping historians to see eras, such as the Civil War and Reconstruction, as disputes which went deeper than simply a power struggle, but rather a struggle for the continuation of the existence of the republic.

³⁹ Baker, *Affairs of Party*, pp. 11-12. See also Ronald P. Formisano, 'The Concept of Political Culture', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 31.3 (2001), pp. 393-426.

⁴⁰ Joanne B. Freeman, 'The Culture of Politics: The Politics of Culture', *Journal of Policy History* 16.2 (2004), p. 137.

⁴¹ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (Oxford and New York, 1995).

⁴² Jean H. Baker, 'Politics, Paradigms, and Public Culture', *Journal of American History* 84.3 (1997), p. 899.

The Rise of Republicanism in Historiography

The historiographical battle to establish republicanism as a vital component of American political culture in the nineteenth century has been hard fought. Originally developed by early American historians researching Colonial and Revolutionary America, it gained prominence through works by Bernard Bailyn, J. G. A. Pocock, Caroline Robbins, and H. Trevor Colbourn.⁴³ Bailyn, the most influential scholar, explored republicanism's development from English reformist thought to American republicanism succinctly documenting its roots and evolution within American society into a Revolutionary creed.⁴⁴ Moreover, he analysed the transfusion of the theory of republicanism into practical politics.⁴⁵ Bailyn recognised that the fears that Englishmen has expressed in Britain were given greater gravity in America.⁴⁶ These fears informed their interpretation of British actions and ideas about government which were eventually transferred into practice.⁴⁷ However, republicanism did not only affect the form of government established but ideas about power and the role of the electorate in guarding it.⁴⁸ Republicanism became infused into all levels of government and politics.⁴⁹

However, it was Gordon S. Wood who ultimately identified and illustrated the importance of the concept for understanding the birth of the young republic. Wood contended that 'the historiographical problems involved in interpreting the Revolution and the formation of the

⁴³ The most influential of these historians was Bernard Bailyn who – first in his *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776* and then in his *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* – outlined the ideas developed from English republicanism. Bailyn built on works by other prominent historians in this field, such as Caroline Robbins and H. Trevor Colbourn. For the development of republicanism in America see Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstances of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968). See also H. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (New York, 1974). Colbourn has also used the republican paradigm to make sense of Jeffersonian America, see H. Trevor Colbourn, 'Jefferson's Use of the Past', *William and Mary Quarterly* 15.3 (1958), pp. 56-70.

⁴⁴ Bernard Bailyn, *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Bailyn, *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Constitution stemmed from a failure to appreciate the distinctiveness of the political culture in which the Revolutionary generation operated.⁵⁰ Republicanism here was both an idiom of politics and a way of seeing the world, rather than simply a form of government, as earlier scholars had conventionally cast it.⁵¹

Increasingly historians of the Early Republic begun to understand republicanism as encompassing a diverse range of connected ideas. For Wood ‘[t]he sacrifice of individual interests to the greater good of the whole formed the essence of republicanism’.⁵² It demanded politicians with sufficient reserves of civic virtue to legislate for the good of the republic. Good republican citizens valued selfless duty, personal honour, and hostility to faction and party. By privileging self-sacrifice, republicanism ran counter to America’s supposed ‘liberal tradition’ of individualism, which helps explain its appeal to a generation of New Left historians searching for alternatives to unbridled capitalist competition.⁵³ But republicanism was above all about power. In the republican mentality, liberty needed careful guardianship lest corrupt men transformed the nation into despotism. It epitomised the ideal that unless republican citizens fiercely guarded their liberties they would lose them: a fate that had befallen history’s previous republics.

It was this ideology of republicanism which not only provided theories for the structure of government in the United States but also ways for Americans to interact with the process of governance. In this way, republicanism became a cultural system which dominated both the system of government and the culture of governance. It imbued Americans with ideas about how to safeguard their new republic. Republicanism asked citizens to watch vigilantly for threats to their liberty; to be wary of attempts to centralise power; to protest against the

⁵⁰ Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787*, p.xvi.

⁵¹ Robert E. Shalhope, ‘Towards a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography’, *William and Mary Quarterly* 29.1 (1972), pp. 49-80.

⁵² Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787*, p. 53.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, and Rodgers, ‘Republicanism’, *Journal of American History*, p. 18.

creation of a standing army and a large national debt; to fear factions and parties; to sacrifice their personal interests to the public good of the whole nation; and honourable conduct and selfless duty in power to sustain the republic. These values and beliefs infused the new political culture of the country in order to protect the nascent republic. Republicanism became the dominant political culture of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴

However, though republicanism provided a fixed set of values that Americans followed to protect the republic, this does not mean that all Americans interpreted these values in the same way. Although Americans believed in the existence of a single public good for the nation, like any country, they did not all agree what form this public good should take. This was most saliently illustrated by the vehement nature of American elections in the nineteenth century which saw each party argue that their opponent's vision would foreclose the death of the republic.⁵⁵ Republicanism did not preclude competing visions of the public good, but rather the idea that only one could exist and be implemented.

Wood's work, Robert E. Shalhope argued, helped historians acknowledge the gravity which language possessed in forming the political thoughts of early Americans and he suggested looking beyond the eighteenth century to trace the genealogy of republican thought.⁵⁶

Shalhope would not be disappointed: over the following years, historians found republicanism all over the first half of the nineteenth century, tracing its influence on journeymen resisting industrialisation, yeoman farmers fighting market encroachment, slaveholders battling abolitionists, and even abolitionists fighting slaveholder tyranny.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ethington, *The Public City*, pp. 6-9, 208, Jon K. Lauck, *Prairie Republic: The Political Culture of Dakota Territory, 1879-1889* (Norman, 2010), pp. 20-23, Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787*, p. xii, and Kruman, 'The Second American Party System and the Transformation of Revolutionary Republicanism', *Journal of the Early Republic*, pp. 509-537.

⁵⁵ Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System*, pp. 122-123; and Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, p. 113.

⁵⁶ Shalhope, 'Towards a Republican Synthesis', pp. 71, 79-80.

⁵⁷ Later scholarship helped to develop and cement the transition of republicanism from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century. In particular, Sean Wilentz explored the growth and development of artisan

Watson's study of republicanism in the Age of Jackson and Smith's study of corruption and political culture in the Civil War indicate how far the concept has travelled.⁵⁸

But the alacrity with which historians answered Shalhope's call to extend the study of republicanism beyond the Revolutionary era has often been met with scepticism. In 1985 the *American Quarterly* hosted a roundtable discussion on the concept in which many historians expressed doubts over the extent of republicanism's importance in nineteenth-century political culture. Jean H. Baker argued that by the 1830s, with the rise of mass political parties, republicanism had ceded in importance as external threats diminished.⁵⁹ She claimed individualism, majoritarian government and the liberty to pursue 'personal interests' – often through party organisation – had made the concept anachronistic.⁶⁰ Her claims were supported by Joyce Appleby who had argued in a long-running debate with J. G. A. Pocock that republicanism was incompatible with capitalism.⁶¹ Individualism and republicanism could not co-exist, she argued, as private and public interests could not coincide.⁶² Appleby contended that if the United States had made the transition to capitalism by 1800, the country could not have been republican as well.⁶³ A few years later, Daniel T. Rodgers tried to lay the republican 'paradigm' to rest by arguing that its popularity owed as much to the professional dynamics of academic history as it did to the historical record.⁶⁴ But despite his assertion that

republicanism in New York City. See Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*. Jonathan Atkins has also shown the development of republicanism in the Jacksonian era. See Jonathan M. Atkins, *Parties, Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee, 1832-1861* (Knoxville, 1997), pp. 1-26. Steven Hahn gives the best exploration of yeoman farmers' role in opposing market encroachment. See Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transition of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York, 1996). For slaveholders' use of republicanism, especially appeals to the vigilance needed in guarding liberty and their fears that the attempts of abolitionists to dissolve slavery represented a desire to impose despotism onto the slaveholders' themselves, see William J. Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics in 1860* (Columbia, South Carolina, 2000).

⁵⁸ Watson, *Liberty and Power*; and Smith, *The Enemy Within*.

⁵⁹ Baker, 'From Belief into Culture' *American Quarterly*, pp. 532-550.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 538.

⁶¹ For details of this battle, see Rodgers, 'Republicanism', *Journal of American History*, p. 23.

⁶² Joyce Appleby, 'Republicanism and Ideology', *American Quarterly* 37.4 (1985), pp. 461-473; and Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and the New Social Order* (New York and London, 1984).

⁶³ Appleby, *Capitalism and the New Social Order*, pp. 95-97.

⁶⁴ Rodgers, 'Republicanism', *Journal of American History*, pp. 11-38.

historians had stretched the concept too far and applied it to areas where it seemed to have little relevance – critiques which many scholars took onboard – it has experienced a resurgence in the last decade.

Republicanism's Endurance into the 1850s

While many historians agreed with Rodgers that republicanism had been overused, they also argued that its use in political culture had great merit. In particular, Philip J. Ethington has shown with precision the ways in which republicanism integrated itself into both an ideology and a culture which intersected politics through beliefs in a singular public good and the necessity of antipartisanship in politics. Despite the rise of interest groups, and the increasing popularity of the notion of pluralist liberalism or rather multiple public goods, republicanism persisted as a guide to political action, which can be seen in many anti-democratic actions which posited themselves as the pursuit of a united public good.

The demise of the Second Party System into multiple political groups during the 1850s gave credence to arguments that partisan interests overtook the republican outlook, but these groups often used both the language and the ideology of republicanism to pursue their political aims. The sincerity of their stances matters less than the necessity of using republicanism to gain political ground in this era as it highlights that the republican political culture was still dominant in this period. In particular, the notion of limiting suffrage to implement a united public good showed that many Americans valued their republican system of government, which urged vigilance in protecting liberty, over democratic government or rather the unrestrained will of the majority. The ability of Americans to suggest that a restrictive suffrage was compatible with republicanism originated in the property qualifications for suffrage at the republic's creation.⁶⁵ The emphasis, when it came to

⁶⁵ Ethington, *The Public City*, p. 168.

suffrage, was on representation and ‘the general good of the commonwealth’, rather than full democratic representation.⁶⁶

As a result, the government employed numerous means to restrict the influence of the common masses on the governing process, but perhaps the most outright embodiment of this notion was how state legislative caucuses chose the presidential electors who decided which candidate would be awarded each state’s Electoral College votes, as well as the state’s senators.⁶⁷ This situation existed in a majority of the states in 1800; only two left the choice to the popular vote.⁶⁸ However, by 1824 all but six referred to the popular vote, and by 1836 only South Carolina still lagged behind.⁶⁹ Universal white male suffrage had been established in all but three states by 1824.⁷⁰ The procedure for nominating presidential candidates also became more democratic after the 1824 election.⁷¹ Although the caucus for presidential electors was gradually superseded by popular elections in the 1820s and 1830s, United States’ senators continued to be chosen by the state legislature until the ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913.⁷² A change to this rule was first proposed in 1826 but significant opposition meant support was not forthcoming until problems with this procedure were encountered in the 1890s.⁷³ The longevity of this limitation suggests that concerns remained over the ability of all men to choose their representatives wisely. While the suffrage was increasingly expanded, safeguards on the electoral process remained. For the established elite, a virtuous citizenry was the cornerstone of the republic, not democracy.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁶⁷ Brown, *Politics and Statesmanship*, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 7-12; and Randall G. Holcombe, *From Liberty to Democracy: The Transformation of American Government* (Ann Arbor, 2002), p. 168.

⁷³ Holcombe, *From Liberty to Democracy*, p. 168.

The sanctity of republicanism – and the public good – over democracy can be seen in numerous incidents, but two of the most significant were the rise of the anti-immigrant Know-Nothing Party and the Vigilance Committees of San Francisco. Formed in 1849, the Know-Nothing Party flourished in the early to mid-1850s through ‘hostility to the old parties’ and ‘Catholic immigration’, especially Irish, both of which they saw as denigrating the purity of American politics.⁷⁴ Anxieties over the partisanship, and selfishness, of parties combined with the supposed ignorance of immigrants and their ‘idolatrous allegiance to a ‘foreign potentate’ cast grave doubts on [their] patriotism’.⁷⁵ The party believed both the Germans and Irish Catholics ‘voted [for] the welfare of their group, often at the direction of machine politicians and priests.’⁷⁶ They also contended they were ‘deficient in self-restraint’ which had led to a rise in both crime and intoxication in the areas they populated.⁷⁷ As such Catholic immigrants became the embodiment of naturalised Americans’ fears over the direction of politics in the 1850s. These fears and insecurities over the future of the republic – undoubtedly exacerbated by the controversies caused by slavery – allowed the Know-Nothing to make substantial electoral gains in the mid-1850s.⁷⁸ Though the party ceased to exist after its poor showing in the 1856 presidential election, its popularity illustrated the ability of political movements which organised around republican themes – in this stance antipartisanship and the common good – to do very well locally despite their anti-democratic sentiments.⁷⁹ The party’s popularity suggests that many citizens had serious doubts over the republican qualifications of some Americans to vote.

Similarly, the Vigilance Committees of San Francisco highlighted these fears of unrepblican values compromising the national good of the republic. These political committees, arising in

⁷⁴ Mark Voss-Hubbard, *Beyond Party*, pp. 107-117.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁷⁶ Brown, *Politics and Statesmanship*, p. 47.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Voss-Hubbard, *Beyond Party*, p. 110, 141-144; and Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850's* (New York, 1982) pp. 127-130, 243.

⁷⁹ Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, pp. 243-248.

both 1851 and 1856, sought to resolve the moral degeneracy of politics which many felt had been corrupted by an un-republican city government. Though short-lived – both lasted around three months – they shared common origins and both intended to correct a lack of republican virtue in politics. Its members saw themselves as ‘republican statesman faced with an ancient challenge to liberty’ which must be corrected lest the republic dissolved under the sway of corruption.⁸⁰ The Committees illustrated the persistence of republican solutions to governmental problems as republicanism dictated that the lapse of republican virtue, justice, and honour in politics necessitated the overthrow of the existing government until civic virtue could be restored to the elected members.⁸¹ These solutions were only possible because as Ethington has stated in relation to San Francisco, ‘[t]he republican ideological construction of the political community was not ... democratic.’⁸²

Though the Second Committee only lasted ninety-nine days, its effects penetrated far deeper into San Franciscan politics. The Vigilantes founded the People’s Party which gained ‘comfortable majorities or pluralities’ at every election for ten years thus providing it with an unprecedented level of power.⁸³ An achievement they gained by combining aspects of republicanism ‘that legitimated the rule of a self-avowed apolitical party run by a secretive executive committee on business principles.’⁸⁴ Its definition of the public good included typical republican values such as ‘low municipal expenditures, low taxation, and the prevention of professional politicians’ from elevation in their ranks.⁸⁵ While they acknowledged the existence of interest groups, they insisted ‘they were not legitimate actors in the formation of public policy.’⁸⁶ These groups included Irish Catholics and low-blue collar workers whose needs were ignored in the Vigilantes definition of the public good; an

⁸⁰ Ethington, *The Public City*, p. 87.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-127; and Watson, *Liberty and Power*, pp. 44-53.

⁸² Ethington, *The Public City*, p. 77.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 128-129.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

action which would eventually led to the splintering of the dominant belief in a single public good in society.⁸⁷ Yet the Vigilantes long reign in power showed the potency of espousing republican values.

Republicanism in the Civil War and Reconstruction Era

The true power of espousing these republican values would be most saliently shown during the Civil War and Reconstruction era where great strides were made for African-American civil rights in the name of national unity. As Ethington has illustrated, republicanism stretched into the Civil War era as the People's Party controlled San Francisco's city government into the mid-1860s.⁸⁸ It was a situation replicated throughout the country as the parties that claimed the republican mantle rose to power. To this end, the national Republican Party re-styled itself as the Union Party and sought to use republican values to gain political power. Many historians have argued, in opposition to Ethington, that republicanism saw a revival during the Civil War as many Americans began to fear the possible demise of their republic. By doing so, they illustrate how important republicanism was for many Americans at this time of national uncertainty. This thesis argues, in line with Ethington, that republicanism continued as the dominant political culture during this era. But it also began to splinter as legislation for African-Americans provided legitimacy for interest group politics, or rather the existence of multiple public goods. However, even as pluralist liberalism gained supporters in the political arena, republicanism still dominated and thus defined the terms of politics in this era.

Among those who argue for republicanism's revival during the Civil War is Baker who has argued that Democratic actions during the war were motivated by a republican political

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

culture revived by the war.⁸⁹ This republicanism led many Democrats (known as Peace Democrats, or to use their derogatory title, Copperheads) to oppose the war. They believed the conflict jeopardised their liberty, as it brought into being a large army and substantial debt, both of which had led to policies in England which made the monarchy's rule intolerable.⁹⁰ Democrats too felt the war would degrade their liberties and lead to despotism.⁹¹ Even those who did support the war (the War Democrats) wanted to retain the Constitution as it was believing that only 'a thesaurus of maintenance' of 'preserving, restoring, upholding, and keeping' would save their virtuous republic from a dangerous slide into ruin caused by war.⁹² Viewed in the republican political culture, the Democrats' actions can be seen as being informed by their fears of the destructive power of war for republics rather than support for the Confederacy, or slavery.⁹³ Debates over power in the Civil War era were often refracted through a republican lens.

The Civil War also saw the revival of another distinctly republican trait: antipartisanship. Though often used by third parties, including the Know-Nothing Party, to amass support by positing themselves in opposition to the partisan – and by extension, selfish – tactics of the main parties, it was rekindled during the Civil War to gain support for the Union war effort.⁹⁴

Adam I. P. Smith has explored how the Republican Party used antipartisanship to 'delegitimiz[e] organized opposition' for electoral gain by stressing the need for 'national unity' to save the republic; the most popular refrain being 'No Party Now but all for the Union'.⁹⁵ The plight of the nation during the Civil War, Smith argues, led to a resurgence of antipartisanship in order to support the Union war effort. He illustrates how the Republican Party used this revival to their advantage to win elections, a strategy known as 'partisan

⁸⁹ Baker, *Affairs of Party*, pp. 143-176.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-174.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-176.

⁹⁴ Voss-Hubbard, *Beyond Party*, pp. 4, 10; and Smith, *No Party Now*.

⁹⁵ Smith, *No Party Now*, pp. 25, 78.

antipartisanship'.⁹⁶ The strategy 'combined a disdain for partisan practices with the claim that the only issue of consequence was the survival of the republic.'⁹⁷ By claiming to represent the public good, the Republicans effectively denied their own partisanship by forcing their opponents into an 'endorsement of the war policy of the administration', or risk charges of treachery.⁹⁸ Antipartisanship, Smith argues, reaped electoral success whilst 'partisanship reaped electoral defeat.'⁹⁹ The party which embraced national unity, abandoned partisanship and showed the partisanship of their opponents won elections.¹⁰⁰ Partisanship quickly became the equivalent of disloyalty which allowed politicians to strengthen the system of party politics whilst promoting antiparty sentiments.¹⁰¹ It was a tactic which allowed the Republicans to implement partisan policies in the name of saving the republic; one which they would repeatedly invoke – through the waving of the 'bloody shirt' – during Reconstruction to achieve otherwise divisive, and controversial, policy aims such as black suffrage.¹⁰²

In the fraught climate of the Civil War another aspect of republican politics came to the fore: fears and conspiracies circled and infected the political arena.¹⁰³ In particular, Michael T. Smith has demonstrated in his study of corruption that many Northerners believed corruption posed a greater threat to the republic than the Confederate States of America, which illustrates how deeply entrenched the fear of un-republican behaviour had become.¹⁰⁴ The growth of the national government during the Civil War – in particular Lincoln's expansion of the executive office – even proved a more immediate concern to some Americans than the

⁹⁶ Smith, *No Party Now*.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42. See also Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*.

¹⁰² Ethington, *The Public City*, p. 9; Robert F. Engs and Randall M. Miller, *The Birth of the Grand Old Party: The Republicans' First Generation* (Philadelphia, 2002), pp. 131-133; Charles W. Calhoun, *From Bloody Shirt to Full Dinner Pail: The Transformation of Politics and Governance in the Gilded Age* (New York, 2010), p. 5.

¹⁰³ Smith, *The Enemy Within*, pp. 1-12.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

potential victory of the Confederates.¹⁰⁵ These fears highlight the tendency inherent in American politics to identify internal threats to liberty, even during periods of real danger from external forces, which illustrates that domestic worries about the state of the republic preoccupied many citizens.

Due to its quasi-military nature, Reconstruction proved a fertile ground for these republican fears over the dissolution of the republic to take root once more. The enhanced powers of the presidency and the lack of precedence for reconstructing the nation cultivated misplaced anxieties, especially during Andrew Johnson's presidency which Mark W. Summers has explored in *A Dangerous Stir*.¹⁰⁶ The extension of presidential power – especially the war powers wielded by Lincoln – and the uncertain future of the former Confederacy led to heightened fears over Johnson's actions in directing Reconstruction policy, and lay behind Republican congressmen's desire to impeach the President. However, Summers argues that Johnson's near conviction by the Senate led to the dissipation of paranoid politics before Grant ascended to the presidency. Yet Andrew Heath and Gregory P. Downs have argued that the uncertain nature of politics in the period continued to spark concerns about national demise, which manifested themselves in prophecies of monarchical government and 'mexicanization': the descent into recurring civil wars.¹⁰⁷ Both Heath and Downs have shown that republicanism and its corollary of paranoid politics remained vital aspects of American political culture during Grant's and Hayes' presidencies.

Indeed, Downs, in his latest book, *After Appomattox*, argues for the prominence of issues of historic republican anxiety – without linking them to republicanism – in enabling the failure

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-12.

¹⁰⁶ Summers, *A Dangerous Stir*.

¹⁰⁷ Heath, "'Let the Empire Come'", *Civil War History*, pp. 152-189; and Downs, 'The Mexicanization of American Politics', *American Historical Review*, pp. 387-409.

of Reconstruction.¹⁰⁸ He highlights how concerns over a large standing army and the size of the national debt led both the Republicans and Democrats to reduce expenditure, through the demobilisation of the army, as soon as feasibly possible, especially after the little known financial crisis of 1865.¹⁰⁹ However, in doing so, both parties jeopardised the ability of the federal government to protect African-American civil rights.¹¹⁰ While the issue, politically at least, benefitted the Democrats, it bore no fruit for the Republicans who supported it including ardent abolitionists such as Senator Charles Sumner.¹¹¹ By acting on deep seated republican fears surrounding both large federal debts and a large standing army, the Republicans unwittingly handicapped the federal government's ability to protect the Reconstruction settlement.¹¹²

Similarly, Andrew Slap has argued for the potency of republicanism during the Reconstruction era by highlighting how many former Radical Republicans – men who supported the abolition of slavery and worked diligently to clothe African-Americans in civil rights – pursued policies that seemed the antithesis of these endeavours, yet were consistent with the republican ideology of limited government.¹¹³ These men argued against the involvement of the federal government in the states, and for the reduction of the size of the army and the federal debt – issues ingrained in Americans from the colonial era as dangerous to republican government, as they believed these issues constituted a serious and ongoing threat to republican government.¹¹⁴ Slap's work illustrates that even those committed to an egalitarian vision of government could not overlook republican ideas on good governance for democratic government. Republican government would not be sacrificed on the altar on equal rights.

¹⁰⁸ Downs, *After Appomattox*.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-95, 222-225.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-36, 41-51, 71-72, 89-108, 203-230.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 223.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 92-95, 222-225.

¹¹³ Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Baker, *Affairs of Party*, pp. 154-176; and Downs, *After Appomattox*, pp. 92-95, 222-225.

The Liberal Republican Party itself was the embodiment of a republicanism that often led to the creation of third parties which posited themselves in opposition to the main parties and promised to uphold values in opposition to partisanship.¹¹⁵ These included the ‘promise to transcend mere partisanship and return vaulted ‘morals,’ ‘principles,’ and ‘brotherhood’ to the center of American public life’ which Voss-Hubbard has shown appealed not only to antebellum citizens, most conspicuously illustrated by the Know-Nothing Party, but even to late nineteenth-century Americans.¹¹⁶ He argues that the language and methods used by third parties as diverse as the Prohibition Party (founded in 1869), the Grangers and Antimonopolists (founded 1874), and the Farmers’ Alliances and the Populist party (active during the 1880s and 1890s), were rooted in republican suspicion of self-interested partisans.¹¹⁷ Thus the antiparty tradition persisted well into the Civil War era and beyond illustrating the dominance of a republican political culture even as interest group politics became increasingly prevalent in the late nineteenth century.

These historians have worked diligently to show that republicanism continued to inform opinions over the boundaries of federal power and the distinctions between the public and private spheres where civil rights were concerned. Republicanism remained an important political language which influenced conceptions of public service and political parties. It also shaped opinions on the role and behaviour of the president. Even republicanism’s detractors have shown how the concept continued to influence the nation. Baker, who argues both for republicanism’s irrelevance in the 1830s and its revival in the 1860s, highlighted this in the 1985 roundtable discussion in the *American Quarterly*, where she showed that children’s

¹¹⁵ Mark Voss-Hubbard, ‘The “Third Party Tradition” Reconsidered: Third Parties and American Public Life, 1830-1900’, *Journal of American History* 86.1 (June 1999), pp. 133-134; and Voss-Hubbard, *Beyond Party*, pp. 4, 10.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Voss-Hubbard, ‘The “Third Party Tradition” Reconsidered’, *Journal of American History*, pp. 130-134.

education in republicanism continued beyond the 1830s.¹¹⁸ In particular, the self-sacrifice of military figures was a crucial element in this republican pedagogy, for ‘[s]oldiers, more than anyone, surrendered their private concerns to attend the greater good.’¹¹⁹ Historians such as Slap, Baker, and Ethington have shown that while the ideology of liberalism – the idea that individuals pursued selfish interests – increasingly permeated nineteenth-century American political culture, it remained compatible with an evolved republicanism.¹²⁰ This is a point Wood himself acknowledged some years ago. ‘America’, he asserted, ‘retained its republican conscience – long after it had become, at least in the North, the most liberal, individualistic, and capitalistic society in the world.’¹²¹

The rise of liberalism in the nineteenth century, therefore, could not curtail the strength of the Revolutionary political rhetoric as many Americans continued to view politics in terms of the public good, civic virtue, corruption and tyranny. The fear of republican decay, however, heightened anxiety about plots to undermine liberty, and placed a great onus on citizens to defend their fragile polity. Richard Hofstadter’s 1964 book *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* began to explore this phenomenon by looking at moments as diverse as the Salem Witch Trials and McCarthyism.¹²² Hofstadter wrote that some Americans feared the existence of ‘a vast and sinister conspiracy, a gigantic and yet subtle machinery of influence set in motion to undermine and destroy a way of life’.¹²³ Hofstadter did not have the conceptual language to link the idea to republicanism. Yet many historians have built on his thesis and connected the paranoia Hofstadter highlighted in politics to the vigilance necessary to protect the republic from disintegration. In particular, Wood has written on how the fear of tyranny, which drove the colonialists to overthrow the British ruling elite in America, transcended the

¹¹⁸ Baker, ‘From Belief into Culture’, *American Quarterly*, pp. 541-542.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 542.

¹²⁰ Ethington, *The Public City*.

¹²¹ Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787*, p. xii.

¹²² Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and other essays* (New York, 2008).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 29

Revolution and embedded itself in American politics and culture.¹²⁴ This fear of oppression did not dissipate with the creation of the American republic; instead the fears of tyranny were transposed onto American institutions like the White House, a point James Madison encapsulated when he stated that ‘[w]herever the real power in a Government lies, there is danger of oppression.’¹²⁵

Even as interest groups became credible, the resilience – and continuing dominance – of republicanism, which was a consequence of the instability wrought by both the Civil War and Reconstruction, led many interest groups to situate themselves in an antipartisan culture of civic virtue, self-sacrifice, and honour in politics or face defeat.¹²⁶ Even those who openly rejected the ideology of a single public good found that to gain political traction they needed to engage with republicanism in order to circumvent it. Ferdinand Wood, mayor of New York in the 1850s and 1860s, encountered this particular problem when he attempted to espouse interest group politics.¹²⁷ Though Wood felt ‘that notions of the common good were antiquated’ and the city simply needed ‘strong, pragmatic, and experienced politicians who would preserve order’, he also realised that this idea needed to be posited in the republican political culture of ‘civic leadership devoted to the public good rather than private interest’ to gain widespread support.¹²⁸ The strength of republicanism meant that opposing republicanism also meant working within its framework.¹²⁹ Parties and politicians needed to posit their policies in republican values to augment power and to detract capital from their opponents. In this respect republicanism, even as it began to wane, still held great potency for policy ends in the late nineteenth century. Democracy remained on the back foot until the turn of the century.

¹²⁴ Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787*, pp. 409-467.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 410, 419-424.

¹²⁶ Smith, *No Party Now*, pp. 3-24.

¹²⁷ Connolly, *An Elusive Unity*, pp. 12-13.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-20.

Ulysses S. Grant and the Historians

Ulysses S. Grant was born in the mid-west of America at Point Pleasant, Ohio in April 1822. The oldest son of a tanner, Grant's experiences in this small town shaped the rest of his life serving as an education in an antiparty republicanism which moulded his conception of politics and politicians.¹³⁰ Following his father's wishes, the reluctant Grant matriculated at the military academy of West Point in 1839 and, despite applying little effort to his studies and hoping Congress would shut down the Academy, graduated in 1843 twenty-first out of the thirty-nine cadets remaining from the original cohort of 109.¹³¹ Denied a position as a mathematics professor, Grant joined the fourth infantry at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri.¹³² Shortly after, the company was ordered to Louisiana as part of ongoing attempts to acquire Texas, and in the ensuing Mexican War Grant distinguished himself despite his personal objections to the partisan conflict.¹³³ Grant received a permanent promotion to first lieutenant and a temporary promotion to Captain, progressing in 1853 to the permanent rank of Captain in the regular army.¹³⁴ However, his subsequent post guarding the Californian border proved a dreary task and in his misery Grant resigned from the army in 1854.¹³⁵

It was during his seven years as a civilian in Missouri and Illinois that Grant's antipartisan political viewpoints came to the fore. Though never an active participant in politics, he held strong opinions on issues as diverse as slavery and the spoils system. Despite his marriage into a slaveholding family, Grant objected to the institution, going as far as to build his own

¹³⁰ For the best treatments of Grant's early life, see Brooks D. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822-1865* (Boston and New York, 2000), pp. 1-11; and Joan Waugh, *U.S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth* (Chapel Hill and London, 2009), pp. 10-20.

¹³¹ William B. Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant: Politician* (Tennessee, 2010), p. 8. [Originally published in New York in 1935]. See also Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p. 11-17.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ H. W. Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union: Ulysses Grant in War and Peace* (New York, 2013), p. 19.

¹³⁴ Jean Edward Smith, *Grant*, (New York, 2001), pp. 34-76, provides a very good overview of Grant's experiences in the Mexican War.

¹³⁵ For details on Grant's unhappiness in California, see Smith, *Grant*, pp. 76-90.

house, his neighbours claimed, to escape arguments on the subject with his father-in-law.¹³⁶ He even once stated, within hearing range of his father-in-law's slaves, that 'he wanted to give his wife's slaves their freedom as soon as possible' and in March 1859 he took a slave acquired from his brother-in-law to the local court and freed him.¹³⁷ Politically, though never officially linked with them, he followed many practises associated with the Whig Party. While his father identified with the Whigs, there is no indication that Grant did so, however, he was guided by republican political notions that aligned with Whig principles, such as antipartisanship, the sacrifice of personal interests, and duty to the public good in politics.¹³⁸ He also supported the ideal of the statesman and federally funded improvements.¹³⁹ His objections to the spoils system came to light with his inability to gain a patronage position due to lack of identification with the controlling party on a commission.¹⁴⁰ This failure led him to enunciate, to his father, his dislike of party politics and his favouring of a meritocratic system rather than one which relied upon party loyalty.¹⁴¹ Though Grant would come to accept, somewhat, the necessity of rewarding party loyalty to pass his favoured legislation as president, he still retained his republican, and Whiggish, viewpoints which would influence, both negatively and positively, the direction of Reconstruction under his presidency.

When Civil War broke out in 1861 Grant felt compelled to offer his services to the United States. He almost failed to get a position after he rejected help from an old army friend as, he wrote, 'he was perfectly sickened at the political wire pulling for all these commissions and would not engage in it.'¹⁴² After unsuccessfully petitioning the Adjutant-General of the

¹³⁶ Brooks D. Simpson, 'Butcher? Racist? An Examination of William S. McFeely's *Grant: A Biography*', *Civil War History* 33.1 (1987), p. 75.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

¹³⁸ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 1-2.

¹³⁹ John Y. Simon, *The Union Forever: Lincoln, Grant, and the Civil War* (Lawrence, 2012), p. 119.

¹⁴⁰ John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 1: 1837-1861 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1967), pp. 351-353.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 2: April-September 1861 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1969), pp. 20-22.

Army, Colonel Thomas, and failing to acquire an interview with Major-General McClellan at his headquarters in Cincinnati, Grant unexpectedly received a helping hand from his Congressman Elihu B. Washburne with whom he had just become acquainted.¹⁴³ The reason Washburne offered his services is unknown as Grant had not appealed to his congressman, but possibly his former rank led Washburne to recommend him to the Governor of Illinois for service.¹⁴⁴ As a result, the position he eventually received was lower than his abilities merited. His distaste for party politics, this thesis argues, would continue to be his compass throughout the rest of his life, and would prove both advantageous and detrimental to his presidential career.

However, the abilities which had distinguished him in Mexico, and saw him rise from his original class ranking of twenty-first on graduation to ninth, came to the fore despite his refusal to engage in party politics.¹⁴⁵ Grant rose from an assistant in the state adjutant general's office to the highest position in the army.¹⁴⁶ His intellect and his determination, derived from his hardships, helped establish him as the United States' most successful General.¹⁴⁷ Congress revived the rank of Lieutenant General for Grant and looked to him for guidance in the post-war years.

As Commanding General of the United States Army, Grant was stationed in Washington D.C. after the Civil War ended, and it was here that his own republican outlook became most apparent. His refusal to express his opinions on political issues and indeed any issues not directly related to his duties contrasted starkly with the partisan fighting occurring over Reconstruction between the President and Congress. A more astute political thinker than has

¹⁴³ Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs* (New York, 1999), pp. 126-128.

¹⁴⁴ For the best overview of Grant's entry into the Union Army, see Smith, *Grant*, pp. 103-109.

¹⁴⁵ Smith, *Grant*, p. 71.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104. Grant's first commission in the Army was as Colonel of the Twenty-first Illinois (a company of volunteers).

¹⁴⁷ On Grant's wartime service, see Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, pp. 95-454; Smith, *Grant*, pp. 108-407; and Bruce Catton, *Grant Takes Command, 1863-1865* (Boston, 1990).

often been recognised, Grant acknowledged the desire of politicians to use his prestige for their partisan endeavours, and remained steadfastly neutral.¹⁴⁸ President Johnson, in particular, tried assiduously but unsuccessfully to use Grant's reputation for his own re-election on his 'Swing around the Circle'. This led many Republicans to believe Grant held conservative opinions on Reconstruction, a belief reinforced by Grant's acceptance of the *ad interim* Secretary of War's office after Johnson removed the incumbent Edwin Stanton. But this political tightrope walking and Grant's stoically nonpartisan stance meant senior Republicans saw him as a plausible presidential candidate who would be acceptable to the whole country after the Radicals were blamed for electoral reverses in 1867. Grant's popularity led him to unanimously win the 1868 Republican presidential nomination.

In a highly partisan battle over the future of Reconstruction which was nevertheless fought in an often antipartisan republican language, Grant won the election and ascended to the presidency in March 1869. He then governed in a way at odds with the political spoils ideology established by President Andrew Jackson in 1828. Taking his guidance from his hero, the Mexican War commander President Zachary Taylor, Grant ruled in a nonpartisan fashion which astounded and appalled Republican congressmen who desired administration positions.¹⁴⁹ Most historians refer to Grant's military background to explain his actions, yet there exists considerable evidence that Grant believed appointments should not be rewards for party loyalty, but given to those with the requisite abilities to fulfil the duties of an office.¹⁵⁰ However, it is evident he did not appreciate the necessity of coalition building

¹⁴⁸ Patrick J. Kelly, 'The North American Crisis of the 1860s', *Journal of the Civil War Era* 2.3 (2012), p. 342.

¹⁴⁹ Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York and London, 1983), pp. 67-99. For Grant's admiration of Taylor, see Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, pp. 51-52, 72.

¹⁵⁰ For historians who have written on how Grant's military background influenced his approach to his presidency, especially his cabinet appointments, see Smith, *Grant*, pp. 468-479; Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union*, pp. 429-435; Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant*, pp. 148-156; Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction*, pp. 178-179; and Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 444-445. In contrast to these assessments, Frank J. Scaturro argued that it was Grant's desire to remain above politics and his disdain for convention which influenced his appointments and course in office rather than his military background. See Frank J. Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered* (Lanham, New York and London, 1999), pp. 16-18, 58-59, 108.

within his party to pass favoured presidential measures which could be attributed to his military education but also his political education, Johnson, after all, was hardly an ideal mentor.

This lack of knowledge, combined with the President's desire to stay independent of Congress, and of his party, was a major contributing factor to the split in his party prior to the 1872 presidential election, which led to an unlikely alliance between the breakaway Liberal Republicans and Democrats. Though he quickly learnt of the need to use patronage as a tool to achieve partisan ends – his toppling of Senator Charles Sumner from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is a particularly salient example of this – he did not reconcile with these men. His second term, though, was rarely in doubt. Grant's overseeing of the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, which secured African-American men suffrage across the nation; his successful resolution of the dispute with Britain over the Alabama Claims; and his prosecution of the Ku Klux Klan saw him once again win the Republican nomination unanimously.

Re-elected in a landslide victory, Grant proceeded to cement the gains of the Civil War. His evolving understanding of the practical implementation of republicanism led him to give more gravitas to party loyalty to achieve these ends, which saw him, in the face of election fraud, consistently side with his own party. In this regard, he continued to prosecute the Klan and enforce the Reconstruction Amendments. However, the financial crisis of 1873, the uncovering of corruption and concerns over the extension of presidential power greatly reduced Grant's ability to protect the gains of Reconstruction. When Grant approved the use of the military to combat voter intimidation and fraud in the Deep South, many Republicans joined the Democrats in decrying the threat posed to republican government by a strong executive. This backlash – especially from Northern Republicans – decreased Grant's political capital to implement Reconstruction and hastened its downfall. Each of these events,

I argue over the following chapters, were debated at the time in republican political language and often shaped by republican ideological assumptions.

Prospects of a third (and for Grant unwanted) term disappeared amid these concerns over the strength of the presidential office. Despite the disputed election of 1876 leaving the federal government in limbo until March 1877, Grant successfully (and peacefully) transferred the presidential office to his successor: the Republican Rutherford B. Hayes. He then embarked on a world tour for two years which raised his stature both at home and abroad. The inclusion of a *New York Herald* journalist on the tour and the frank conversations on his presidency which – although initially reluctant – Grant allowed John Russell Young to publish, turned a man scarred by partisan political fighting into a statesman.¹⁵¹ Upon his return, domestic problems and growing admiration for his use of federal power during Reconstruction led some Republicans to renew calls for a third term. However, Grant could not muster enough votes to win the 1880 Republican nomination which he lost to House member James Garfield, who won the election.¹⁵² Grant retired to New York where he remained a private citizen – rarely engaging in public events – until a poor business investment and poor health thrust him back into the public arena.¹⁵³ In a bid to provide for his family after contracting terminal throat cancer, Grant initially wrote a few articles for *Century* magazine for which he received little compensation.¹⁵⁴ Their popularity led to a suggestion that he write his memoirs which began a race against time as Grant sought to complete the task before his passing.¹⁵⁵ The resulting product, which covers his career up to Appomattox, is considered an American

¹⁵¹ For details of Grant's world tour and his conversations with John Russell Young, see Young, *Around the World with General Grant*.

¹⁵² For a treatment of presidential term limits, see Michael J. Korzi, *Presidential Term Limits in American History: Power, Principles & Politics* (College Station, 2013). For Grant's third term effort see pages 58-64.

¹⁵³ The best treatment of Grant's financial loss and the last year of his life is Thomas M. Pitkin, *The Captain Departs: Ulysses S. Grant's Last Campaign* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 2000). This short book covers, in depth, the timeline of events in Grant's last year.

¹⁵⁴ Pitkin, *The Captain Departs*, p. 19.

¹⁵⁵ Pitkin, *The Captain Departs*. See also McFeely, *Grant*, pp. 495-517.

literary great.¹⁵⁶ The absence of any reflection on his presidency in the memoir is telling, for upon his death in July 1885, he was remembered as a general rather than a chief executive.

The emphasis on the military man who fought for national unity rather than the incumbent of the White House who battled for equal rights signalled the shift in mood towards ‘reconciliationist’ memories of the Civil War era.¹⁵⁷

Initial histories of Grant’s life reflected the image presented of him to the nation in death.¹⁵⁸

Whilst his Civil War career was celebrated, his attempts to enforce African-American civil rights were denounced as overzealous and mistaken, anticipating the position that would crystallise in the Dunning School historiography of the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁹

This image of Grant prevailed until the 1920s, when, in the aftermath of the attrition of World War One, scholars re-evaluated Grant’s military reputation. Historians began to denigrate Grant’s military abilities by claiming his victories owed simply to superior numbers and resources; they denounced him as a ‘drunken butcher’ who did not care about his troops.¹⁶⁰

Not until the 1950s when popular historians re-evaluated Grant’s military reputation did this view of Grant change. The appearance of numerous popular histories which reclaimed

¹⁵⁶ McFeely, *Grant*, pp. 510-511. See also Ethan S. Rafuse, ‘Still a Mystery? General Grant and the Historians, 1981-2006’, *Journal of Military History*, 71.3 (2007), p. 866; and Alan Brinkley and Davis Dyer (eds.), *The American Presidency: The Authoritative Reference* (New York, 2004), p. 200. James McPherson has also called Grant’s memoirs ‘one of the great military autobiographies in the English language.’ See James McPherson, ‘Grant: A Biography (review)’, *Civil War History* 27.4 (1981), p. 364.

¹⁵⁷ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001).

¹⁵⁸ Numerous histories were written the year Grant died in 1885 such as Albert Deane Richardson, *A Personal History of Ulysses S. Grant* (Hartford, 1885) and James P. Boyd, *Military and Civil Life of Gen. Ulysses S. Grant* (Philadelphia and Chicago, 1885). The dedication of Grant’s tomb in New York City in 1897 also saw a flurry of new biographies which echoed the sentiments of those published in 1885. These biographies discuss Grant’s early life and Civil War career in depth but give very little space, if any, to his presidency. See James Grant Wilson, *General Grant* (New York, 1897). Wilson spends 12 pages on Grant’s presidency and discusses Reconstruction in a single page out of a total of 379 pages. See also Walter Allen, *Ulysses S. Grant* (Boston and New York, 1901). Allen implies that in pursuing the convictions of the Ku Klux Klan Grant acted like a dictator. He also claims Grant was naive in politics and allowed corruption to run riot in government.

¹⁵⁹ William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction: Political and Economic 1865-1877* (New York and London, 1907).

¹⁶⁰ Rafuse, ‘Still a Mystery?’, *Journal of Military History*, p. 851. See James Ford Rhodes, *History of the Civil War 1861-1865* (New York, 1917), pp. 107-108, 255-257, 306, 309, 320-321, 323, 325, 361. Rhodes, whilst claiming Grant was a military genius, makes constant references to the number of Grant’s troops, his need for reinforcements, his drunkenness and the loss of life he caused on the battlefield. See also Walter H. Taylor, *General Lee: His Campaigns in Virginia 1861-1865 with Personal Reminiscences* (Norfolk, Virginia, 1906), pp. 72, 230-232, 241, 245-250, 262. Taylor claims that Grant won due to superior numbers and cared little for ‘human life’ (p. 241).

Grant's 'military genius' along with academic scholarship helped to re-establish Grant's battlefield reputation to the standing it had enjoyed at the time of his death.¹⁶¹

However, Grant's presidential standing still languished. While scholarship on Reconstruction – especially the presidency of Abraham Lincoln – underwent favourable revision during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Grant's presidency received a harsher critique in this era than in initial evaluations. With the exception of John A. Carpenter's *Ulysses S. Grant*, published in 1970, which is a rare example of a favourable study of Grant's presidency. Carpenter highlighted Grant's nonpartisan style of governing which saw him attempt to reform the federal government.¹⁶² Picking up on his republican beliefs, without naming them as such, Carpenter showed how Grant's sense of duty drove his journey to the White House and how he was more committed to dutiful governance than any specific policies.¹⁶³ In particular he illustrated that Grant pursued reform of the civil service, seen partly through his cabinet appointments, in good faith though he was ultimately unsuccessful in achieving permanent reform.¹⁶⁴ Though critical of Grant's Southern policies, Carpenter offered a more balanced assessment of Grant's conduct than other works.¹⁶⁵ He illustrated Grant's attempts to ensure the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment but also strongly critiqued his lack of intervention in Southern states.¹⁶⁶ In this sense, Carpenter presented a

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, and Bruce Catton, *Grant Moves South, 1861-1863* (Boston, 1990), pp. 30, 260, 420. In particular works by Bruce Catton, T. Harry Williams, and Kenneth Williams did a great deal to raise Grant's military reputation. See especially T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals* (London, 1952). In his book Williams outlines how Grant was a greater general than Robert E. Lee. See also Bruce Catton, *U.S. Grant and the American Military Tradition* (Boston, 1954). In this book Catton affirmed that Grant had been treated unfairly and inaccurately by historians; there was neither any evidence of drunkenness nor carelessness in his career. Grant, he claimed, possessed a military prowess which was clear in his victories. This book was a short overview of work Catton had done in his earlier books on Grant but also considered his presidency briefly. Catton also hinted at Grant's republicanism by showing his duty, self-sacrifice and antipartisanship as a military commander. See Bruce Catton, *Grant Takes Command, 1863-1865* (Boston, 1990), pp. 117-124. For evidence of Grant's sobriety and a refutation of his reputation for drunkenness, see p. 117, and pp. 26-27, 331-335.

¹⁶² John A. Carpenter, *Ulysses S. Grant* (New York, 1970).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-86.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 111-127.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-92.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

more nuanced examination of Grant than other historians at this time and provided a more balanced, though often extremely critical, account of Grant's presidency.

Revisionist historians, along with Carpenter, criticised Grant for failing to protect and enforce African-American civil rights. Denouncing Grant's lack of political prowess, they alleged his loyalty to his friends led him to appoint corrupt men to power who mired his administration in scandal.¹⁶⁷ Preoccupied with dealing with this corruption, the administration's attention was distracted from Reconstruction which allowed white conservatives to disenfranchise African Americans in the South.¹⁶⁸ Grant, they charged, wasted the opportunity provided by Lincoln and the Republican Congress to firmly establish equal rights for the former slaves.¹⁶⁹ One historian went further. William Gillette alleged that Grant's Southern policy was non-existent thus making the enforcement of the Reconstruction Amendments and the protection of African-Americans impossible.¹⁷⁰

The evaluation of the inept president culminated with William S. McFeely's biography of Grant which not only accused Grant of incompetence but also denied him the military greatness accorded by earlier scholars.¹⁷¹ McFeely's assessment echoed the post-World War One scholarship on his Civil War career and post-World War Two evaluations of his presidency. Not only did the picture presented include the worst elements of previous works but McFeely attributed a brutality to Grant which other scholars had not, especially in his

¹⁶⁷ Though this revision mostly occurred as a result of the Civil Rights movement, William B. Hesseltine broke this trend by presenting a revision of Grant's presidency in the 1930s. See Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant*. See also Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction*. Gillette portrays Grant as incompetent and inconsistent in his Reconstruction policies, which he argues were ineffectual. He also claims that Grant was unable to stem the tide of corruption and supported his friends and family in politics to his detriment.

¹⁶⁸ Some historians went so far as to allege that Grant did not have a Southern Reconstruction policy to implement in the first place and thus allowed each State to all but disenfranchise former slaves. See Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction*, pp. 76-77.

¹⁶⁹ Gillette in particular espouses this view by claiming that Grant was inconsistent and indecisive in policy. Even when Gillette acknowledges the vigorous use of executive power by Grant, he alleges the action was ill-thought out and ultimately detrimental to Reconstruction. See Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction*, pp. 86, 133-135.

¹⁷⁰ Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction*, pp. 76-77.

¹⁷¹ McFeely, *Grant*.

seemingly brilliant Civil War career. Seeing arrogance where others saw modesty; inhumanity where others saw compassion; and incompetence where others saw brilliance; McFeely presented the most negative portrayal of Grant to date in 1981, plunging Grant's reputation lower than even the orthodox historians of the early twentieth century had placed it.

Although the book was praised by many of McFeely's contemporaries, its portrait of Grant did not chime with many historians.¹⁷² Reviews criticised McFeely for his insubstantial research and his lack of understanding of Civil War military history.¹⁷³ As a result, McFeely's biography inspired a wave of post-revisionist works which sought to amend Grant's reputation. The first salvo came from Brooks D. Simpson who challenged McFeely's implication that Grant was simply a 'butcher' and a 'racist'.¹⁷⁴ McFeely did not explicitly accuse Grant of these things, as Simpson acknowledged, rather he suggested Grant had 'an indifference to human suffering.'¹⁷⁵ Grant, in McFeely's view, cared neither for his soldiers as a General, nor the African-Americans whose rights he should have protected as President.¹⁷⁶ However, Simpson charges McFeely with using his sources selectively and ignoring a large body of evidence which showed that Grant cared deeply about both his soldiers and the former slaves.¹⁷⁷ Simpson, along with a number of other historians, such as John Y. Simon, John A. Carpenter, and lawyer Frank J. Scaturro, has worked to amend this viewpoint, and restore Grant's humanity.

¹⁷² For a list of accolades won and praise from historians see Brooks D. Simpson, 'Butcher? Racist? An Examination of William S. McFeely's *Grant: A Biography*', *Civil War History* 33.1 (1987), pp. 63-65.

¹⁷³ Rafuse, 'Still a Mystery?', *Journal of Military History*, p.855-856. Rafuse gives an overview of how McFeely's book was greeted. For critical reviews, see James McPherson, 'Grant: A Biography (review)', *Civil War History* 27.4 (1981), pp. 362-366. McPherson criticises McFeely for his numerous factual errors as well as 'his superficial understanding of the nature of Grant's generalship' (p. 364). See also Richard N. Current, 'Grant without Greatness', *Reviews in American History* 9.4 (1981), pp. 507-509. Current argues that McFeely's biography 'tells nothing about the genius of a Civil War general' and criticized McFeely for his obvious dislike of Grant which neared 'disgust' at times. Much of the book, Current claimed, relied on conjecture and McFeely made numerous errors in his work which undermined its contribution to Grant's historiography.

¹⁷⁴ Simpson, 'Butcher? Racist?', *Civil War History*, pp. 63-83.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-83.

Simpson's article did much to challenge McFeely's assessment of Grant's insensitivity and inhumanity by showing how deeply Grant felt the carnage of war and the suffering caused by battles. Simpson showed both Grant's efforts to avoid unnecessary suffering, highlighting that Grant's battles from 1861-1863 'achieved significant results at a surprisingly low cost in casualties' but also his regrets, even years later, at the loss of life which occurred at Cold Harbor – a battle which he lost – and his inability 'to remove the Union wounded for several days after the battle.'¹⁷⁸ A colleague of Grant's, Colonel Horace Porter, wrote how Grant 'was visibly affected by his proximity to the wounded, and especially by the sight of blood.'¹⁷⁹ To Porter, it was evident that Grant 'felt most keenly the painful spectacle presented by the field of battle.'¹⁸⁰ Grant even went as far as risking his death to 'halt an offensive that had become needless slaughter' after he realised 'the attempt to pierce the Confederate lines through the use of a mine was doomed'.¹⁸¹ Simpson painted a man with great humanity and compassion for others; one whom it was evident, by Simpson's account, had depths which remained unplumbed by McFeely.

This assessment of Grant's conduct in war was reinforced by his care and concern for African-Americans. McFeely charged Grant with a lack of concern for them citing, in particular, his wife's ownership of several slaves.¹⁸² According to Simpson, Grant 'enthusiastically supported' the enlistment of African-Americans in the army and pushed his officers to prevent 'prejudice against them'; an indication of his potential policies as president.¹⁸³ He had great belief in their abilities and felt that strategically they were 'a powerful ally.'¹⁸⁴ He also showed his support for 'black equality' by 'promising retaliation if

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66, 72.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Confederate commanders either executed or reenslaved them.¹⁸⁵ In support of his assessment of Grant's freedom from racial prejudice, Simpson cited the opinions of several prominent African-Americans after the war, as well as the opinions of both free blacks and slaves that worked with him in Missouri in the 1850s.¹⁸⁶ Not only did Grant pay more than other employers of free blacks, which both his neighbours and other whites complained about, he also refused to whip them or force them to work.¹⁸⁷ Simpson recalled General Order No.3, issued 12 January 1866, which nullified the Black Codes that had restricted the free movement of the former slaves in the South; and Grant's request for 'statistics on interracial crime' from his colleagues in the field.¹⁸⁸ By highlighting these little known incidents, Simpson illustrated that Grant was more committed to black equality and in tune with the suffering of others than McFeely claimed. In doing so, Simpson showed the need for a deeper analysis of Grant's policy decisions as president.

Yet Simpson went further in trying to revise Grant's reputation. In addition to writing a biography on his life up to the end of the Civil War, Simpson wrote a book on the period 1861 to 1868 and another on the Reconstruction presidents which briefly explored Grant's presidency. Both efforts went a long way to revising the existing picture of Grant as a president not committed to maintaining black civil rights. His first effort, *Let Us Have Peace*, presented a far more succinct and nuanced examination of Grant's political abilities illustrating that Grant was far from the novice that many historians have portrayed. He cited instances as diverse as Appomattox, where his 'terms embodied Lincoln's spirit of magnanimity, achieving what the president wanted', to Johnson's Reconstruction where, amongst other actions, he urged Congress to pass legislation which would shield 'district

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.74-75.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.79-80.

commanders from removal by the president' to protect the gains already made.¹⁸⁹ Grant repeatedly tried to circumvent Johnson's attempts to undermine Reconstruction; from attempts to convince Congress to pass legislation and stay in session, to pleading with the president, and accepting the *ad interim* Secretary of War position to make sure that orders contrary to Congress' wishes were not issued.¹⁹⁰ It was evident from these actions that Grant was more politically savvy than many historians (and contemporaries) had given him credit. Yet his work also showed a side of Grant which has been little explored: that of the dutiful, antipartisan man who assiduously tried to walk a patriotic line in politics; a line he would again attempt to follow as president. Though Simpson acknowledges Grant's Whig roots, especially in his belief in following Congress' will, he did not equate his sense of antipartisanship, his sense of duty, and his honourable stances with republicanism.¹⁹¹ Despite this he showed, in both *Let Us Have Peace* and *The Reconstruction Presidents*, a man who 'played politics skilfully', who cared deeply about the public good, and who fought for black civil rights against the odds.¹⁹² He searched for means to clothe the former slaves in their rights from advocating the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, asking Congress for legislation to enforce its provisions, and pursuing the annexation of Santo Domingo so white Southerners would learn to appreciate their worth.¹⁹³ Simpson showed that Grant strove for African-American civil rights more diligently than many have realised.

Simpson's picture of a more principled, committed, and compassionate man than many historians, especially McFeely, had painted was propelled forward by other scholars too, such as John Y. Simon, who also endeavoured to elevate Grant's stature by giving him a more balanced assessment. Simon worked laboriously to amass Grant's personal papers and

¹⁸⁹ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, p. 186.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-197.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-3, 194.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, and Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p. 134, 139, 142-143.

¹⁹³ Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, pp. 142-150.

publish them in print form thus making widely available a large body of evidence to enable fresh research into the man.¹⁹⁴ In his many published articles, Simon highlighted the care which Grant showed for his troops recalling how he wrote ‘to an anxious mother of two privates’ at one point stating he would find her sons when possible and ‘do all in my power to cheer them up.’¹⁹⁵ He recalled Frederick Douglass’ statement on Grant’s ‘superiority to popular prejudice’ and depicted the patriotism which motivated Grant’s decision to accept the presidency despite his distaste for politics.¹⁹⁶ If Grant had only served one term, Simon suggests he would be viewed far more favourably, for despite his teething problems, he achieved many significant successes in his first term.¹⁹⁷ Simon, like Simpson, showed a more complex and politically astute man with far more compassion than had previously been recognised and in doing so, helped to enhance his reputation.

Though few works on Grant look specifically at his presidency, one recent study which has sought to re-evaluate Grant’s presidency is Frank J. Scaturro’s aptly titled *President Grant Reconsidered*.¹⁹⁸ In analysing Grant’s presidency, and the type of president he was, Scaturro suggested that part of the reason for Grant’s mediocre reputation was the literary reputations of his adversaries; left out of power, these men had ample time to pen their criticisms of the President.¹⁹⁹ Scaturro, like Simpson and Simon, claimed Grant was a far more competent politician than has been generally acknowledged, but more than this, he claimed Grant, as a president, was a reformer, which can be seen in his attempt to rally against the spoils system at the beginning of his administration with his cabinet choices.²⁰⁰ He also highlighted how

¹⁹⁴ Bruce Weber, ‘John Simon, Tireless Editor of Grant’s Papers, Dies at 75’, *New York Times*, 10 July 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/10/us/10simon.html?_r=0

¹⁹⁵ Simon, *The Union Forever*, p. 114.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁹⁸ Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered*.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-22.

Grant's critics, for political reasons, had exaggerated the extent of corruption discovered.²⁰¹

In one instance another reformer, George William Curtis, in trying to show how easily the spoils system could be abused, used financial figures from Johnson's administration on the New York Customhouse, which elicited accusations from Grant's critics that he had lost nearly \$100 million when corruption had actually been reduced under Grant's governance.²⁰²

Scaturro also goes some way to show the superficial nature of investigations into corruption and how less corruption occurred than under other presidents with better reputations such as Harry Truman.²⁰³ Scaturro has attested that Grant has been judged harshly, both by his contemporary critics and scholars, creating an image which is out of sync with much of his presidency.

Yet despite these re-evaluations, the overall historical opinion on Grant's presidency still languishes somewhat under the misapprehension that Grant was politically naive and unable to distinguish between honest and corrupt men. But although this evaluation still persists in Grant's historiography, there has also been a steady stream of new studies published in the last decade which have continued to present a more nuanced assessment of Grant's presidency.²⁰⁴ One of the most recent academic monographs, Joan Waugh's *U.S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth*, was published in 2009 and focused mainly on Grant's passing and the process of building his tomb in New York City.²⁰⁵ However, her book also contained a short biography which – though heavily reliant on existing historiography of

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-23.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-47. For the comparison to Truman see pages 46-47.

²⁰⁴ See, for example, studies of Grant's foreign policy endeavours such as the annexation of Santo Domingo. See Eric T. L. Love, *Race Over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill and London, 2009); and Nicholas Guyatt, 'America's Conservatory: Race, Reconstruction, and the Santo Domingo Affair', *Journal of American History* 97.4 (2011), pp. 974-1000.

²⁰⁵ Waugh, *U.S. Grant*. Waugh's book focuses mainly on the Civil War memory of Grant cultivated upon his death. In particular she looks at the process of building Grant's tomb: examining the methods used to accumulate the funds for construction; the infighting between committee members; and the design process. Waugh's short biography is a sharp synthesis of some of the more favourable treatments of Grant in the existing literature, and overall she presents an honourable man.

Grant's military and political careers – offered new insights into Grant's early life.²⁰⁶ As a result, her work indicated how far re-assessments of Grant's life had come.

Yet many of the recent published works on Grant are still popular biographies of his life which often describe his military career in great detail and cover his presidential career more briefly.²⁰⁷ Their assessments of Grant's presidency offer scant revision of his abilities or policies as president. The latest, by academic H. W. Brands, bucks this trend by allotting a significant portion of his biography to Grant's presidency.²⁰⁸ Though Brands presents the most favourable assessment of the Grant administration to date he is more interested in policy than ideology and political culture, and consequently leaves unexamined the republican milieu which both shaped Grant's own understanding of the presidency and delimited the powers of his office. An understandable emphasis on what Grant did rather than what he could do is common in numerous biographies and academic works, which often begin with the qualifier that their subject is an enigma – a paradox – who eludes understanding.²⁰⁹ By

²⁰⁶ Although Waugh offers valuable accounts of Grant's early life, she does so without analysing what these accounts implied about Grant's childhood and what they meant for the overall mental development of Grant. The numerous accounts – especially popular biographies – written in response to McFeely's work on Grant have led to a rise in Grant's reputation as President. Though overall Grant still languishes, he lies much higher now in presidential rankings than when the rankings first began in 1948. See Max J. Skidmore, *Presidential Performance: A Comprehensive Review* (Jefferson, North Carolina, 2004), p. 1; and Robert W. Merry, *Where They Stand: The American Presidents in the Eyes of Voters and Historians* (New York, 2013). However, the impact of McFeely can be seen in the dip in Grant's rank in the early eighties and nineties where in 1994 and 1996 he sank to a low of 38th out of 42 presidents. See Siena College Research Institute, *US Presidents Study 1994*; and William J. Ridings and Stuart B. McIver, *Rating the Presidents: A Ranking of U.S. Leaders, From the Great and Honorable to the Dishonest and Incompetent* (New York, 2000). One of the last surveys conducted by historians, in this case the United States Presidency Centre in the UK in 2011, places Grant much higher at number 29. See USPC, *UK Survey of US Presidents*, 2011. However, it was a British newspaper survey that produced his highest ranking of 18 in 2008. See Jeremy Griffin and Nico Hines, 'Who's the Greatest? The Times US Presidential Rankings', *The Times*, 28 October 2008 [accessed 20 November 2014]. However, it is worrying that the same survey placed Andrew Johnson at 24. Grant is also popular among journalists, such as Ta-Nehisi Coates of the *Atlantic*, who has written several favourable articles which have helped to erode popular perceptions of Grant. See Ta-Nehisi Coates, 'Ulysses S. Grant, Trouble Man', *The Atlantic*, 5 June 2010 [accessed 26 August 2014].

²⁰⁷ In particular see Smith, *Grant*.

²⁰⁸ Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union*.

²⁰⁹ Biographers who have noted in their prefaces and introductions Grant's enigma-like qualities include Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, pp. xvii-xix and Smith, *Grant*, pp. 13-15, 306. Others have described Grant as confusing. See Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant*, pp. 1, 91. This issue is the subject of Ethan Rafuse's aptly titled article 'Still a Mystery? General Grant and the Historians, 1981-2006', *Journal of Military History*, pp. 855-856. Though not a biography, also of interest is the chapter on Grant, written by McFeely, in Brinkley and Dyer (eds.), *The American Presidency*, pp. 200-214, which begins 'Ulysses S. Grant is a study in paradox.'

not identifying the ideas which motivated Grant – and the constraints of the political culture in which he operated – these historians and biographers cannot sufficiently understand and explain his actions. Many of the works which have most successfully re-evaluated Grant have therefore examined his actions within the wider context of the Civil War and Reconstruction. By contextualising Grant and narrowing their focus, historians such as Eric T. L. Love, Nicholas Guyatt, Jonathan D. Sarna and Patrick J. Kelly have furthered our understanding of Grant the man – and the type of president he was – and in doing so have provided a more nuanced account of his own understandings of politics and the limits of what he was able to achieve.²¹⁰

But despite the efforts of Brands and others, Grant's role in Reconstruction still awaits a fuller revision, as historians continue to claim that Grant lacked a proper Southern policy and that scandals and corruption need to be placed along the blind spots of free labour ideology and persistent racism for the Grant administration's inability to firmly establish equal rights during Reconstruction.²¹¹ While in recent years many aspects of Reconstruction have been reassessed, Grant's role in many events continues to take a backseat to local figures and social history.²¹² Moreover, Grant's presidency has not been subjected to the same studies of

²¹⁰ Both Eric Love and Nicholas Guyatt explore Grant's attempted annexation of Santo Domingo. See Eric T. L. Love, *Race Over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill and London, 2009), and Nicholas Guyatt, 'America's Conservatory: Race, Reconstruction, and the Santo Domingo Affair', *Journal of American History* 97.4 (2011), pp. 974-1000. Jonathan Sarna explores Grant's infamous General Order No.11 – which removed all Jews from his military district before being rescinded soon after issue by President Abraham Lincoln – and his attempts to rectify his mistake during his presidency. See Jonathan D. Sarna, *When General Grant Expelled the Jews* (New York, 2012). Most recently, Patrick Kelly has commented on the relationship of Mexican politics to the United States during the Civil War era, and has an interesting take on Grant's republican assessment of the geopolitical situation. See Patrick J. Kelly, 'The North American Crisis of the 1860s', *Journal of the Civil War Era* 2.3 (2012), pp. 337-368.

²¹¹ One of the most recent publications on Reconstruction – Mark W. Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion: A New History of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill and London, 2014) – does not focus solely on presidential Reconstruction but its whole political history. Though Summers' is more lenient on Grant than past scholars he still presents a bumbling man, ill-equipped to deal with the necessities of Reconstruction.

²¹² One example of this is the under-explored role of the federal government in affairs in Reconstruction Louisiana. Several works have been published on Reconstruction Louisiana in recent years but Grant receives little mention. See Ted Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction: War, Radicalism and Race in Louisiana 1862-1877* (Baton Rouge and London, 1984). Out of all the historians referenced here, Tunnell makes the most substantive references to Grant. However, though he does reference Grant, his interventions are not properly explored, he is often merely used to explain the movements of federal troops, and thus he appears as inconsequential in

political culture that other aspects of Reconstruction have undergone. For example, Slap's *The Doom of Reconstruction*, contains a chapter and numerous references to Grant, but presents an unrevised portrayal of the President and does not consult Grant's published personal papers.²¹³ Despite this tendency many works are forthcoming on the role of Grant's administration in Reconstruction – especially by doctoral students – but are yet to appear in print.²¹⁴

Political Scientists' Assessment of Grant's Presidency

Many works on the Reconstruction presidency by political scientists have tended to assess the White House in this period badly in the wider history of the office. Presidential studies tend to deem Lincoln's presidency the highpoint of executive power in the nineteenth century: a peak not scaled again until Theodore Roosevelt in the twentieth century. This, in part, derives from Congressional Reconstruction which incapacitated President Andrew Johnson. Grant's presidency here appears as a prelude to the diminished office of the Gilded Age. These studies rarely recognise the distinctiveness of Grant's presidency, though, and by reproducing

Louisiana politics, despite Grant being very much the public face of intervention in the media and politics. When he does intervene, Grant often appears incompetent and naive as Tunnell criticises him for his lack of earlier intervention and a preference for supporting his friends and relatives rather than making politically-wise choices. For a more recent look at Reconstruction Louisiana, see LeeAnna Keith, *The Colfax Massacre: The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror and the Death of Reconstruction* (Oxford and New York, 2008). Keith explores Louisiana politics in relation to the Colfax massacre. Yet, she does not explore Grant's role in its aftermath. The references to Grant in her work are mostly in passing, and she gives two pages to his role in the implementation of the Ku Klux Klan Acts of 1870 and 1871. See also Justin A. Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (Baltimore, 2010). Nystrom makes greater references to Grant, however, these are also insubstantial as they do not properly explore his role or the federal government's instead he focuses on local figures. Another book marked by this trend is Frank J. Wetta, *The Louisiana Scalawags: Politics, Race, and Terrorism During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, 2012). Wetta too makes several passing references to Grant with no real exploration of his role in Louisianan politics.

²¹³ Though admittedly Grant's personal papers had not been digitised when Slap published his book in 2006, twenty-eight volumes had been published. By 2003, twenty-six volumes had been published taking the series up to 1875. Another two volumes taking the series to 30 September 1878 were published in 2005.

²¹⁴ There are several academic works in progress on Grant at the moment. In particular, Charles W. Calhoun is working on a monograph on Grant's presidency, and Aaron Crawford of the Ulysses S. Grant presidential library is researching Grant's appointments to the federal courts. There are also doctoral theses on Grant's federal appointments and foreign policies currently ongoing in the United States, such as Ryan Semmes of Mississippi State University on Grant's foreign policies. On Reconstruction, Jeremiah Bauer at the University of Nebraska is currently exploring the role of the courts in civil rights enforcement from 1866-1873, while Andrew Prymak at Pennsylvania State University is examining the effect of the United States' financial problems on Reconstruction politics.

charges that he was incompetent, naive and a mere puppet of Congress, they reinforce the perception of a weak executive.²¹⁵ Michael J. Korzi in his book *A Seat of Popular Leadership* offers an explanation for this situation: he claims that political scientists are too focused on ‘presidential leadership of the Progressive stripe’ which leads to many seeing little point in studying other styles of leadership.²¹⁶ Only leaders, such as Lincoln, who epitomise this leadership style gain attention.²¹⁷ Elaborating on this theme Korzi explains how other presidents ‘are often dealt with in a cursory fashion and less on their own terms than in the ways they failed to be strong modern leaders.’²¹⁸ The result of this has been a ‘superficial picture of nineteenth-century presidents and presidential leadership.’²¹⁹ Though he claims this situation is being challenged, he also asserts that many political scientists continue to ‘do a disservice to the complexity and texture of the nineteenth-century presidency and its forms of presidential leadership.’²²⁰

One indication of this change can be found in political scientist Max Skidmore’s recent study on the nineteenth-century presidency entitled *The Maligned Presidents*. Though, as the title suggests, Grant still does not fare well in existing literature on his administration.

Nevertheless Skidmore has attempted to reconsider many elements of Grant’s presidency,

²¹⁵ A key example of this is Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development 1776-1993* (Washington D.C., 1994) which calls Grant’s presidency ‘the abdication of executive power’. The chapter claims Grant failed in his duty to ‘presidential responsibility’ (p. 180) which led to the Whiskey scandal. The authors ignore that the scandal was discovered and prosecuted by a member of Grant’s cabinet with Grant’s knowledge. Similarly Melvin I. Urofsky (ed.), *American Presidents: Critical Essays* (New York, 2000) criticises Grant for choosing friends as his cabinet members and failing to keep a close eye on their activities which led to corruption. The high points of Grant’s administration, such as aspects of his foreign policy, are attributed to other figures such as Secretary of State Hamilton Fish (pp. 246-247). Grant’s use of executive power is not considered at all in comparison to Lincoln’s use which is thoroughly explored. Urofsky’s book considers Grant in even less detail than Andrew Johnson’s four years as President.

²¹⁶ Michael J. Korzi, *A Seat of Popular Leadership: The Presidency, Political Parties, and Democratic Leadership* (Amherst, 2004), p. 2. Another of Korzi’s books: Michael J. Korzi, *Presidential Term Limits in American History: Power, Principles, and Politics* (Texas, 2013) is unique in choosing to examine Grant’s attempt to gain a third presidential term.

²¹⁷ Korzi, *A Seat of Popular Leadership*, p. 2.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

including his role in Reconstruction.²²¹ By highlighting aspects of Grant's administration where Grant showed the strength of the executive office such as his enthusiasm for enforcing civil rights and strenuous involvement in implementing Reconstruction, Skidmore presents a more favourable image of Grant's presidency than many historians. Of particular significance is Skidmore's analysis of Grant's appointments to the circuit courts where he shows that Grant took an active role in judicial appointments to safeguard the implementation of the Reconstruction settlement.²²² In doing so, Skidmore illustrates that Grant was a perceptive political strategist. However, in his analysis of Grant, he undertook no primary research and instead relied primarily upon secondary literature which somewhat detracts from his otherwise insightful analysis.²²³ In common with many studies by political scientists, he also does not situate his study within the republican political culture which informed many of Grant's decisions in power focusing instead on Grant's achievements rather than the constraints on his power. Though Skidmore highlights that historians have not given Grant's presidency proper consideration in their efforts to understand him, his own study misses an opportunity to redeem Grant through its own lack of in-depth research which would have substantiated his creditable study.

Building on Korzi's insight, this thesis aims to explore the political culture in which Grant operated, and thus address misconceptions over his use of executive power.²²⁴ By situating the Grant presidency in both its historical and political context, specifically a political culture

²²¹ Max J. Skidmore, *The Maligned Presidents: The Late 19th Century* (New York, 2014) pp. 25-47.

²²² *Ibid.*, pp. 34-45.

²²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-49.

²²⁴ Many studies of the United States presidency often ignore the role of Grant's administration in the overall development of the office. In particular, Stephen Skowronek's influential study *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership From John Adams to Bill Clinton* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1997) views Lincoln's presidency as rebuilding the office before moving onto Theodore Roosevelt as the next innovator. This approach highlights the lack of appreciation of many political scientists for Grant's use of executive power. See also Thomas E. Cronin and Michael A. Genovese, *The Paradoxes of the American Presidency* (New York, 2004). Among many tables showing survey results which often rank Grant as one of the ten worst presidents – and on one occasion worse than Andrew Johnson (p. 93) – this study notes that '[m]ixed in between the Jeffersons, the Lincolns, and the TRs [Theodore Roosevelt] were a series of lesser or lacklustre presidents who often diminished the office. For every Jackson, there was a Tyler; for every Lincoln, a Grant' (p. 131).

shaped by republicanism, the chapters that follow aim to provide a more historicised account of Grant's presidency than much of the existing work on the subject.²²⁵ Removing presidents from the political cultures, and thus the constraints, in which they operated can present a lopsided view of administrations. It is therefore difficult to understand the accusations of tyranny that Grant so often faced if we do not consider the political context his administration occupied. Republicanism, as the dominant ideology of the era, was an everyday part of nineteenth-century political culture, and understanding it can help explain the enigmas of the Grant White House.

Sources and Plan of Thesis

My thesis explores the Grant presidency in the context of a political culture shaped by republicanism. Looking at the President himself, his friends, and his critics, I will show how republican ideology could simultaneously augment and detract from Grant's power. The relationship between executive power and republicanism defined Grant's ability and inability to reshape the nation in an egalitarian vision enshrined in law but lacking in reality. I argue that Grant tried to remake the presidency along antiparty lines, but his success in doing so, paradoxically, made him vulnerable to charges of despotism which hindered his attempts to govern as a strong independent executive. Although some historians have recognised aspects of Grant's republicanism, especially his antipartisanship, none have closely analysed Grant's dedication to his understanding of republicanism and the impact this had upon his conception of politics and its influence on his policy decisions.²²⁶ Republicanism, I argue, shaped

²²⁵ This is typical of work by political scientists who often neglect ideological context in their desire to find trends across periods. Though there is great value in this method, it means presidencies which garner less attention from historians are often ignored. A notable example of a Reconstruction historian who did not adequately take political culture into consideration is Gillette who claims that Grant's Southern policy was inconsistent and haphazard. See Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction*.

²²⁶ In particular Brooks D. Simpson acknowledged Grant's antipartisanship and dislike of politics but he does not specifically mention his republicanism, and suggests his silence in the 1868 election originated from his ambition to win the election. See Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 214-217.

Reconstruction much like other, better-explored ideologies of the era like white supremacy and free labour.

By exploring the political culture of the era, my research mainly rests upon public perceptions of Grant and his presidency which has resulted in the use of sources from many different areas of print culture. Primarily the thesis draws upon newspapers and journals which carried news of political developments to even the most remote areas of America in the nineteenth century. In 1860 there were 4,051 newspapers in the United States, of which 3,242 were partisan in nature.²²⁷ It has been suggested that this meant almost every town of 1,500 people had two political newspapers circulating, which highlights the importance of print culture to the republic.²²⁸ To stay afloat in this harsh environment, these newspapers had to reflect their constituents' views, and while they do not present the unmediated perspectives of their readers, they do offer insights into the language and ideas that resonated in a competitive political marketplace.²²⁹ Mark E. Neely Jr., one of the leading historians of Civil War-era political culture, noted a few years ago that he was 'continually surprised by the insight on American society that can be derived by diligent reading of nineteenth-century newspapers.'²³⁰ It is a comment supported by Ethington who has stated that '[i]t is impossible to overestimate the importance of the press as the central institution of the public sphere.'²³¹

In exploring newspapers I have catalogued the differing types and practices of newspaper editors across the United States. There are several methods that can be used to taxonomize newspapers but I have split them into five main categories. The most notable genre was the big city national newspapers, such as the New York dailies, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Atlanta Constitution*, whose influence was signified by their national reach. Smaller

²²⁷ Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill, 2005), p. 5.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-8.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

²³¹ Ethington, *The Public City*, p. 19.

newspapers would have subscriptions for them and often reprinted their articles, both with and without acknowledgement. Next in significance were the independent journals such as *Harper's Weekly*, the *Nation*, and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, which also had national reputations, but were printed on a weekly basis. Also of great importance, and treated in a similar manner to the big city papers, were the big party newspapers, which also had national readerships, such as the semi-official government paper the *National Republican*, the Republican *Hartford Daily Courant*, the Liberal Republican *Springfield Republican*, and the Democratic *New York World*. After this were the smaller city newspapers whose reach extended to the surrounding states, but which would also have extracts printed in the bigger newspapers when they desired to show a cross-section of national opinion. These included both party and independents, such as the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, the *Sacramento Daily Union*, and the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*. Lastly, and perhaps the most important, were the small, and usually more rural, newspapers, of both party and independent stripes, which had small circulations and remained mostly confined to their locales, such as *Juniata Sentinel* (Mifflintown, Pennsylvania), the *Jeffersonian* (Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania), and the *Bolivar Bulletin* (Bolivar, Hardeman County, Tennessee).

Newspapers, which provided the medium for citizens to connect with the wider world of politics, are vital to my study of public perceptions of Grant's presidency. The United States was a literary nation with enviably high literacy rates by the 1850s.²³² Like the Revolution, which Ethington claims 'was literary as much as it was oral', much of the nineteenth-century discussions of politics took place in the literary sphere.²³³ Therefore it is crucial to examine newspapers from every category to analyse the relationship between the well-capitalised larger papers and their smaller counterparts. Together they helped to constitute a republican national political culture, albeit one that was often shaped by partisan and local

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

preoccupations. In this respect *Chronicling America* has been an essential resource for unearthing small town newspapers, whilst for-profit newspaper databases have made many city newspapers accessible. I have also supplemented this with the perusal of key newspapers, for my research, from library archives in the UK and US especially where they are unavailable digitally.

Print culture, though, encompasses many varied forms, and I have also consulted numerous pamphlets, books and official government records, all of which have provided valuable insights into the concerns of nineteenth-century Americans. Two in particular are of especial importance. Campaign biographies, a feature of nineteenth-century electioneering, have been used to explore the presidential races of 1868 and 1872.²³⁴ Pamphlets, meanwhile, have often proved crucial in the dissemination of ideas, especially where these are records of important speeches printed cheaply to reach a wider audience. These forms of political discussion helped to shape opinion and thus give insight into the kind of values and rhetoric which skilful political operators understood nineteenth-century Americans esteemed. Print culture, therefore, was essential to informing and shaping the political opinions of nineteenth-century Americans.

However, in order to test whether public pronouncements of republicanism were just rhetorical devices for the mobilisation of the electorate, I have consulted the personal papers of many important public figures to my thesis, including editors and publishers themselves, and also important political figures such as Senators Carl Schurz, Lyman Trumbull and Charles Sumner. Here I have found significant correlation between their private concerns and public rhetoric, and though at times this might be explained by their assumption that anything they wrote may eventually enter the public domain, it does suggest that their understanding of

²³⁴ Scott E. Casper, *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth-century America* (Chapel Hill and London, 1999); and Korzi, *A Seat of Popular Leadership*, pp. 225-228.

executive power was more than mere propaganda. For those such as Grant, who was famous for his reluctance as a public speaker, they have been essential to understanding the motives behind their actions. Personal papers have illustrated that the language of republicanism in the Reconstruction era was not simply a ‘party game’.²³⁵

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The thesis is divided into five substantial chapters, each exploring episodes during Grant’s political career in which his understanding and use of executive power came into question. Chapter One provides a brief introduction to the presidency on the eve of the 1868 election before focusing on the election itself. The boundaries of executive power had been in flux since the beginning of the Civil War when Lincoln expanded the war powers of the executive office. Johnson furthered the uncertainty through his refusal to compromise with Congress on Reconstruction policy which resulted in a congressional takeover of Reconstruction after the 1866 midterms. In contrast to both Lincoln and Johnson, though, Grant had his own vision of the presidency, which harked back to George Washington and Zachary Taylor, but the uncertainties over power during Reconstruction meant that his attempts to change the nature of the office would often be misconstrued. Although Grant did not campaign in 1868, his acceptance letter illustrated his conception of the presidency – the idea of a strong antipartisan republican President. To reinforce this, his supporters built upon the themes in his letter in order to present his republicanism to the nation; a convenient campaign strategy in a tumultuous era. The 1868 Republican campaign was built around Grant’s republican simplicity, but his silence, hostility to partisan politics as usual, and military background led Democratic critics to accuse him of coveting an imperial crown. The election that year set the

²³⁵ Mark W. Summers, *Party Games: Getting, Keeping, and Using Power in Gilded Age Politics* (Chapel Hill and London, 2004).

basis upon which Grant would both be supported and opposed: the republican themes that defined his presidency are first showcased during this election.

Chapter Two explores the consequences of Grant's attempt to define the presidency in his own republican vision. It highlights the many faces of corruption and how congressmen attempted to deal with deviations from the accepted status quo. Grant's independence and antipartisanship – especially in his cabinet choices and patronage appointments – were interpreted as an attempt to build a power base for his dictatorship rather than an attempt to make the presidency a bastion of the people's will. As a result, influential members of the party sought to undermine the President's appointment power partly through their actions but more powerfully through print culture. Senator Charles Sumner coined the term 'Caesarism' – by which he referred to 'militarism' or 'military rings' – to explain Grant's preference for army appointments in civilian affairs.²³⁶ Prominent figures believed these men would support Grant in all his endeavours: even a perpetual presidency.²³⁷ Grant's independence – and the strong executive position he had established through his antipartisan leadership – led them to fear for the safety of the republic.²³⁸ His opponents within the Republican Party attempted to curtail executive appointment powers through what became known as 'the one term principle', which was one of the reasons behind the party's split into two rival factions prior to the 1872 election. Although seemingly championing civil service reform, Grant's opponents' reform aimed to curtail executive power especially, effectively strengthening the hand of Congress in its ongoing battle with the White House. The breakaway Liberal Republicans aimed to weaken the independence and antipartisanship of the President to

²³⁶ Charles Sumner, *Republicanism vs. Grantism: the Presidency a Trust; Not a Plaything and Perquisite. Personal Government and Presidential Pretensions. Reform and Purity in Government.* (Washington D.C., 1872), p. 5.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

lessen the dangers of a republican slide into tyranny. But in doing so they began a process of weakening the presidency which would in turn undermine Reconstruction.

Chapter Three explores how fears of centralised power remained a powerful weapon with which opponents of Reconstruction could curtail the President's power. Though Grant had won re-election by a landslide majority in 1872, anxieties over the reach of executive power had not diminished. By exploring the impact of a series of editorials entitled 'Caesarism' by a *New York Herald* journalist, this chapter seeks to show how Grant's ability to enforce the Reconstruction amendments remained precarious due to the repeated incursions of federal power into state matters. The articles exacerbated these fears by suggesting that the office had grown so large, had so few restrictions on power, and such a popular man in the office that an unprecedented (though not unconstitutional) third term could be sought and won. Although seen as a hoax by the only historian to explore the subject, it is my contention that the author voiced real anxieties about federal power engendered by the nature of Reconstruction.²³⁹

Concerned that Grant's landslide victory in 1872 had given him the popular support for a coup, and drawing on ideas put forward by Democrats in 1868 and Liberal Republicans four years later, many newspapers and public figures warned that the presidency (and sometimes Grant in particular) was a menace to the republic. These fears worked to undermine Grant's military powers at a moment when they were most needed as southern white conservatives once more turned to violence.

Chapter Four, while continuing to examine republican anxieties about executive usurpation, challenges the notion presented by some historians that Grant was controlled by the Republican Party. It looks specifically at Grant's veto of the inflation bill of 1874, a measure

²³⁹ Mark W. Summers, *The Press Gang: Newspapers & Politics: 1865-1878* (Chapel Hill and London, 1994), pp. 268-278. Summers also wrote about Caesarism in his book: *The Era of Good Stealings* (Oxford and New York, 1993), pp. 249-253. Caesarism is also briefly mentioned in his new book. See Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, pp. 358, 375.

which sought to increase the number of greenbacks in circulation without increasing the amount of gold held by the United States treasury. The President's independence from party – many Republicans strongly supported the bill – allowed supporters to portray him as a model antiparty man, but opponents suggested his unconventional use of the veto represented more aggrandisement on the part of the White House. It suggested that fears over the expanded powers of the executive office extended well beyond the familiar issues of Reconstruction. The veto, I argue, challenges the dominant view of Grant as a weak executive controlled by the Republican Party. It also suggests how thoroughly republican ideas about party, independence, and honour permeated Reconstruction-era political culture.

Chapter Five explores attempts to nominate Grant for an unprecedented third term. Concerns about a third term had abounded since 1873, but the idea seemed a more realistic possibility as Grant's second term neared its termination. This chapter challenges the conception that Grant's ability to implement Reconstruction was solely undermined by alleged scandals and corruption by illustrating that concerns over executive power, especially his military powers, continued to play a powerful role in politics. Grant's firm use of his military powers to enforce Reconstruction even instigated investigations into the conduct of his administrations in an attempt to undermine the power of his office. Grant's use of the military to preserve the democratic process in Louisiana in 1875 led to renewed concerns about centralised power which diminished Grant's political capital even before a series of corruption scandals left him a lame duck. I suggest that we need to look too at republican fears of executive aggrandizement to understand why prospects of a third term were foreclosed in 1876.

However, after Grant left office and embarked on his successful world tour, he enjoyed a political rehabilitation. The rise of Democratic power in Congress over the following years and the party's underhand methods to coerce President Hayes to undermine Reconstruction

outraged Republicans who threw their support behind the ‘strong man’ of politics: Grant.²⁴⁰ These Republicans now argued that Grant’s use of federal military powers to enforce black civil rights made him the model republican. During Reconstruction they had interpreted his use of executive power – from his cabinet to his veto to his use of military power in the South – as dangerous political developments, but the actions of unscrupulous Democrats awakened them to the dangers for the legacy of the Civil War and the future stability of the country. These Republicans supported a third term for Grant in 1880 but could not override the fears of other Republicans over breaking George Washington’s two term precedent. Ultimately, the republican mantra that liberty required close vigilance and self-restraint proved too strong to risk giving Grant another four years.

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My thesis seeks to illustrate the continuing dominance of the different facets of the republican ideology in the Reconstruction era. It highlights the endurance of republicanism in American political culture in the nineteenth century and its ability to shape the political agenda. Both supporters and opponents of Grant defined their positions using this malleable republican language, employing the idiom to both empower the President and hinder him. Principled republican opposition to Grant early in his presidency gnawed away at the foundations of his administration and enabled the outrage that strong executive action later engendered. When Grant intervened in Louisiana in 1875, Republican opposition to his actions revolved around ingrained republican fears over centralised power, not just disregard for African-American civil rights. Prominent public figures and newspapers – many of them ostensibly committed to defending biracial democracy – feared for the safety of the republic when troops entered the Louisiana legislature and forcibly removed men from the chamber. Whilst racism and

²⁴⁰ ‘Anti-Grant Address’, St Albans *Daily Messenger*, 7 April 1880. See also ‘A Question of Party Policy’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 17 January 1880; ‘The Republican Party and a Third Term’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 31 January 1880; and ‘No Demand For Grant’, *New York Tribune*, 9 April 1880.

economics certainly contributed to the downfall of Reconstruction, the dominance of the republican political culture of the nineteenth century continued to shape the parameters of executive power and defined how far the President could go in protecting the gains of the Civil War and Reconstruction. To understand the downfall of Reconstruction, this thesis contends, we need to understand the relationship of executive power to republicanism.

The 1868 Presidential Election: The Republican Paradox of the Silent Man

Ulysses S. Grant was surely unusual among recipients of presidential nominations when he wrote to a friend in May 1868 stating that he could not visit on account of meeting with ‘a Committee from that awful Chicago Convention’.¹ His private statement reflected his public sentiments: he was called to office reluctantly. Grant’s acceptance letter of the Republican presidential nomination epitomised his understanding of the presidency as a republican duty. His letter referred not only to the Republican Party, but the whole country in accepting the nomination. ‘I endorse the resolutions’, the General declared, ‘[i]f elected it will be my endeavour to administer all the laws in good faith, with economy, and with the view of giving peace, quiet and protection everywhere.’² Acknowledging the turbulent nature of politics in the late 1860s, Grant stated how at ‘present it is impossible, or at least eminently improper to lay down a policy to be adhered to, right or wrong, through an administration of four years.’³ Further emphasising his antipartisanship and adherence to the public good, Grant explained how ‘[n]ew political issues, not foreseen, are constantly arising; the views of the public on old ones are constantly changing, and a purely Administrative officer should always be left free to execute the will of the people. I always have respected that will, and always shall.’⁴ The independent nominee of a political party ended his letter with a plea rather than a promise: appealing to the nation, he claimed only ‘[p]eace and universal prosperity—its

¹ John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 18: October 1 1867- June 30 1868 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1991), pp. 262.

² Ely, Burnham, and Bartlett, *Proceedings of the National Republican Convention, Held at Chicago, May 20 and 21, 1868* (Chicago, 1868), p. 141. For the original draft, see Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 18, pp. 263-265.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

sequence,—with economy of administration, will lighten the burden of taxation, while it constantly reduces the national debt. Let us have peace.’⁵

The acceptance letter of the Republican presidential nominee stood in stark contrast to many examples of the genre in the Civil War era. Though, in accordance with others from 1848-1892 (they only became commonplace in 1852), it professed sympathy with the party platform, Grant’s letter did so diplomatically, referring to the people and the nation as a whole rather than simply the Republican Party.⁶ In commending the Republican convention’s ‘wisdom, moderation, and patriotism’, the writer echoed his hero Zachary Taylor’s brief acceptance letter in 1848, which applauded the ‘*spirit of moderation in [the convention’s] political opinions*’, though unlike Grant, Taylor did not refer to the entire country but his party alone.⁷ But most letters went further, detailing the nominee’s commitment to certain policies and, sometimes, giving their opinions on party platforms.⁸ Grant’s letter thus expressed far less affinity with the party than the first victorious Republican in 1860, Abraham Lincoln, and more accord with the people’s will.⁹ Grant promised to look instead to the country for guidance in policy, and not to party or providence as others had done before

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Korzi, *A Seat of Popular Leadership*, pp. 53-58. Although acceptance letters did not become an integral part of presidential election campaigns until 1852, I have included Zachary Taylor’s 1848 acceptance letter due to Grant’s admiration of him.

⁷ *Ibid.*, and Zachary Taylor and S. Horn (ed.), *All the Letters of Major General Z. Taylor: Anecdotes of Old Rough and Ready: Songs of Old Zach’s Campaigns, &c* (New York, 1848), p. 11; and Ely, Burnham, and Bartlett, *Proceedings of the National Republican Convention*, p. 141. For the original draft, see Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 18, pp. 263-265.

⁸ For examples of political acceptance letters, see Rutherford B. Hayes, *Letters and Messages of Rutherford B. Hayes, President of the United States, Together With Letter of Acceptance and Inaugural Addresses* (Washington D.C., 1881), pp. 5-8; James Garfield’s is in *Proceedings of the Republican National Convention, held at Chicago, Illinois, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Monday, Tuesday June 2d, 3d, 4th, 5th, 7th, and 8th, 1880* (Chicago, 1881), pp. 298-301, and James Buchanan’s can be found in *Official Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention, Held in Cincinnati, June 2-6 1854* (Cincinnati, 1856), pp. 76-78.

⁹ Korzi, *A Seat of Popular Leadership*, pp. 56-57.

him.¹⁰ Where other candidates were keen to appear as party men, Grant's letter showed a desire to remain starkly antipartisan.¹¹

Grant's acceptance letter seems incongruous given how the 1868 presidential election has typically been portrayed in histories of Reconstruction. The election is usually shown as a referendum on Reconstruction due to the strikingly partisan election platforms of both parties.¹² The Democratic platform promised to repeal all the Reconstruction Acts with the exception of the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery.¹³ Reconciliation among whites, and not Reconstruction, was their watchword as they sought the immediate removal of political disabilities for all Confederates. The Republicans, however, desired the continuation of Reconstruction.¹⁴ This entailed enforcing the former slaves' new citizenship rights derived from the Fourteenth Amendment and pursuing the future possibility of colour-blind suffrage nationwide, though that precise aim was absent from the platform. Republicans also restated their policy for the re-admittance of the former Confederate states which rested upon the incorporation of the new Amendments into their State Constitutions. Voters, then, had a clear choice: to turn the clock back to 1865 or continue the changes unleashed by Reconstruction. Yet despite these highly partisan platforms, both parties had desired Grant as their candidate, not only due to his popularity but also on account of his reluctance to express his own views on these contentious issues.¹⁵ Grant's refusal to engage in partisan politics made him an ideal candidate as it allowed the Republicans to campaign on the basis of Grant's character and nationalism; it was that character, meanwhile that Democrats set out to

¹⁰ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Life of Franklin Pierce, President of the United States*. (London, 1853), pp. 132-133, and Roy P. Basler (ed.), *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln IV* (New Brunswick, 1953), p. 51.

¹¹ Korzi, *A Seat of Popular Leadership*, pp. 56-57.

¹² Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 333, 340-345. See also Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*, pp. 75-76; Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*, pp. 109-110; and Gregory P. Downs, *Declarations of Dependence: The Long Reconstruction of Popular Politics in the South, 1861-1908* (Chapel Hill and London, 2011), pp. 113-117.

¹³ George Wakeman, *Official Proceedings of the Democratic Convention Held At New York, July 4-9, 1868*. (Boston, 1868), pp. 58-60.

¹⁴ Ely, Burnham, and Bartlett, *Proceedings of the National Republican Convention*, pp. 84-85.

¹⁵ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 213-218.

sully.¹⁶ It was ironic that in an election where so much was at stake, a significant amount of the campaigning in the North revolved around whether one man was a good republican or a threat to the nation. This chapter explores those debates by looking at republicanism and the presidency in the 1868 election.

The election needs to be read in light of the constitutional as well as the social turbulence of the previous three years. The assassination of President Lincoln a few days after the defeat of the Confederacy saw former Democrat and Union Party Vice-President Andrew Johnson ascend to the presidency. Johnson proceeded to govern the country in a way at odds with Republicans in Congress, which led to many political tussles and resulted in his impeachment by the House of Representatives, though he would be narrowly acquitted by the Senate.¹⁷ The political turmoil of these years and the promotion – and defeat – of black suffrage in a handful of Northern states in the 1867 elections led the Republicans to seek a popular antipartisan candidate.¹⁸ Though the losses were not great, they reduced the strength of party and provided a clear rebuke on the extension of the suffrage; the partisan platform, reluctantly adopted by the party due to the Radicals' strength, had proved unpopular with the Northern electorate.¹⁹ The electoral reverse in the same year that the party had extended the vote to African-American men in the South (as a military Reconstruction measure) meant that many leaders' preferred choice of a more Radical Republican no longer seemed plausible.²⁰ Seeking a candidate who would ensure success in 1868, and aware of the popularity of the

¹⁶ Korzi, *A Seat of Popular Leadership*, pp. 56-57.

¹⁷ Michael Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle: Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction 1863-1869* (New York, 1974), pp. 294-314.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 268-277. For the 1867 losses, see Michael Les Benedict, *Preserving the Constitution: Essays on Politics and the Constitution in the Reconstruction Era* (New York, 2006), pp. 23-31; and Eric C. Sands, *American Public Philosophy and the Mystery of Lincolnism* (Columbia, Missouri, 2009), pp. 106-111.

¹⁹ Les Benedict, *Preserving the Constitution*, pp. 23-31; and Sands, *American Public Philosophy and the Mystery of Lincolnism*, pp. 106-111.

²⁰ Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle*, pp. 268-169. See also Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 212-213. As Simpson explains, the choice of Grant occurred due to the lack of nationwide appeal by any of the potential moderate Republican presidential nominees, whereas plenty of Radical Republicans had nationwide appeal but their policies were considered too radical for victory in the presidential election.

Commanding General of the United States Army, the conservatives and moderates had desired Grant's nomination prior to the election but had faced opposition from the influential Radicals.²¹ Now facing a reverse in fortunes, the more Radical Republicans, out of necessity, accepted the antipartisan General.²² A decision made more appealing after Grant's open-conflict with Johnson in early 1868 marked him, by default, as a Republican supporter.²³ Republicans believed the frenzied state of American politics required moderation, and the popular, independent Grant represented an ideal candidate in 1868.²⁴

However, the focus on Grant's character in the election also reflected Grant's own attempts to define the presidency as an office. Grant's acceptance letter illustrated a different conception of presidential power to many of his predecessors. It illustrated an attempt not only at 'carving out a position of independence for the executive, free from the influence of party' but a redefining of the presidency in republican terms as standing for the public ahead of party.²⁵ Grant's antipartisan republican vision of politics, this chapter argues, had roots in his youth. Educated at the United States' military academy of West Point between 1839 and 1843 and given a commission on graduation, Grant for most of his adult life had served the nation.²⁶ His early schooling and military education instilled in him a conception of politics which revolved around republicanism and the pursuit of the public good. As an army officer he had remained strictly antipartisan, refusing to become implicated in political matters for fear it would compromise his duty to the nation. As a candidate Grant provided an opportunity for the Republican Party to eschew divisive political issues and instead concentrate on his character and nationalism. Personal honour mattered more than policy.

²¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 337; Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 18, pp. 294-295; and Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 223-224.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 218-224. See also Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle*, pp. 268-277.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Korzi, *A Seat of Popular Leadership*, p. 57.

²⁶ Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs* (London, 1999).

The result was an election which, to a more significant extent than has sometimes been realised, revolved in parts of the United States around Grant's republicanism. Supporters and opponents used republicanism in different ways to measure Grant's fitness or otherwise for high office. The Democrats depicted Grant as a military blunderer, drunkard, and tyrant: a man so lacking in self-restraint that under his rule the nation would lose its last remaining liberties. Republicans sought to counter such a portrait with examples of Grant as the model republican.²⁷ The stories Democrats and Republicans told about Grant in 1868 would serve as foundations for coming political conflicts during and after his two terms in office. Supporters and opponents would draw, modify, and subvert ideas about the General in attempting to either expand or restrain the powers of the presidency. The use of republican tropes – both in 1868 and after – indicated the powerful hold which republicanism retained on the nation and the desire for republican politics despite the significant issues at stake. The election was not simply a referendum on Reconstruction, but a referendum on Grant's republicanism, too.

Defining the Presidency

The presidency which Grant sought to redefine had undergone tremendous change during the previous seven years. The Civil War, which resulted from the secession of eleven slaveholding states, led the newly inaugurated President Lincoln to greatly expand his presidential powers through a broad interpretation of his oath to protect the nation and the 'Commander in Chief' clause of the Constitution.²⁸ Acting while Congress was out-of-session Lincoln claimed powers most assumed to be vested in Congress such as the right to suspend the writ of *habeas corpus*, and pursued actions of questionable constitutional basis

²⁷ Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle*, pp. 268-277.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58. Marcus Cunliffe, *American Presidents and the Presidency* (London, 1969), p. 84. See also Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (Oxford and New York, 1991), pp. 4-14 on Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus. Edward S. Corwin has also explored the laws under which Lincoln exercised these powers and argued that Lincoln partially drew his authority to execute these actions through 'the presidential oath.' (p. 77). And Edward S. Corwin, *The President Office and Powers 1878-1948: History and Analysis of Practice and Opinion* (Washington Square and New York, 1948), p. 77.

like employing more troops than sanctioned by the Constitution.²⁹ Though Lincoln argued he was acting in an emergency with Washington in recess, even after Congress assembled, he continued with his programme of executive aggrandisement. The President closed newspapers; limited freedom of speech by forbidding the use of the Post Office ‘for ‘reasonable’ correspondence’; emancipated slaves in areas beyond Union lines; and solely directed wartime Reconstruction.³⁰ Lincoln’s Secretary of State, William H. Seward, astutely summarised the situation to an English minister when he said ‘I can touch a bell on my right hand and order the imprisonment of a citizen of Ohio; I can touch a bell again and order the imprisonment of a citizen of New York; and no power on earth, except that of the President, can release them. Can the Queen of England do so much?’³¹ Lincoln understood that the Constitution was endowed with a certain flexibility and vagueness in order to allow for action by the executive in emergencies.³²

However, while the powers he used to direct the war were borne out of necessity, Lincoln, in attempting to direct the post-war settlement single-handedly, was setting a dangerous precedent for the executive office.³³ Lincoln set the stage for future confrontations with Congress over Reconstruction when he began issuing directives for reconstructing the

²⁹ Frank L. Klement, *The Limits of Dissent: Clement L. Vallandigham & the Civil War* (New York, 1998), pp. 76-77, 99-100, 119-120. See also Neely Jr., *The Fate of Liberty*, pp. 24-38; Mark E. Neely Jr., *Lincoln and the Triumph of the Nation: Constitutional Conflict in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill and London, 2011), pp. 63-111, 201-234; and Richard Carwardine, *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power* (Reading, 2004), pp. 198-204, 253-259.

³⁰ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston and New York, 2004), p. 58.

³¹ John A. Marshall, *American Bastille: A History of Illegal Arrests and Imprisonment of American Citizens during the Late Civil War* (Philadelphia, 1871), p. viii and Neely Jr., *The Fate of Liberty*, p. 19. See also Herman Belz, *Abraham Lincoln, Constitutionalism, and Equal Rights in the Civil War Era* (New York, 1998), pp. 18-22. Belz explores in detail the notion of a ‘constitutional dictator’ and whether Lincoln’s actions during the war can legitimately be described as dictatorial. He concludes that Lincoln was ‘a constitutionalist who used the executive power to preserve and extend the liberty of the American founding’ (p. 43). This notion is echoed by numerous other Lincoln historians. They point out that the originators of the claims were generally Copperheads and other Northern Democrats, and that the first historian to give them credence was William A. Dunning. See also Milkis and Nelson, *The American Presidency*, pp. 150-164. For a contemporary supporter of Lincoln’s actions, see Sidney George Fisher, *The Trial of the Constitution* (Philadelphia, 1862).

³² Milkis and Nelson, *The American Presidency*, pp. 158-164, and Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency*, pp. 11, 18, 62. See also Louis Fisher, *The War Power: Original and Contemporary* (Washington D.C., 2009), pp. 16-19.

³³ Urofsky (ed.), *American Presidents*, pp. 205-206, 208-213.

defeated and occupied Confederate states before the Civil War had ceased.³⁴ Radical Republicans fumed about Lincoln's tyranny but – with the exception of the Wade-Davis bill, which Lincoln vetoed – did not openly challenge him.³⁵ They were particularly outraged by his attempts to influence their legislative role during the passage of a confiscation bill. One senator announced 'I will not surrender the independence of the Senate and the Constitution of the United States at the dictation of any President', while another cried 'it will not do, through a Senator upon this floor, to suggest that a bill must be modified. It is monstrous to commence a practice that would require the two Houses to ascertain and the shape their action by the will of the Executive.'³⁶ The founders had not provided for reconstructing the nation, having failed to foresee the possibility of such a crisis when drafting the Constitution.³⁷ As a result, Lincoln's claim of the prerogative to direct Reconstruction was pure conjecture, and led the Senate to vigorously debate the issue.³⁸ Lincoln's defence rested upon his belief that 'the Executive power itself would be greatly diminished by the cessation of actual war.'³⁹ Yet the end of the war did not herald the end of hostilities in the South, and Lincoln's war powers passed to a man whose conception of the Constitution was greatly removed from his own.

Taking his lead from Lincoln, the new President – Andrew Johnson – sought to reconstruct the Confederate states by himself.⁴⁰ Just as Lincoln did not assemble Congress when the war

³⁴ T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and The Radicals* (Madison, 1972) pp. 318-322.

³⁵ *Ibid.* Even though they challenged his authority on Reconstruction with this bill, they did not attempt to revive the bill or pass any other measures. Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle*, p. 71.

³⁶ *Congressional Globe*, Debates and Proceedings 1833-1873, 37th Congress, 2nd Session., p. 3374. Though the accusation of monarchical government rested with Senator Benjamin Wade (one of the authors of the Wade-Davis bill) who suggested 'we ought to have a committee to wait on the President whenever we send him a bill, to know what his royal pleasure is in regard to it; and whether it contains anything he would like to modify' (p. 3375).

³⁷ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, p. 166.

³⁸ Cunliffe, *American Presidents and the Presidency*, p. 85.

³⁹ William C. Harris, *Lincoln's Last Months* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Paul H. Bergeron, *Andrew Johnson's Civil War and Reconstruction* (Knoxville, 2011), p. 74. See also Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 176-227; Robert J. Cook, *Civil War Senator: William Pitt Fessenden and the Fight to Save the American Republic* (Baton Rouge, 2011), pp. 201-211; and Les Benedict, *Preserving the Constitution*, pp. 34-35, 38-39.

commenced, Johnson did not summon Congress in the aftermath of Lincoln's assassination. Instead, just as Lincoln sought to establish the direction of the Civil War, Johnson sought to establish the direction of Reconstruction without congressional interference.⁴¹ The difference between the two men was their interpretation of the Constitution. Lincoln believed the emergency powers and his oath to protect the country gave him – and by extension the federal government – the ability to direct Reconstruction.⁴² However, Johnson – as a strict constructionist – did not believe that either the executive or the legislature had the right to reconstruct the former Confederacy.⁴³ He believed that authority rested with the states: the president could suggest legislation but could not enact it.⁴⁴ Johnson also did not believe he could force African-American suffrage on the states, or repeal state legislation, no matter whether he found it to his taste or not.⁴⁵ Ironically, in order to implement his interpretation of the Constitution, he had to use the presidential powers Lincoln had claimed to restore the states to their antebellum stature.⁴⁶

Formally neither the President nor Congress had the right to reconstruct the nation and the quasi-war status of the country meant that the president's powers were further blurred.

However, whereas Congress had acquiesced somewhat to Lincoln, as a sufficient number of Republicans believed his actions were governed by good intentions, the same courtesy was not extended to Johnson due to his antagonistic personality and his new-found sympathy for the former slaveholding planter elite.⁴⁷ Johnson, in his Annual Message of December 1865, seemed to accept that Congress had a role within Reconstruction, yet his actions as President

⁴¹ Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency*, p. 58; and Bergeron, *Andrew Johnson's Civil War and Reconstruction*, pp. 71, 74.

⁴² Cunliffe, *American Presidents and the Presidency*, p. 84.

⁴³ Bergeron, *Andrew Johnson's Civil War and Reconstruction*, p. 93.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-91.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-97. See also Eric L. McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (New York and Oxford, 1988), pp. 134-213, and Hans L. Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography* (London, 1989), pp. 214-254.

⁴⁷ Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 176-227; Cook, *Civil War Senator*, pp. 201-211; and Les Benedict, *Preserving the Constitution*, pp. 34-41.

overruled this sentiment.⁴⁸ When Congress attempted to provide a modicum of protection to former slaves by extending the life of the Freedmen's Bureau, he issued a veto with the statement that the bill was unconstitutional as 'it had been passed when none of the eleven ex-Rebel states was represented in Congress.'⁴⁹ This position meant – as Senator William P. Fessenden observed – that it would be impossible for Congress to pass any legislation on Reconstruction without facing a presidential veto.⁵⁰ This gave the President the sole power to direct Reconstruction (which he delegated to the states), unless Congress achieved a two-thirds majority to overturn the President's vetoes, which Republicans were soon able to do.⁵¹ Johnson's unwillingness to compromise with Congress eventually resulted in his impeachment and near-conviction in May 1868.⁵²

By the time of Grant's nomination in late May 1868 – which came a day after Johnson's acquittal – the strength of the presidential office had greatly decreased from its high point of 1865. Johnson was an embittered and marginal figure, while control of Reconstruction stood firmly in legislative hands. Yet Reconstruction as a military occupation was still ongoing, which meant the future president could still use the expanded powers of the presidency with a supportive Congress. Who would be in command, though, was still subject to question. It was not clear whether the taming of Johnson had permanently diminished the presidency or whether under a more adept chief executive, the White House might come to dominate the federal government once more. Thus the boundaries of presidential power, and which branch of government had greater authority to direct Reconstruction, remained undefined. It is in the context of these doubts over presidential power, then, that the 1868 election must be understood. Americans were voting for an officer but were unclear what the office meant.

⁴⁸ Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle*, p. 156.

⁴⁹ Bergeron, *Andrew Johnson's Civil War and Reconstruction*, p. 108.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* See also Cook, *Civil War Senator*, pp. 201-211.

⁵¹ Cunliffe, *American Presidents and the Presidency*, p. 130.

⁵² Bergeron, *Andrew Johnson's Civil War and Reconstruction*, p. 89, 110-111.

And though Congress had managed to restrict presidential power under Johnson, the quasi-military nature of Reconstruction, and the recent memory of Lincoln's wartime measures, meant the potential for power to flow back to a strong commander-in-chief remained a very real prospect. Grant – with an army behind him – could appear in this context as not just a true patriot, but also a dictator waiting for his chance to strike.

The General's introduction to partisanship

Johnson's battles with Congress had a tremendous influence on Grant, who due to his popularity as Commanding General of the United States Army, became embroiled in many of Johnson's conflicts despite the General's insistence on the non-political status of the army.⁵³ Grant believed the presidency, as a vehicle, should be used to implement the public good as opposed to party programmes; a view which was only reinforced by Johnson's manoeuvring for his own political advantage. During Johnson's years as President, Grant had privately indicated his disagreement with Johnson's interpretation of the rights of the office, and his sympathy with Lincoln's perception of executive power. Grant believed that the sacrifice of those who fought in the Civil War was being trifled with by politicians.⁵⁴ The power battles between the President and Congress, he feared, revolved around self-serving partisanship rather than the interests of the nation.⁵⁵ Johnson was not a Republican – the Tennessee Democrat had received the 1864 vice-presidential nomination partly to show national unity during the Civil War – and as President he had begun to align himself with the Democratic Party and shun Republican policies.⁵⁶ Dismayed by the penetration of party politics into the

⁵³ John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 16: 1866 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1988), pp. 337-338.

⁵⁴ John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 17: January 1-September 30, 1867 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1991), pp. 343-344; and Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 18, pp. 292-293.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Republicans had faced accusations by Democrats that antipartisanship during the Civil War was merely a guise to deny them power. The concession of Johnson to the 1864 Union ticket was an attempt to show

presidency at a time of crisis for the country, General Grant accepted the Republican nomination, despite his distaste for politics.⁵⁷

Grant's acceptance letter echoed the views of many white voters throughout the country who – desirous of peace and a settlement of Reconstruction questions – seemed to reject party politics in the elections of the previous two years. In the 1866 and 1867 elections, the party which eschewed antipartisanship to campaign upon radical party positions tended to lose, indicating a desire for the antipartyism promoted during the Civil War.⁵⁸ Faced with the patriotic antipartisan Republican platform in the 1866 elections, the Democrats sustained significant losses.⁵⁹ In contrast, during the canvass for the 1867 elections, the Republicans' championing of black suffrage in the North met much hostility and led to a decrease in voter support.⁶⁰ Meanwhile Johnson's 'reprehensible' attempt to develop an electoral base in his 'swing around the circle' and his fights with Congress alienated even Democratic supporters.⁶¹ His abuse of patronage powers – in an attempt to build a loyal body of supporters – further illustrated that Johnson had no interest in ensuring peace.⁶² His actions proved politics had taken a decidedly partisan turn, which, by unbalancing the equilibrium of power and encouraging white Southern intransigence towards the freedmen, threatened further turmoil.⁶³ It became evident to many Republicans after the 1867 elections that antipartisan platforms constructed around the promise of peace and unity remained popular

antipartisanship helped both parties' electoral success. See Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 44; and Smith, *No Party Now*, pp. 105-107, 161, 162.

⁵⁷ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 17, pp. 343-344. And Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 18, pp. 292-293. See also John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume Ten: January 1-May 31 1864 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1982), pp. 132-134. In a letter, to childhood friend Daniel Ammen, dated 16 February 1864 Grant expressed his dislike of politics stating 'I have always thought the most slavish life any man could lead was that of a politician.'

⁵⁸ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, p. 207.

⁵⁹ Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle*, pp. 196-209.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 268-277.

⁶¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 265-267. See also 'General Grant', *New York Herald*, 12 November 1867 and 'General Grant', *New York Herald*, 19 November 1867.

⁶² Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 265-267.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

despite the end of the war.⁶⁴ White voters in the North seemed willing to accept party measures like African-American suffrage in the South if it meant Union, indeed, but proved less supportive when they were pursued as policy ends in their own right. This led more politically astute Republicans (and Democrats) to realise that a moderate antipartisan candidate was necessary to win votes in 1868, and despite the reluctance of many Radical Republicans to choose an outsider not openly committed to black suffrage, they eventually joined with the moderates and conservatives at the Republican convention to choose a candidate who could appeal to all white voters.⁶⁵ The convention unanimously selected Grant as their candidate amidst much fanfare.⁶⁶

Over the preceding years it had been Grant's status as the unifier of the nation that led both Congress and the President to seek his support for their own cause in their battles. However, as a general who believed in the strict separation of civil and military life, Grant claimed neutrality. Both branches – and both parties – nevertheless claimed his support.⁶⁷ And Grant's apolitical stance did have a politics of its own. As Commanding General of the United States Army Grant had been consulted on the Military Reconstruction Act of 1867, which placed most of the ex-Confederacy under temporary army control and gave suffrage to African Americans in the South. A few Republican congressmen claimed Grant's participation here as proof of his support for the Republican Party, but as the man himself refused to openly declare his support, many Radicals remained sceptical of his real allegiance; others, such as President pro tempore of the Senate Benjamin Wade, deliberately deceived many Republicans on Grant's political position in order to deny him the presidential

⁶⁴ 'General Grant', *New York Herald*, 12 November 1867 and 'General Grant', *New York Herald*, 19 November 1867.

⁶⁵ Hans L. Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans: Lincoln's Vanguard for Radical Justice* (New York, 1969), pp. 362-363. See also Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 313-316; and Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 206-212, 218-224.

⁶⁶ Ely, Burnham, and Bartlett, *Proceedings of the National Republican Convention*, pp. 90-95.

⁶⁷ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 149, 158, 199. Grant stoically refused to take a side during the battles over power during Johnson's presidency declaring that as a representative of the Army he had to remain neutral; Grant had not even voted in 1864 presumably for the same reason.

nomination.⁶⁸ Many of the Radicals were understandably sceptical of Grant's solidarity with their cause, especially as Johnson and his Democratic supporters had repeatedly tried to win the General over to their side.⁶⁹ Others, such as General Benjamin F. Butler, had a personal dislike of Grant due to his actions during the Civil War: Butler had been removed from his command by Grant in January 1865, and had never forgiven him.⁷⁰ Grant did have some supporters in the Radical camp, such as Senator Henry Wilson, but on the whole only moderate and conservative Republicans preferred his nomination prior to the losses of the 1867 elections.⁷¹ In general, the Radical Republicans supported the candidacies of either Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase or Wade.⁷² However, the electoral reverse in 1867 illustrated the lack of white support for black suffrage when the latter was presented as part of a party programmes rather than as a necessity for national unity. The Radicals, who had championed this policy, including Chase and Wade, were clearly going to struggle to win electoral support.⁷³ Grant's popularity gave him the nomination, although some Radicals, such as Charles Sumner and Wendell Phillips, continued to dissent against his nomination.⁷⁴ Grant's supporters, however, were not worried; the Radicals, especially Phillips, had objected to Lincoln in 1864, too.⁷⁵

While refusing to take sides overtly in the battles going on in Washington between 1866 and 1868, Grant came to see Johnson as a threat to the republic, and particularly resented the President's attempts to manipulate him.⁷⁶ Forced to accompany Johnson on his 'swing around

⁶⁸ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 208-210.

⁶⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 337. See also Les Benedict, *Preserving the Constitution*, pp. 26-28.

⁷⁰ David Work, *Lincoln's Political Generals* (Champaign, 2009), pp. 153-156. For Butler's declaration that he would never forgive Grant, see William D. Mallam, 'The Grant-Butler Relationship', *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 41.2 (1954), p. 268.

⁷¹ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 210, 207, 212.

⁷² Frederick J. Blue, *Salmon P. Chase: A Life in Politics* (Kent, Ohio, 1987), pp. 283-284. See also Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 337.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 221-222, 234.

⁷⁵ T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and The Radicals*, pp. 306, 310, 314.

⁷⁶ Summers, *A Dangerous Stir*, pp. 204-205, 57-173.

the circle' campaign in 1866, in Cincinnati Grant had implored the organiser of a soldiers' demonstration outside his theatre to disperse the crowd explaining that he 'consider[ed] this merely a political demonstration for a selfish and political object, and all such I disapprove of.'⁷⁷ He believed such an action was intended 'to offend the President' and 'embarrass the relations existing between them.'⁷⁸ In Pittsburgh, he fumed to a correspondent that 'he had abstained from declaring his own political sentiments, or authorizing anybody else to do so' and that 'he was annoyed at the successive attempts which [had] been made by Seward and others, to announce to the people along the road that his political views were in harmony with those of Mr. Johnson'; such actions, he declared, were 'unwarranted and impertinent.'⁷⁹ The President then drew the General directly into the political fray when, in defiance of the Tenure of Office Act, he dismissed Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and appointed Grant as his successor.⁸⁰ Despite the Senate's reinstatement of Stanton, Johnson still sought to involve Grant in unconstitutional actions by trying to persuade him to remain in the position.⁸¹ In a further attempt to persuade the General to act illegally, Johnson told Grant to ignore the reinstated Secretary of War's orders, but refused to put the statement into writing or issue a formal order to Grant.⁸² To circumvent Stanton, Johnson contrived to force Grant to break the law without implicating himself.⁸³ Johnson, however, underestimated Grant's constitutional scruples.

Unable to control his General, Johnson proceeded to leak private conversations to a newspaper in an attempt to slander Grant's name by suggesting he had disobeyed orders.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ 'What Gen. Grant Said At Cincinnati', *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling, West Virginia), 21 September 1866.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Les Benedict, *Preserving the Constitution*, p. 39. See also McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction*, p. 498.

⁸¹ Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson*, pp. 306-308.

⁸² Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 231-233.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 230. See also Summers, *A Dangerous Stir*, pp. 204-205.

This culminated in Grant's damning letter to Johnson – given to Congress by Stanton – outlining the President's scheme.⁸⁵ Grant summarised Johnson's actions in his closing remarks, stating:

And now, Mr President, when my honor as a soldier and as a man have been so violently assailed, pardon me for saying that I can regard this whole matter, from beginning to the end, as an attempt to involve me in the resistance of law, for which you hesitated to assume the responsibility in orders, and thus to destroy my character before the country.⁸⁶

Though Grant focused on obedience to the law and defence of his character here, it is evident from the letter that he feared Johnson was trying to politicise the army, which, he claimed, Johnson's 'communication[s] plainly indicate was sought.'⁸⁷ It was on this basis that he accepted Stanton's position; Grant explained 'my greatest objection, to [Stanton's] removal or suspension, was the fear that some one would be appointed in his stead who would, by opposition to the laws relating to the restoration of the Southern States to their proper relations to the Government, embarrass the Army in the performance of duties.'⁸⁸ Grant's point was clear: partisan politics had no place in the army.

Johnson's actions had opened Grant's eyes to the reality of politics, and he appears to have been genuinely disgusted that the cause for which he and thousands others had fought was being jeopardised by politicians jockeying for base and selfish advantages in the political arena.⁸⁹ Grant expressed his outrage to his friend and subordinate General William T.

Sherman in a letter of 18 September 1867, soon after he had assumed the office of Secretary

⁸⁵ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace* pp. 233-234.

⁸⁶ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 18, pp. 124-126.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 216-217.

of War, but still five months before his public falling-out with President Johnson.⁹⁰ ‘I received your very kind letter written from Omaha which gave assurances of your sympathy for me at the very unpleasant position which I am now called on to occupy’, wrote Grant, ‘[i]t is truly an unenviable one and I wish I had never been in it.’⁹¹ Tellingly, Grant expressed his contempt for partisan politics and Johnson’s behaviour: ‘[a]ll the romance of feeling that men in high places are above personal considerations [*sic*] and act only from motives of pure patriotism, and for the general good of the public has been destroyed. An inside view proves too truly very much the reverse.’⁹²

Grant’s concerns about creeping partisanship threatening independent institutions like the army almost certainly played a part in his decision to accept the Republican nomination. Writing to Sherman in June 1868, he explained that he had not accepted the position ‘for any mere personal consideration, but, from the nature of the contest since the close of active hostilities, I have been forced into it in spite of myself.’⁹³ The political infighting of the last three years had affected Grant deeply and left him distrustful of both parties. Grant believed he ‘could not back down without, as it seems to me, leaving the contest for power for the next four years between mere trading politicians, the elevation of whom, no matter which party won, would lose to us, largely, the results of the costly war which we have gone through.’⁹⁴ The results of the war, he believed, were being squandered by partisan politicians more interested in power than the country’s welfare.

Grant clearly believed an antiparty man – like himself – was needed to save American politics from the politicians. He also hoped his nomination would have a moderating effect on the Democratic Party by forcing them into nominating a similar man above the party fray.

⁹⁰ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 17, pp. 343-344.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 18, pp. 292-293.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Grant wrote that '[n]ow the Democrats will be forced to adopt a good platform and put upon it a reliable man who, if elected, will disappoint the Copperhead element of their party. This will be a great point gained if nothing more is accomplished.'⁹⁵ Grant clearly hoped his own popularity would force the Democrats to abandon their opposition to Reconstruction and pursue patriotic – and by extension antipartisan – policies.

Sherman, for his part, reiterated Grant's opinions in his reply stating that he would be outraged if a Copperhead (a Democrat who opposed fighting the Civil War, also known as a Peace Democrat) such as George Pendleton or Horace Seymour were nominated by the Democrats.⁹⁶ He underscored his opinion with the statement that '[t]he War, no matter what its cause, or conduct was an epoch in our National history, that must be sanctified, and made to stand justified to future Ages.'⁹⁷ Grant then – in order to make himself perfectly clear – forwarded copies of his own and General Sherman's letters to Sherman's brother, John, a prominent Radical Republican Senator.⁹⁸ Grant's intentions were clear: he wished to purge politics of the evils of partisanship.

Grant's acceptance letter and his correspondence with prominent Republicans illustrate how he expected to redefine the presidency. Grant's vision of politics, which can be rooted in an antiparty tradition historians have begun to recover over the past two decades, harked back to the early republic and the halcyon days of George Washington: he lamented the increasing overlap between branches of the government, especially executive interference in the legislative process.⁹⁹ Objectivity in politics – which Grant thought required independence from party discipline – and the highest regard for the law were the keys to peace. He was

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 294-295.

⁹⁹ Historians who have recognised this antiparty tradition include Voss-Hubbard, 'The "Third Party Tradition" Reconsidered', *Journal of American History*, pp. 121-150; Ethington, *The Public City*; Voss-Hubbard, *Beyond Party*; and Smith, *No Party Now*.

imbued at West Point – and in his early schooling – with a belief that politics should be conducted for the public good without regard to selfish individual interests.¹⁰⁰ His distaste for partisanship, indeed, long predated the struggles of Reconstruction. Grant had never voted ‘an out and out’ party ticket, and – albeit for one week only – had been a member of the Know-Nothing party, which he probably joined for its antiparty stance as he had no known hostility to immigrants.¹⁰¹ The only presidential vote he cast in his lifetime was in 1856 for James Buchanan, purely because he knew the Republican candidate personally and did not believe he held the necessary republican qualities for high office; Grant believed John Fremont’s partisanship would tear the country asunder.¹⁰² But his antipartisanship needs to be defined more broadly. It did not just entail a rejection of self-serving candidates, but also the spoils system that distributed patronage to supporters of the victor, which he had opposed before and during the Civil War.¹⁰³ Grant, like more Americans than historians of the ‘party period’ once recognised, was profoundly suspicious of party political culture defined in its widest terms.

By 1868, concerned with how easily demagogic politicians could trifle with the sacrifice and lives of thousands of men, Grant became determined to inaugurate a more antipartisan order into politics. Grant’s acceptance letter, so different in tone to others in his era, codified ideas already hinted at in his private correspondence: a law, once passed, must be enforced; this was a matter of duty upon which the president’s honour rested; and a good republican like

¹⁰⁰ Baker, ‘From Belief into Culture’, *American Quarterly*, p. 534.

¹⁰¹ John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume One: 1837-1861 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1967), pp. 350-352, and Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, pp. 111-112.

¹⁰² Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, pp. 113. See also Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, pp. 284-285.

¹⁰³ Grant had once failed to get an appointment as a County Engineer in St Louis, Missouri, due to the party spoils culture. Though reputable men of the city had recommended his appointment, the Free Soilers, who had the majority position on the Board, desired a party man. Grant, though closest to one of the Free Soilers on the Board, was not strongly associated with the party which lost him the position. See Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume One, pp. 350-352. Grant also despised the party politicking that accompanied the dispersal of positions of rank at the beginning of the Civil War and refused to engage in the practice, see Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume Two, pp. 20-22.

Grant would not retreat from that duty.¹⁰⁴ The letter also implied efforts should be made to ensure prosperity and peace and guarantee the rights of citizens.¹⁰⁵ By promising to uphold the people's will rather than a partisan programme, he implied that the president should be independent of his party.¹⁰⁶ The idea that the president should remain above politics in order to implement policies in the best interests of the country resonated with the Revolutionary republicanism of the country's origins.

Republicans, chastened by their losses in 1867, seemed to follow the General's lead to claim the partisan prize of Grant's authentic antipartyism. Senator Sherman's response to Grant's letters indicated their willingness. 'Your nomination', Sherman claimed, 'was not made by our party but by the People and in obedience to the universal demand that our Candidate should be so independent of party politics as to be a guarantee of Peace and quiet. You are the only man in the Nation who can give this guarantee and that without pledges or platform.'¹⁰⁷ The Republican convention platform reiterated this sentiment.¹⁰⁸ Aside from pledges to protect the Reconstruction settlement as it stood, the platform focused mainly on finance.¹⁰⁹ The Republicans promised to honour the debt and redeem it 'over a fair period' whilst endeavouring to 'reduce the rate of interest ... honestly'.¹¹⁰ They also agreed to lower taxes as soon as feasibly possible.¹¹¹ Otherwise there was little in the way of new policies – the suffrage question in Northern states for instance was left as a matter for the states

¹⁰⁴ Ely, Burnham, and Bartlett, *Proceedings of the National Republican Convention*, p. 141. For the original draft, see Simon (ed), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 18, pp. 263-265.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 18, pp. 294-295.

¹⁰⁸ Ely, Burnham and Bartlett, Chicago, *Proceedings of the National Union Republic Convention*, pp. 84-85.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

themselves – and such vagueness ensured that Grant could run on his reputation and promise to adhere to the public will.¹¹²

Grant's silence on political issues allowed the Republicans to campaign as antipartisans who desired the nation's best interests with little reference to future policies. They had used this campaign strategy during the Civil War to great success. One historian in particular – Adam I. P. Smith – has explored this strategy in-depth. Smith, in his book *No Party Now*, examines how the Republicans used antipartisan strategies to win elections, a practice known as 'partisan antipartisanship'.¹¹³ The method preyed upon the 'disdain for partisan practices' by alleging 'that the only issue of consequence was the survival of the republic.'¹¹⁴ By claiming they represented the national interests of the country, instead of selfish partisanship, the strategy effectively allowed the Republican Party to assail their opponents on the basis that they lacked patriotism.¹¹⁵ It ensured success for the party that eschewed partisanship and defeat for those who campaigned on party issues.¹¹⁶ The party which supported the war effort and promoted national unity while exposing their opponents' partisanship won elections.¹¹⁷ As Brooks D. Simpson has claimed, Grant's silence allowed the Republicans' a 'safe, easy, and wise' canvass.¹¹⁸ If Grant in his correspondence with Sherman is to be believed, though, he intended his candidacy to force the opposition to adopt a legitimate position. His broader ambition was not the spoils of office but the reconstruction of American politics along patriotic and antipartisan lines.

Though it appeared as a tactical stance to many, Grant's silence was borne from a mix of respect for tradition and a determination to keep the army free from politics. Although both

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 141. See also Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 337-338.

¹¹³ Smith, *No Party Now*.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹¹⁸ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, p. 217.

Johnson and Lincoln made speeches during their presidencies, neither had campaigned for their election for vice-president and president respectively. They both left it to their party to campaign on their behalf, adhering to the precedent set down by Washington in 1788 and every other presidential nominee, bar Stephen A. Douglas, since.¹¹⁹ As a good republican Grant followed the course outlined by his predecessors: to covet the office indicated unworthiness for its august traditions. However, silence was even more imperative for Grant, as he remained Commanding General of the United States Army throughout the campaign, and the possibility remained that he would retain the position after the election; thus he refused to issue any partisan statements for fear he would compromise his role.¹²⁰ If he issued anything which amounted to a manifesto, he would not only compromise his position as a military man, but also threaten his character, as it would deny him the freedom to act as each occasion merited. Grant, like Lincoln, understood that in politics a certain amount of flexibility was needed at times, but unlike a consummate politician like Lincoln, he saw party as a baleful influence.

This reluctance to voice his political opinions was also part of his understanding of the presidency as an office. Grant believed that the president's duty was to enforce the laws of Congress regardless of personal interests. However, unlike both Lincoln and Johnson, Grant believed Reconstruction was a joint endeavour. Though the president could suggest legislation he could not direct Reconstruction efforts alone. Furthermore, the veto power could only be used if a law was unconstitutional, or threatened the national interests of the country.¹²¹ In contrast to Johnson, Grant believed Congress had a right to legislate on Reconstruction: civil rights, in this respect, were a national issue and not one purely for the

¹¹⁹ Richard J. Ellis (ed.), *Speaking to the People: The Rhetorical Presidency in Historical Perspective* (USA, 1998), p. 113.

¹²⁰ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 17, pp. 76-77.

¹²¹ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, pp. 239-242. See also Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 17, pp. 76-77.

states.¹²² But Grant also differed from Lincoln in his belief that Congress had an equal, or greater, right to decide the post-war settlement.¹²³ Though Grant believed the executive should remain independent from Congress, he did not believe the president alone should decide the future of the country. In a letter complaining about Johnson's stance on Reconstruction, Grant mocked the President for believing 'that the nation has not now the power, after a victory, to demand security for the future', indicating that Grant's own interpretation of congressional powers was more liberal than his predecessor.¹²⁴ Another example of Grant's stance on Reconstruction appeared in a letter written to one of the district commanders of the unreconstructed states where Grant instructed him to implement 'what the framers of the reconstruction laws wanted to express, as much as what they do express, and to execute the law according to that interpretation.'¹²⁵ Intent, then, was just as important as law. Grant's understanding of the presidency was different to the two preceding incumbents of the office both in terms of his hostility to partisan culture and his strict division of labour between legislative and executive branches. For a man who eschewed a programme, he had a clear republican blueprint for what the presidency ought to be, but the very strengths of his candidacy threatened to be his weakness.

'The Peace of Despotism and Death': the Democratic Attack on Grant

Restraint – so prevalent at the Republican convention – was absent at the Democratic convention in New York. Their speakers, who met on the propitious date of 4 July, spoke of congressional usurpations of presidential power and the oncoming Republican dictatorship aided and abetted by the army.¹²⁶ They denounced the army's ongoing presence in the South

¹²² Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 17, pp. xiii-xvi, 51-52, 76-77.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 76-77.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 256

¹²⁶ Wakeman, *Official Proceedings of the Democratic Convention Held At New York*.

as ‘military despotism’ which constituted the destruction of the republic.¹²⁷ Meanwhile Johnson was praised for preventing a congressional dictatorship and attempting to restore power to the states.¹²⁸ Decrying congressional attempts to help the freedmen as ‘negro supremacy’, they promised to repeal all the Reconstruction Acts except the Thirteenth Amendment.¹²⁹ The platform also called for the restoration of all the states and amnesty for all former Confederates.¹³⁰ Promising to use taxes for the diminution of the national debt and – except where stated otherwise – repay that debt in any form of legal currency, the Democrats effectively committed themselves to meeting their obligations to the Union’s creditors with devalued paper currency.¹³¹ Drawing on sectional and inflammatory language, they threatened to overthrow the post-war order, and return to the minimalist Reconstruction of Johnson’s Southern state governments.¹³²

In stark contrast to the Republicans, the Democrats chose both a controversial candidate and platform. The Republicans had sought to remove all traces of partisan politics from their canvass – including playing down their commitment to African-American suffrage – but the Democrats renewed the partisan battles of the war years. They chose for president the former Governor of New York and Peace Democrat Horatio Seymour, who called the New York Draft rioters in 1863 ‘my friends’.¹³³ Seymour had spoken to the crowd in an attempt to calm the rioters and claimed to have their interests at heart which had caused much outrage in Republican circles.¹³⁴ Seymour did not support the war and encouraged its cessation, and in Union circles he was denounced as a traitor. Both Generals Grant and Sherman had hoped

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5. See pp. 24-27 for Horatio Seymour’s speech denouncing Reconstruction as ‘military despotism’.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 72.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-60.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 58-60. On the Convention, see Klement, *The Limits of Dissent*, pp. 306-308; Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 338-341; and Richardson, *Death of Reconstruction*, p. 69.

¹³³ Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance For American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York, 1990), p. 50.

¹³⁴ Union Republican Congressional Committee, *Treasonable Designs of the Democracy* (Washington D.C., 1868), p. 6.

Grant's nomination would preclude the selection of such a man for the Democrats, but their calculations had proved misplaced. The choice immediately placed the canvasses in sharp relief to each other.

The Democrats immediately proceeded to attack the republicanism of the Republican candidate, turning the election, in part at least, into a referendum on Grant's credibility. They focused on Grant's character and nationalism and characterised the nominee as a man lacking in republican self-restraint. The Democrats tried to hurt Grant on three main issues: General Order No.11 (an incident concerning Jewish citizens during the Civil War); allegations of drunkenness and (to a lesser extent) butchery; and his potential as a tyrant. However, though they sought to illustrate Grant's lack of fitness for republican government, there were many contradictions in the Democrats' allegations, not least in their desire to simultaneously portray him as an inebriated incompetent and a master planner plotting to dissolve constitutional government. Furthermore, his supposedly tyrannical intentions had surprising appeal in parts of the South, where disaffected whites sought a strong leader who would oppose the Radical Congress. Lastly, their strategy, by focusing on aspects of Grant's military career, moved attention away from the more divisive issue of Reconstruction, to the benefit of the Republican campaign. The Democrats then, unwittingly, set up the perfect platform for the Republican Party by concentrating on Grant's republicanism. Yet though Grant and the Republicans would win the battle, it was something of a Pyrrhic victory. For many of the accusations levelled at Grant would be seized upon by others – Liberal Republicans, independent newspapermen, and even Republican stalwarts – over the following eight years, and each time the old fears were invoked they would diminish his capacity to enforce Reconstruction measures.

The least important prong of the Democratic trident – General Order No.11 – had been issued by Grant in 1862 when he was in charge of the Department of the Tennessee. Smuggling was

endemic in the area, and even Grant's friends attempted to use their personal influence with the commander to ask for favours transporting various commodities.¹³⁵ The smuggling, Grant believed, amounted to unrepugnant corruption, and undermined the Union war effort by aiding the Confederate economy.¹³⁶ He therefore reacted badly when asked by his father and the Jewish Mack brothers for passes which would enable them to smuggle cotton across the lines in return for a cut of the profits.¹³⁷ In anger at the willingness of these men to undermine the Union war effort for their own personal gain, Grant very rashly pursued what he perceived as the only option open to him: he banished all Jews from his Department.¹³⁸ Although the order was delayed due to a cut in communications and rescinded by President Lincoln before its full effects could be felt, it cast a shadow on General Grant's otherwise impeccable record.¹³⁹

Although the Order was well-known in the Jewish community, it was unknown to many Americans until the Democrats drew on it during the presidential campaign.¹⁴⁰ It called into question whether General Grant would protect all sections of society in the Union, and many American Jews were unsure whether to vote for the party they preferred knowing its candidate had previously undermined their civil rights.¹⁴¹ It greatly divided the Jewish community, some of whom campaigned for General Grant, whilst others produced anti-Grant pamphlets promising that Jewish citizens would not vote for him regardless of his

¹³⁵ Jonathan D. Sarna, *When General Grant Expelled the Jews* (New York, 2012), pp. 44-45.

¹³⁶ *Speeches of General U.S. Grant* (Washington D.C., 1868), p. 8. The Republican pamphlet features a quotation from a letter wrongly described as sent to Edwin Stanton. A letter from Grant was sent on 13 August 1868 to William P. Mellen – a special agent of the Treasury – in which Grant stated '[m]y own opinion is that all trade with an enemy with whom we are at war, is calculated to weaken us. Individually I am opposed to selling to, or buying from them while war exists, except from those actually within our lines.' See John Y. Simon (ed.), *Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume Nine: July 7-31 December 1863 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1982), pp. 177-180.

¹³⁷ Sarna, *When General Grant Expelled the Jews*, pp. 47-48.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

achievements.¹⁴² Jonathan Sarna has recently suggested that the importance of the Order on electoral votes can be seen in the substantial amount of newspaper space it received even in areas where the Jewish population was very low.¹⁴³ Sarna cites the *Flemingsburg Democrat* (Flemingsburg, Kentucky) which ‘devoted two full columns in its issue of March 6, 1868, to ‘Gen. Grant and the Jews’ which denounced the Order as ‘outrageous’.¹⁴⁴ For the Democrats, the Order clearly undermined Grant’s integrity by illustrating his lack of self-restraint, but it was far from ubiquitous in the party press.¹⁴⁵

The second most important issue promoted to undermine Grant’s reputation was his supposed alcoholism. Allegations of drunkenness comprised a central component of the Democratic campaign. The origin of the allegation is unknown, but it was raised during the Civil War, and most likely came from disgruntled colleagues, including General Henry Halleck, who used it early in the conflict in an attempt to remove Grant from his command during a dispute.¹⁴⁶ The Democrats denounced Grant as ‘[n]otoriously a drunken debauchee’, a ‘[d]runken sot’, and ‘Phillips’ and Tilton’s drunken friend’; the last of which conflated Grant with two radical abolitionists in an attempt to link him to the cause of African-American suffrage.¹⁴⁷ The allegation of drunkenness held much potency in nineteenth-century America as it suggested that a person was incapable of controlling his passions. Temperance societies

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 61, and Ph. von Bort, *General Grant and the Jews* (New York, 1868), p. 16.

¹⁴³ Sarna, *When General Grant Expelled the Jews*, p. 55.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ For examples of Democratic newspapers which ran the story see ‘Gen. Grant and the Jews’, *The Evening Argus* (Rock Island, Illinois), 7 March 1868; ‘The Hebrew Meeting’, *Memphis Daily Appeal*, 16 July 1868; ‘General Grant’s Order No. 11, Driving the Jews from his Military Department—The Slanders of a Radical sheet’, *Daily Ohio Statesman*, 20 October 1868; and ‘The Israelites and General Grant’, *Staunton Spectator* (Staunton, Virginia), 28 July 1868. For details of the Republicans’ defence of Grant’s Order, see article ‘The Jews’ in the independent (but Republican supporting) *Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), 14 August 1868. For details of another Republican defence in an independent newspaper, see ‘Gen. Grant and the Israelites’, *Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig*, 1 July 1868. For a defence in a Republican newspaper, see ‘Gen. Grant’s Mississippi Order’, *Belmont Chronicle* (St. Clairsville, Ohio), 25 June 1868; and also ‘Appealing to Prejudice’, *White Cloud Kansas Chief*, 18 June 1868.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, *Grant*, pp. 172-173. The famous Lincoln quotation about sending a barrel of the whiskey favoured by General Grant to all his other Generals is derived from this period, and was repeated by many newspapers and biographers in order to illustrate Lincoln’s support for General Grant.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Value of Detraction’, *Perrysburg Journal*, 9 October 1868. For democratic slanders, see ‘The Bondholders’ Circular’, *The Plymouth Weekly Democrat* (Plymouth, Indiana), 12 March 1868, and also ‘Democratic Argument’ and ‘A Lovely Blast’, *White Cloud Kansas Chief* (White Cloud, Kansas), 6 August 1868.

had flourished since Andrew Jackson's era in an attempt to reform the drinking habits of the American public.¹⁴⁸ Their advocates believed that drunkenness resulted from an inability to exercise self-restraint. Here the critique of the drunkard became political, for men without self-restraint, could not be good republican citizens.¹⁴⁹ At least one newspaper questioned the logic of replacing one White House drunkard – Andrew Johnson – with another.¹⁵⁰ An indication of the strength of concerns over alcoholism in politics was implied by the formation of the first temperance party – the Prohibition Party – only a year later. Furthermore, Republicans themselves had first broached the issue – during debates over their presidential nomination – which gave it credence and made it a usable political tool.¹⁵¹

In trying to deny Grant the Republican presidential nomination several Radical Republicans called him a drunkard publicly in the press.¹⁵² In particular, Radical abolitionist Wendell Phillips wrote frequent editorials in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* spreading rumours about Grant's drunkenness; Phillips' objection to Grant's nomination sprang from Grant's refusal to confirm his radicalism, which led Phillips to conclude that the General was a conservative opponent of civil rights.¹⁵³ Despite the Republican losses in the 1867 elections, Phillips slandered Grant's name, claiming that 'rumors reach us from Washington, coming from different and trustworthy sources, that Gen. Grant has been seen unmistakably drunk in the streets of that city within a few weeks.'¹⁵⁴ Phillips had hoped that by accusing Grant of

¹⁴⁸ Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers 1815-1860* (New York, 1995), pp. 124-128.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

¹⁵⁰ 'Intemperance in the White House', *Newark Advocate* (Newark, Ohio), 7 February 1868.

¹⁵¹ *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, Ohio), 12 October 1868.

¹⁵² Phillips, 'General Grant', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1 February 1868. See also 'Editorial Correspondence', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1 February 1868.

¹⁵³ Phillips, 'The "Perils of the Hour"', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 30 November 1867. See also Phillips, 'General Grant', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1 February 1868, Wendell Phillips, 'A Temperance Lecture', *Nashville Union and Dispatch* (Nashville, Tennessee), 16 April 1868, 'Grant and His Defamers', *New York World*, in *The Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), 5 October 1868. And Phillips' Speech at the Brooklyn (New York) Academy of Music in "Surrender of Congress", *Anderson Intelligencer* (Anderson Court House, South Carolina), 22 January 1868. See also 'Speech of Wendell Phillips', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 13 June 1868, and Wendell Phillips, 'The Election', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 14 November 1868.

¹⁵⁴ Phillips, 'General Grant', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1 February 1868. See also 'A Temperance Lecture', *Nashville Union and Dispatch* (Nashville, Tennessee), 16 April 1868.

drunkenness he would persuade temperance men of Grant's ineligibility for Office.¹⁵⁵ Opponents of Johnson formed a Congressional Temperance society in January 1868, as Johnson's drinking was well-known in political and public circles.¹⁵⁶ Phillips repeatedly warned of the fallacy of electing another drunkard for the presidency lest a man similarly lacking in self-discipline repeated his predecessor's errors.¹⁵⁷ Following Phillips' lead, Grant's opponents liberally spread the accusation, and forced his supporters onto the defensive.¹⁵⁸

Charges of drunkenness also fed into another Democratic accusation which sought to demonstrate Grant's unfitness for positions of power; the General, the Democrats alleged, had butchered his troops on the battlefield. Though a contentious charge – many white Southerners admired Grant's magnanimity to his opponents at the close of the war – it was nevertheless a popular refrain. However, despite its inherent link to the drunkenness charge, it did not appear as often in denunciations of Grant, perhaps due to the use of statistics to prove the statement which resulted in multitude inconsistencies throughout the Democratic press.¹⁵⁹ One newspaper, which wisely omitted these statistics, nevertheless suggested two different

¹⁵⁵ Phillips, 'General Grant', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1 February 1868. See also 'Editorial Correspondence', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1 February 1868.

¹⁵⁶ 'Congressional Temperance Society', *Daily National Intelligencer*, 27 January 1868.

¹⁵⁷ Phillips, 'General Grant', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1 February 1868. See also 'Editorial Correspondence', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1 February 1868, and Wendell Phillips, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 6 June 1868.

¹⁵⁸ For evidence of Democratic accusations of Grant's drunkenness see 'General Frank Blair in Columbus—The Journal and its Caricature', *Daily Ohio Statesman*, 7 October 1868; 'Grant's Drunkenness', *The Spirit of Democracy* (Woodsfield, Ohio), 20 October 1868; 'Radicals who Support General Grant', *Wyoming Democrat* (Wyoming County, Pennsylvania), 1 July 1868; 'Is Hiram U. Grant a Drunkard?', *Fayetteville Observer* (Fayetteville, Tennessee), 13 August 1868; and 'Grant's Unfortunate Habits', *The Plymouth Weekly Democrat* (Plymouth, Indiana), 15 October 1868. For Republican refutations see 'Spirit of the Press', *The Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), 31 August 1868; 'Gen. Grant's Habits', *National Opinion* (Bradford, Vermont), 15 May 1868; 'Democratic Objections to Gen. Grant', *Burlington Weekly Free Press* (Burlington, Vermont), 14 August 1868; 'Schuyler Colfax and Gen. Grant' and 'Admiral Porter on Gen. Grant', *Delaware Gazette* (Delaware, Ohio), 28 August 1868. Also, for a Democratic repudiation in a Republican newspaper see 'Is Grant a Drunkard?', *Raftsmen's Journal* (Clearfield, Pennsylvania), 16 September 1868.

¹⁵⁹ 'General Grant—Let Soldiers Read', *Bloomsburg Democrat* (Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania), 17 June 1868; 'Gen. Grant as a Butcher', *Edgefield Advertiser* (Edgefield, South Carolina), 8 July 1868; and 'The Campaign Song of the Bummer Party—History of Its Leader', *Clarksville Chronicle* (Clarksville, Tennessee), 19 June 1868. See also 'The Butcher', *The Pulaski Citizen* (Pulaski, Tennessee), 11 September 1868; *The Pulaski Citizen* (Pulaski, Tennessee), 18 September 1868; and *Wyoming Democrat* (Wyoming County, Pennsylvania), 3 June 1868.

figures in the same brief article for the number of men Grant was responsible for killing.¹⁶⁰ But more common were simple statements such as ‘Grant, the butcher’ or ‘[b]utcher’ Grant’ rather than in-depth analysis of the accusation.¹⁶¹ But the allegation fitted neatly into the drunken depiction of Grant which one newspaper highlighted when it claimed that Grant was ‘a military blunderer and a wholesale human butcher ... who, in the midst of battle, revelled in drunken debauchery’.¹⁶² Yet Grant was assailed in this manner fewer times than he was described as a drunkard or even a military blunderer; most likely the problem lay in the inconsistencies of the number of men killed by Grant which these newspapers suggested, or possibly the memory of the Confederate losses proved too compelling for some. Either way, ‘butcher’ Grant held less potency for the electorate than ‘drunkard’ Grant.

The most prevalent and enduring of the three issues which formed the Democratic attack on Grant, however, consisted of warnings of tyranny and military despotism. Voiced throughout the convention proceedings they found sympathy with nominated men, too, especially with the vice-presidential candidate General Frank P. Blair. In his acceptance letter, Blair warned – as had many speakers at the convention – that Grant’s election would entail a continuation of the so-called military despotism already existing in the South after the passage of the 1867 Reconstruction Acts.¹⁶³ Yet Blair went further. Blair alleged that Grant was a new Napoleon: a permanent autocrat.¹⁶⁴ Blair’s acceptance letter – so different in tone to the man he assailed – stated how Grant ‘exclaims: ‘Let us have peace.’ ‘Peace reigns in Warsaw,’ was the announcement which heralded the doom of the liberties of a nation. ‘The Empire is peace,’ exclaimed Bonaparte when freedom and its defenders expired under the sharp edge of his

¹⁶⁰ ‘Butcher Grant’, *The Spirit of Democracy* (Woodsfield, Ohio), 7 July 1868.

¹⁶¹ ‘Democratic Meeting at Saluda Factory’, *The Daily Phoenix* (Columbia, South Carolina), 28 July 1868; ‘Desperation’, *Keowee Courier* (Pickens Court House, South Carolina), 26 June 1868; ‘No Party Candidates’, *The Fairfield Herald* (Winnsboro, South Carolina); ‘The News’, *Memphis Daily Appeal*, 15 September 1868; and ‘Louisville Courier on Gen. Grant’, *Arizona Miner* (Fort Whipple, Arizona), 11 July 1868.

¹⁶² ‘Vote Right!’, *Spirit of Jefferson* (Charles Town, West Virginia), 28 July 1868.

¹⁶³ For Blair’s letter, see Wakeman, *Official Proceedings of the Democratic Convention Held At New York*, pp. 180-181. For other speakers, see pp. 3-6, 24-27, 153-154.

¹⁶⁴ Wakeman, *Official Proceedings of the Democratic Convention Held At New York*, pp. 180-181.

sword. The peace to which Grant invites us’, Blair declared, ‘is the peace of despotism and death.’¹⁶⁵ Blair implied that the election of Grant would entail more than a willingness to support the congressionally-implemented despotism; it would ensure the end of democracy.¹⁶⁶

Although often represented as a radical viewpoint – Blair was widely ridiculed and James Gordon Bennett Senior of the *New York Herald* attempted to oust him from the ticket – the letter simply built upon the ground laid by Democratic public figures at the convention and in the Democratic press.¹⁶⁷ The convention was replete with accusations of military despotism inflicted by a usurping tyrannical Congress.¹⁶⁸ Accusations of a Radical congressional tyranny were also promoted by prominent Democratic newspapers: the *Daily National Intelligencer* (a semi-official administration newspaper), the *La Crosse Democrat*, the *Chicago Times*, the *New York Herald* (Democratic leaning in the 1860s under Bennett Sr.) and the *New York World*. The *Herald* had called the Republican convention the ‘council of war at Chicago’ whilst the *Chicago Times* stated how the Republicans ‘proposed to make Grant dictator’.¹⁶⁹ The *Chicago Times* claimed this was so ‘that he may, through military despotism, reduce the noblest, most intelligent, and gallant white men of the South to subjection to the brutalized negroes who have just emerged from the degradation of life long and abject slavery.’¹⁷⁰ The Democrats already believed the restrictions on former

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ For reprints and discussion of Blair’s letter, see ‘Frank Blair’s Position’, *Nebraska Advertiser* (Brownville, Nemaha County, Nebraska), 6 August 1868; ‘The Blairs—How Frank Sunk his own Shirt’, *White Cloud Kansas Chief* (White Cloud, Kansas), 16 July 1868; ‘Too Late!’, *The Weekly North-Carolina Standard* (Raleigh, North Carolina), 2 September 1868; ‘Seymour and Blair Have Declared War’, *The Weekly North-Carolina Standard* (Raleigh, North Carolina), 16 September 1868; ‘Policy vs. Platform’, *The Charleston Daily News*, 22 September 1868. For ridicule of Blair’s words, see *National Opinion* (Bradford, Vermont), 30 October 1868; ‘Frank Blair on Gen. Grant’, *The Highland Weekly News* (Hillsborough, Highland County, Ohio), 27 August 1868; ‘The Two Men’, *White Cloud Kansas Chief* (White Cloud, Kansas), 16 July 1868; and *Rafisman’s Journal* (Clearfield, Pennsylvania), 19 August 1868.

¹⁶⁸ Wakeman, *Official Proceedings of the Democratic Convention Held At New York*.

¹⁶⁹ ‘The Response’, *Daily Cleveland Herald* (Cleveland, Ohio), 23 May 1868; and ‘What is Proposed’, *Daily News and Herald* (Savannah, Georgia), 22 January 1868.

¹⁷⁰ ‘What is Proposed’, *Daily News and Herald* (Savannah, Georgia), 22 January 1868.

Confederates' political rights and the absence of several Southern states from Congress resembled despotism. Though Blair's accusations were slightly more extreme, he did not create the idea of a military despotism which was a long-running charge the Democrats had made against Lincoln and congressional Republicans.

Blair's letter therefore played on real fears. The assassination of a president and the failed conviction on impeachment charges of another had, along with the long shadow of the Civil War itself, left Americans seriously concerned about the stability of their republic. Paranoia ran riot within politics. Johnson and his Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, believed the Radical Republicans were plotting to overthrow his presidency, whilst the Radicals feared Johnson had planned a coup d'état of Congress.¹⁷¹ There is evidence to suggest Johnson considered dismissing the thirty-ninth Congress in 1866 – evidence possibly leaked to a Philadelphia newspaper which reported the idea.¹⁷² The Democratic allegations of despotism were made more plausible when they were tied to fears about what the former slaves might do with their new civil rights as Southern whites, in particular, raised the old cry of servile insurrection. Many recent works have explored this paranoia which permeated the post-Civil War nation by looking at republican suspicions of centralised power and the importance of rumour.¹⁷³ Studies by historians on issues as diverse as 'mexicanization' and 'monarchism' have illustrated that in uncertain times some citizens entertained fears that with hindsight seem outlandish: that the United States might descend into a perpetual cycle of war and revolution, or that only a king could hold the nation together.¹⁷⁴ Reconstruction led some to fear the destruction of the United States and increased support for extreme solutions: Blair's concerns were not as extraordinary as they might appear at first glance.

¹⁷¹ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 153, 169.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹⁷³ Summers, *A Dangerous Stir*.

¹⁷⁴ Downs, 'The Mexicanization of American Politics', *American Historical Review*, pp. 387-409, and Heath, "'Let the Empire Come'", *Civil War History*, pp. 152-189.

Blair was acquainted with Grant. He had fought on the Union side at Vicksburg under Grant's leadership, which gave him first-hand knowledge of the General, and he could find among Grant supporters comparisons of their man to Napoleon I.¹⁷⁵ General Halleck wrote of Grant after Vicksburg, for instance, that '[i]n boldness of plan, rapidity of execution, and brilliancy of routes, these operations will compare most favourably with those of Napoleon about Ulm.'¹⁷⁶ Once nominated by the Republicans, authors began churning out biographies replete with Napoleon comparisons. One Grant biographer – John S. C. Abbott – had previously written a highly favourable biography of the French Emperor. Another writer, Albert D. Richardson – whose work was reprinted in many newspapers – compared Grant's lucid concise speech to the words of another destroyer of republics, Napoleon III.¹⁷⁷ He claimed both were 'no flowers of rhetoric' and spoke 'in the plainest, homeliest words' commenting that 'Napoleon's memorable sayings are all of this order'.¹⁷⁸ The Democratic convention took place two months after the Republicans had met, allowing for the press to pick up on such double-edged praise.¹⁷⁹ Grant himself, despite his abhorrence of Napoleon III, had signed his acceptance letter with '[I]et us have peace' which bore remarkable similarity to Napoleon III's rallying cry after his coup, '[t]he empire is peace'.¹⁸⁰ Under these circumstances, Blair's connection of the themes of tyranny and Napoleon became understandable.

Blair spoke openly on the issue on the campaign trail, illustrating that his allegations were not simply a campaign trick. He gave a speech at Leavenworth, Maine in which he warned about

¹⁷⁵ William A. Crafts, *Life of U.S. Grant* (Boston, 1868), p. 68.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ 'Character of General Grant', *The Vermont Chronicle*, 13 June 1868. Other reprints can be found in the following articles, see 'Grant's Personal Character', *The Highland Weekly News* (Hillsborough, Highland County, Ohio), 18 June 1868; 'Grant in the Mexican War—A Leap For Life', *The Emporia News* (Emporia, Kansas), 9 October 1868; 'Grant Analyzed', *Nebraska Advertiser*, 28 May 1868; and *White Cloud Kansas Chief* (White Cloud, Kansas), 24 September 1868.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Robert J. Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: A History of Election Practices* (London, 1989), pp. 68-69.

¹⁸⁰ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, pp. 237, 248-250.

the dangers of underestimating Grant.¹⁸¹ In response to a man who called Grant ‘a fool’, Blair stated ‘Sir, you are mistaken. Grant is no fool. ... He is the greatest man of the age.’¹⁸²

He continued:

Sherman, Sheridan and Thomas are good men, but Grant is worth more than all of them. Oliver Cromwell and Napoleon Bonaparte were both great men, but, sir, I tell you that Grant is a greater man than Cromwell and Bonaparte put together. He is not a talker, but he is one of the greatest thinkers in the world. He is ambitious, but he don’t show it; and I tell you, that if he is elected President, he will set up a monarchy and establish himself Emperor. I tell you, that the people are mistaken when they suppose Grant to be a fool. They have good reason to fear his greatness. The man that can spring right up from poverty and obscurity, and do what he has done, is no mere creature of circumstances. Circumstances don’t run so much in one way.¹⁸³

Blair’s speech and acceptance letter showed how real concerns over power existed in both the North and the South. The words were widely printed (and often ridiculed) but they were not unwarranted especially as he repeated concerns over Grant’s silence.¹⁸⁴ Both politicians and the press had expressed concerns over Grant’s unwillingness to voice his opinions on

¹⁸¹ *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier* (Bangor, Maine), 18 August 1868.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier* (Bangor, Maine), 18 August 1868. See also ‘Vermont Election’, *New Hampshire Statesman*, 4 September 1868. For worries over Grant’s silence, see ‘Some Contrasts’, *Public Ledger* (Memphis, Tennessee), 7 July 1868; ‘Large Losses of Voters to the Grant Ticket’, *Bloomsburg Democrat*, 12 August 1868; ‘Deserting Grant’, *Wilmington Journal* (Wilmington, North Carolina), 7 August 1868. For reprints and discussion of Blair’s letter, see ‘Gen. Blair’s Letter of Acceptance’, *The Spirit of Jefferson* (Charles Town, West Virginia), 28 July 1868; ‘Frank Blair’s Position’, *Nebraska Advertiser* (Brownville, Nemaha County, Nebraska), 6 August 1868; ‘The Blairs—How Frank Sunk his own Shirt’, *White Cloud Kansas Chief* (White Cloud, Kansas), 16 July 1868; ‘Too Late!’, *The Weekly North-Carolina Standard* (Raleigh, North Carolina), 2 September 1868; ‘Seymour and Blair Have Declared War’, *The Weekly North-Carolina Standard* (Raleigh, North Carolina), 16 September 1868; ‘Policy vs. Platform’, *The Charleston Daily News*, 22 September 1868. For ridicule of Blair’s words, see *National Opinion* (Bradford, Vermont), 30 October 1868; ‘Frank Blair on Gen. Grant’, *The Highland Weekly News* (Hillsborough, Highland County, Ohio), 27 August 1868; ‘The Two Men’, *White Cloud Kansas Chief* (White Cloud, Kansas), 16 July 1868; and *Raftsmen’s Journal* (Clearfield, Pennsylvania), 19 August 1868.

political matters. It led to fears, on both sides, that he held extreme views.¹⁸⁵ Democratic newspapers across the country mocked Grant's silence and chided him for his elusiveness. One speaker claimed, for example, that '[s]peech is silver, silence is golden. Grant's silence is leaden.'¹⁸⁶ The implication here was that Grant's tight-lipped posture was a reflection of his stupidity but for others, like Blair, it hinted at a malevolent political genius. To answer Democratic allegations, an artist at *Harper's Weekly* had, a year earlier, drawn the General as a Sphynx, who remained indecipherable to civilians but a towering monument to soldiers.¹⁸⁷ But such messages were hard to control. Educated Americans would have known, indeed, that Napoleon III was also often compared to this mythical and enigmatic creature.

Oddly, though, Democratic attempts to tar Grant with the brush of tyranny actually accentuated his appeal in parts of the South. Few white Southerners desired the election of their old enemy (though Sherman or Butler would have been worse). Yet though these men feared Radical victory, they did not despair over the election of Grant. 'Gen. Grant, so far as he is personally concerned, is most respected by the Southern people' declared a Baltimore newspaper.¹⁸⁸ White Southerners declared their admiration for Grant's 'magnanimity to General Lee', his honesty, and his lack of vindictiveness towards the South.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, they saw potential benefits in the election of Grant. A former 'messmate' from West Point claimed 'Grant had the ambition of ten Caesars ... but his ambition would be to build up instead of destroying the country' and in particular, this situation 'would be better for the country at large, and especially the South, to prosper under his empire than to be ruined by

¹⁸⁵ 'General Grant', *New York Herald*, 12 November 1867, and Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle*, pp. 268-269.

¹⁸⁶ 'Down on Grant', *Orangeburg News* (Orangeburg, South Carolina), 23 May 1868.

¹⁸⁷ 'The Sphynx at the War Office', *Harper's Weekly*, 7 September 1867.

¹⁸⁸ 'Why not be Just and Fair?', *The Western Democrat*, 20 October 1868 [originally from the *Baltimore Sun*].

¹⁸⁹ 'Speech of Hon. Ellison S. Keitt', *The Newberry Herald* (Newberry, South Carolina), 14 October 1868.

this radical Congress and their thieving emissaries.’¹⁹⁰ The despotic ambitions of Grant, then, were far from frightening for Southern Democrats.

In an oft-reprinted article, entitled ‘General Grant in the South’, a Southern author sought to calm fears existing in the South over a Republican victory.¹⁹¹ His hopes rested on Grant’s ‘character and capacity’.¹⁹² The author asserted ‘[h]e is arbitrary, but he will have no orders but his own’ before claiming that Grant ‘will not have much respect for these bogus governments in the South. But he will aim to keep up a sort of order by the military.’¹⁹³ The implication here was that Grant’s tyranny need not be feared: he had no sympathy with the former slaves and ‘[w]hen he comes to be tried, when his peculiarities are allowed to come out, just as he would have been cruel as a slaveholder he will be cruel and violent as a ruler.’¹⁹⁴ Seymour, the author claimed, would offer the ex-slaves more protection than Grant.¹⁹⁵ The tyranny of the General would result in the absence of ‘anarchy and a disregard of his edicts’.¹⁹⁶ Under the tyrannical Grant ‘order will be preserved. The peace of Warsaw will prevail. Their republican governments will be gone, but as a general thing, the people will not be disturbed in their homes. They can live—not so prosperously as before—but still life and property will be untouched.’¹⁹⁷ As Andrew Heath has pointed out, in early 1869 some white Southerners hoped Grant would become a tyrant; a benevolent dictator, they believed, would be preferential to Radical democracy.¹⁹⁸

This article was reprinted throughout the Southern press indicating at the very least white Southern interest in its suggestions. The fears of Northern Democrats, then, were not

¹⁹⁰ ‘General Grant’, *The Daily Phoenix* (Columbia, South Carolina), 17 June 1868.

¹⁹¹ ‘General Grant in the South’, *The Louisiana Democrat*, 2 November 1868.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Heath, “‘Let the Empire Come’”, *Civil War History*, pp. 159-170.

necessarily reflected in their Southern counterparts. The message Democrats in the South promoted indicated a preference ‘for a white man’s government against a black man’s despotism.’¹⁹⁹ Grant, they believed, would govern the South as ‘a disciplinarian’.²⁰⁰ Southern newspapers claimed Grant had convinced a friend ‘that he would wash his hands of Radicalism.’²⁰¹ Some white Southerners therefore desired the despotism of Grant believing it preferable to the governance of white Republicans in the South and Radical Republicans in Congress. Blair’s warning, then, did not provoke fear among these men in the South. Grant’s silence – though often mocked – provided an unlikely source of hope to white men in the South who loathed congressional radicalism.

If Blair’s warnings exposed sectional divisions within the Democratic alliance, it also exposed contradictions in the party’s line of attack. To Blair, Grant was a master planner, but to most Democrats, he was an imbecile; it was hard to see how a dimwit could become a despot. The reprinting of Grant’s short speeches formed a favourite tactic of the Democrats.²⁰² They particularly liked speeches in which Grant referred to other speakers. At Toledo, Ohio, in 1865 Grant greeted the crowd before introducing the ‘Rev. Mr. Vincent, who has come out on the train from Chicago, [and] has kindly consented to return my thanks for this hearty welcome, which you have given me.’²⁰³ On another occasion, Grant stated ‘I am not going to reply to the address, gentlemen. I could not do so if I should try.’²⁰⁴ Other Democratic newspapers sought out former acquaintances of Grant to attest to his intellectual unsuitability for the presidency. One such person claimed Grant was ‘one of the most

¹⁹⁹ ‘Kentucky Thunder—The First Note of the Campaign’, *The Fairfield Herald*, 26 August 1868.

²⁰⁰ ‘General Grant in the South’, *The Louisiana Democrat*, 2 November 1868.

²⁰¹ ‘The reading of the President’s letter in the House’, *The Opelousas Courier*, 22 February 1868. See also ‘Grant Not Radical’, *The Athens Post* (Athens, Tennessee), 2 October 1868.

²⁰² ‘Gen. Grant’s Speeches’, *White Cloud Kansas Chief* (White Cloud, Kansas), 9 July 1868. See also ‘Items From the Louisville Journal’, *The Pulaski Citizen* (Pulaski, Tennessee); 31 July 1868; ‘Incidents at Grant’s House’, *The Fairfield Herald* (Winnsboro, South Carolina), 10 June 1868; and ‘Public Speeches of H. U. Grant’, *The Stark County Democrat* (Canton, Ohio), 22 July 1868.

²⁰³ ‘Public Speeches of H. U. Grant’, *The South-western* (Shreveport, Louisiana), 5 August 1868.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

stupendous humbugs ever known in this or any other age.’²⁰⁵ The author wrote how a short ‘conversation with him will clearly convince any one that he does not possess military genius or the first elements of statesmanship.’²⁰⁶ Tales of incompetence, such as this one, were more common in Democratic newspapers than Blair’s contradictory claim of a masterminding genius planning his future empire.

Indeed more Democrats believed that the country would descend into military despotism through Grant’s ineptitude and impressionability than his calculating genius. He would, they assumed, quickly fall under the sway of silver-tongued congressmen, who would continue to erect their legislative tyranny. Here, an unrepugnant lack of independence became a crucial part of the case against the General. Several newspapers asserted ‘that any man willing to assume the guardianship of Grant has easily secured his unreasoning acquiescence in all political questions.’²⁰⁷ ‘In politics’, the Democrats claimed, Grant had ‘always taken up with the minds that mastered him.’²⁰⁸ Another newspaper described the matter less eloquently, stating that when Grant was asked in 1861 whether ‘the war was to be prosecuted for the abolition of slavery’, he ‘first avowed himself to be a democrat, and then said he did not believe such to be the object, but that if such were the object of the war, upon being convinced of the fact, he would resign his commission in the Federal army and go over to the enemy.’²⁰⁹ It was an accusation repeated frequently that Grant, ‘like many other weak mortals’, did not have ‘a mind or an opinion’ which he could ‘justly claim as [his] own’, and

²⁰⁵ ‘Louisville Courier on Gen. Grant’, *Arizona Miner* (Fort Whipple, Arizona), 11 July 1868. See also ‘Grant and Colfax’, *The Athens Post* (Athens, Tennessee), 2 October 1868.

²⁰⁶ ‘Louisville Courier on Gen. Grant’, *Arizona Miner* (Fort Whipple, Arizona), 11 July 1868. For another example of Grant’s inflated ego see *Fayetteville Observer* (Fayetteville, Tennessee), 1 October 1868. For an example of a typical article illustrating Grant’s stupidity, see ‘Hard Joke on Grant’, *Fayetteville Observer* (Fayetteville, Tennessee), 6 August 1868.

²⁰⁷ ‘What Grant Has Been, Is, Is Not, And Wants To Be’, *The Pulaski Citizen*, 5 June 1868 [article originally published in the *New York World*].

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ ‘Radical Papers Please Copy’, *Fayetteville Observer*, 29 October 1868 [originally printed in the *Denver Gazette*].

as a result he would be ‘a tool, and fit representative of Radical corruption.’²¹⁰ Grant, they contended, was not a genius but an impressionable fool: a slave rather than a master.

In this depiction, Grant’s malleability meant he could easily be manipulated into enacting tyranny upon the South. In the estimation of many Democrats, Grant was a soldier who could ‘be lead [*sic*] around by the nose by demagogues and unprincipled public thieves’ but who, unlike Johnson, had ‘the army at his sole command’.²¹¹ Thus, ‘urged on by a vindictive and section hating ring of usurpers and political cancers, with no principles of justice to restrain him’, Grant would allow ‘the despotism that now holds sway in the outraged and abused South’ to become ‘what we may expect the whole nation to become, if Grant and his party are successful.’²¹² This ‘despotism once inaugurated throughout the country will never go backward, but push on from worse to worse, unless crushed and totally destroyed by insulted justice.’²¹³ In this respect, the Democrats turned the Republican portrayal of Grant’s antipartisanship and silence on political issues into a weakness by surmising that the General used silence to hide his complete lack of judgement on political issues. As he had no restraining conscience to direct his actions, he would be complicit in enabling despotism to take root in the United States, and thus preside over the destruction of the republic. It was his incompetence, rather than any claims of intellectual genius, which most Democrats believed would install a dictatorship in the country.

Yet the contradictory nature of the Democratic campaign did not aid the party’s course. The Democrats presented a campaign of paradoxes that even their own supporters found baffling. Their controversial platform, though often popular among white voters in the South, was divisive in the North. Conservative party journals were particularly critical of Blair’s

²¹⁰ ‘Grant!’, *The Lincoln County Herald* (Troy, Lincoln County, Missouri), 11 June 1868.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid.*

histrionic warnings about Grant's designs, for instance, while the prospect of paying the war debt in greenbacks alienated New York's hard money men. Moreover, the Democratic courting of Grant prior to 1868 enabled Republicans to rebuke claims of Grant's despotism, drunkenness and discrimination. The Democratic campaign, as a result, was full of contradictions. Grant was a genius and an idiot, a despot when some Democrats longed for despotism and a man whose service to the nation supposedly made him a threat to the nation itself. These were difficult ideas to hold simultaneously and cracks soon showed. Even the most radically antiwar wing of the party in the North, the Peace Democrats, denounced the attempts to asunder Grant's military reputation with accusations of tyranny and drunkenness. The Copperhead Clement Vallandigham's *Dayton Daily Ledger* newspaper reportedly labelled 'the frequent abuse of General Grant, as 'the weakest and most foolish thing that the Democratic press or Democratic orators can do.'²¹⁴

Vallandigham – a Copperhead who fled to Canada during the war – underlined the problem which the Democrats faced. By focusing on undermining Grant's reputation they merely increased attention on his Civil War career rather than the more divisive issue of Reconstruction. When Democratic newspapers scolded Grant for 'victories [that] were too costly to be valuable', lambasted him as a 'military blunderer' and labelled him as the 'man who needlessly sacrificed one hundred thousand lives in his Potomac campaign' they were countered with the Democratic *New York World's* 1865 opinion that '[his] last brilliant campaign sets the final seal upon his reputation.'²¹⁵ The *World* added how it had 'stamp[ed] him as the superior of his able antagonist as well as of all the commanders who have served with him or under his command in the great campaigns of the last year.'²¹⁶ As Vallandigham indicated, these statements merely highlighted the foolishness of attempting to undermine

²¹⁴ Quotation reprinted in *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier* (Bangor, Maine), 5 June 1868.

²¹⁵ 'Value of Detraction', *Perrysburg Journal*, 9 October 1868, and 'Lieutenant-General Grant', *New York World*, 11 April 1865.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Grant's republican reputation. They only aided the Republican depiction of Grant by showing that the nominee was able to win praise from the Democrats. Over time, though, the fears that the likes of Blair had stoked would take root, and threatened to strangle Grant's presidency.

The Model Republican

As per the American tradition, Grant made clear he would not campaign personally for the presidency.²¹⁷ Although many congressmen and many more American citizens pressed Grant in person, in writing, and in the press for his political opinions, the General kept to both tradition and the policy of the army and stayed silent. Grant had staunchly attested to his belief that the army should remain separate from politics – a position held since his education at West Point.²¹⁸ During Johnson's 'swing around the circle' Grant told a reporter that 'he did not 'consider the Army a place for a politician'', which the Mexican minister Matias Romero acknowledged, stating that 'the General ... holds the maxim that soldiers ought not mix themselves in politics.'²¹⁹ Grant had also previously informed a group of Republicans who visited him that as the Commanding General of the United States Army, '[i]t is not my business to go about the country making political speeches; but when it is in the line of my duty to express my opinion on Reconstruction, I shall do so freely, as I have done in the past.'²²⁰ As a republican and as Commanding General of the United States Army – with the possibility of retaining this position – he would not campaign for the presidency.²²¹

This compelled the Republicans to focus their campaign on Grant's character and nationalism, which they tied to their role in uniting the nation during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Grant's neutrality and the Republican losses in the 1867 elections allowed

²¹⁷ Ellis (ed.), *Speaking to the People*, p. 113.

²¹⁸ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, pp. 25, 62.

²¹⁹ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, p. 149. See also 'What Gen. Grant Said At Cincinnati', *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling, West Virginia), 21 September 1866.

²²⁰ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, p. 199.

²²¹ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, pp. 25, 62.

the General and his supporters to fight the canvass on their preferred terrain.²²² Most Republicans embraced Grant's republican lead and used it to focus on the meaning of the Civil War and the importance of loyalty to the Union. The Democrats decision to run on a platform that promised to turn back the clock to 1865 made the Republicans' job that much easier.

Even though Grant remained aloof from the campaign in 1868, he played a central role for the first time in his career in shaping his own national image. For Grant's silence ensured his supporters focused on his past deeds rather than his future programme, and judged him on his reputation rather than on his policy. His supporters therefore used his military career and his humble upbringing to tell a story of a plain, simple man who – through his own efforts – had risen to great heights by fulfilling his duty to the United States. General Grant's words, letters, and military orders showed his patriotism, his sacrifice and his republican virtue. The portrayal of Grant in this election reflected the way he wished to be portrayed as he had communicated to Radical Republican Senators.²²³ To John Sherman he had sent his correspondence with General Sherman which detailed his desire to remain above the party fray and act for the national interest.²²⁴ His letters made implicit that he had acted out of republican duty.²²⁵ Patriotism and antipartisanship were his guides: his election was for the nation, not the party.²²⁶ The image of General Grant in 1868 was the image of Grant the man, derived from his own words, his own actions and his own beliefs, but packaged and reproduced for a mass audience.

The Republican campaign did not simply focus on presenting an image of Grant but on countering Democratic claims which meant portraying the nominee as a man marked by

²²² Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle*, pp. 268-277.

²²³ John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 18, pp.292-295.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

republican self-restraint. Republicans delved into Grant's past to present to the nation a picture of a model republican. As in combat, the Democrats would attack and the Republicans would repel the allegations in a constant attempt to illustrate their candidate's suitability for the presidency. It was a war of attrition in which a man's character was the battlefield.

Take for instance the charge of insobriety. The potency of the allegation in American society is suggested in the vigor with which Grant's supporters refuted it. They countered the charge with examples of Grant's republican restraint. Those who had travelled with the army during the Civil War came to Grant's defence immediately, as did prominent temperance men, such as Republican Senator Henry Wilson and the President of the National Temperance Society, who both gave testimony to uphold Grant's reputation as a sober man.²²⁷ Former Pennsylvania Governor John W. Geary told an audience that he 'never knew [Grant] to touch spirits of any kind' and stated that he thought 'there is no man who has been more ungenerously treated on that subject during the last few months than Grant.'²²⁸ A Pennsylvanian woman, who was associated with the Sanitary Commission, told several stories that attested to Grant's temperance, including one that recounted an occasion when a doctor prescribed alcohol and the General refused to take the medicine telling his wife that 'he will not die' but nor would he 'touch a drop upon any consideration'.²²⁹ The Reverend J. L Crane recounted his experience as a Colonel in 1861. Whilst marching, some soldiers had acquired liquor, and were well on their way towards getting themselves drunk.²³⁰ Grant stopped his regiment for a break and examined his soldiers' canteens before ridding them of their

²²⁷ 'The "Last Card"', *The Highland Weekly News* (Hillsborough, Highland County, Ohio), 29 October 1868.

²²⁸ 'Governor Geary's Opinion of General Grant', *Daily Cleveland Herald* (Cleveland, Ohio), 1 June 1868.

²²⁹ 'Anecdotes of General Grant—His Habits', *The Union and Dakotian* (Yankton, South Dakota), 16 May 1868.

²³⁰ 'Recollections of Grant', *Vermont Watchmen and State Journal* (Montpelier, Vermont), 1 July 1868.

alcohol.²³¹ He then ‘had the offenders tied behind the baggage wagons till they had sobered into soldierly propriety.’²³² The soldiers were taught ‘no whiskey nor intoxicating beverages were allowed in his camp.’²³³ However, the most influential and reprinted defence of Grant came from Admiral Horace Porter. A pro-Grant newspaper – *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* – received a letter which detailed a conversation between a merchant and Porter.²³⁴ The merchant had commented that ‘we must elect Grant, especially in view of the new revolution now threatened by the rebels and their sympathizers; but what a pity that the General drinks!’²³⁵ Porter proceeded to describe his long acquaintance with Grant and denounced the accusation as ‘a falsehood’ with the statement ‘that, during the whole period of my acquaintance with him, I have never known him to taste, nor have I ever heard of his touching intoxicating liquors of any kind, not even wine.’²³⁶ The claim of alcoholism was also decried by General Daniel Sickles as ‘but one of the thousand slanders daily reiterated against [Grant].’²³⁷

But refuting charges of drunkenness were just one part of the pro-Grant campaign. The Republicans reprinted and distributed copies of Grant’s letters and military orders to prove Grant’s republicanism and his commitment to the prosperity of the nation.²³⁸ Grant’s own words illustrated not only his character but what could be expected of him if he were to become president. Military men – such as George Washington – could seem desirable as political leaders because of their selfless patriotism.²³⁹ The nation’s history tended to indicate the electorate’s preference for military heroes, with George Washington, Andrew Jackson,

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ ‘Admiral Porter on General Grant’, *Lowell Daily Citizen and News* (Lowell, Massachusetts), 25 August 1868.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ ‘General Sickles on Grant’, *Lowell Daily Citizen and News* (Lowell, Massachusetts), 2 October 1868.

²³⁸ Summers, *Party Games*, p. 36.

²³⁹ Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 2001), p. 10.

William Henry Harrison and Zachary Taylor all using their martial backgrounds as a springboard to office.²⁴⁰ Although Harrison and Taylor died during their first terms in office, both Washington and Jackson had served two terms and remained popular in the 1860s.

Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin have noted that ‘military heroism and sacrifice [offered] a sounder basis of patriotism and republican virtue’ than the partisan environment in which career politicians operated.²⁴¹

This preference made the spread of General Grant’s letters, military orders and personal history of the Civil War extremely important. For as the Democratic campaign showed, military leadership was a double-edged sword. If on the one hand it conveyed republican selflessness, on the other it gave the potential president immense power, which enabled critics to compare Grant in 1868 to military vanquishers of republics like the Bonapartes. How the story of Grant’s military service was told therefore mattered a lot. And in the Republican canvass Grant’s writings were used to show wisdom, respectful leadership, and patriotism. In many respects, Grant’s campaign biographers followed a form which had been established by many other writers, but crucially, Republican authors in 1868 relied on ‘adherence to truth and didactic purpose’ to elevate their works above the arena of ‘petty politicking’.²⁴² Biographies formed a standard but important part of election campaigns in the nineteenth century.²⁴³ But though these works followed a ‘formula’ they also had to rely solely on the subject at hand in order to somehow persuade their readers that their works were absent of political purpose.²⁴⁴ Perhaps what is most interesting about Grant’s biographies was that his biographers, believing they had rich material, did not feel the need to obscure any

²⁴⁰ There are a few exceptions as not every military man nominated became president, but the fact that they received the nomination, often on controversial platforms, indicates how politicians often tried to sell the electorate partisan politics with antipartisan men. An example here is the Democratic nomination in 1864, which went to General George B. McClellan, even though he disagreed with the party’s platform.

²⁴¹ Altschuler and Blumin, *Rude Republic*, p. 10.

²⁴² Casper, *Constructing American Lives*, pp. 95-96.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

area of Grant's life: they did not have to create the illusion of antipartisanship. In stark contrast stood biographies of the Democratic candidates, especially Seymour's which glossed over his early life (often covered in a couple of pages) and focused on his political career.²⁴⁵ While Republican biographers sought to illustrate Grant's antipartisanship, Seymour's were keen to stress his partisanship, especially his loyalty to Democratic ideals. As a result, the biographies of each candidate reflected their party platforms.

In line with familiar American campaign strategies, numerous biographies were commissioned by the Republican Party, as well as newspapers, which detailed Grant's early life and Civil War career.²⁴⁶ The works were often written by journalists, such as Charles A. Dana of the *New York Sun* (as a former special investigative agent of the War Department, Dana was charged with discerning the truth in rumours of Grant's alcoholism and reported their groundless basis to his superiors) and Albert D. Richardson of the *New York Tribune*, but also by historians, such as John S. C. Abbott (the admirer of the Napoleons).²⁴⁷ The biographers all told a similar story of Grant's record during the Civil War – and sought to explain away incidents which had reflected badly upon their hero. Their descriptions of character and stories of dedication were quoted widely in the Republican press.²⁴⁸

The Republicans endeavoured to show Grant's dedication to the public good through drawing on his past deeds. They highlighted incidents which indicated the qualities necessary to govern the country effectively. These included Grant's good judgement, his economy and

²⁴⁵ For 1868 Democratic biographies of Seymour, see James D. McCabe Jr., *The Life and Public Services of Horatio Seymour: Together With a Complete and Authentic Life of Francis P. Blair* (New York, 1868); George W. Allen, *Seymour: His Past and Present Position* (Washington D.C., 1868); and *The War Record of Horatio Seymour and Pennsylvania's Share of the Public Debt* (Philadelphia, 1868).

²⁴⁶ Casper, *Constructing American Lives*, pp. 88-106.

²⁴⁷ Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union*, pp. 214-215, 229-230.

²⁴⁸ 'Grant's Personal Character', *The Highland Weekly News* (Hillsborough, Highland County, Ohio), 18 June 1868; 'Grant in the Mexican War—A Leap For Life', *The Emporia News* (Emporia, Kansas), 9 October 1868; 'Grant Analyzed', *Nebraska Advertiser*, 28 May 1868; and *White Cloud Kansas Chief* (White Cloud, Kansas), 24 September 1868.

purging of corruption from the army, and his selflessness.²⁴⁹ All these qualities demonstrated how greatly Grant differed from his predecessor: a contrast Republicans understandably were eager to stress.²⁵⁰ They illustrated how differently Grant understood executive power and how he could be trusted in power.²⁵¹ Grant's life, the biographers argued, proved his claim to republican purity was valid.²⁵² Contrary to the claims of Blair and other Democrats, he would not lead the country down the road to tyranny.

The Republicans, in an effort to counter Democratic charges, highlighted two events, in particular, which portrayed Grant as a model republican. These examples indicated his selfless devotion to the nation: a vital quality in the chief executive. The first example was his return to the army. Grant volunteered his services a few days after the Confederate firing upon Fort Sumter in April 1861. Despite this he struggled to gain a fitting position in the army, though he eventually received some unexpected help from his Congressman Elihu B. Washburne. Expressing his gratitude, he wrote to Washburne (in words reminiscent of Washington): 'I left the Army, expecting never to return. I am no seeker for position, but the country, which educated me, is in sore peril, and, as a man of honor, I feel bound to offer my services for whatever they are worth.'²⁵³ In highlighting this quotation, the Republicans implied Grant's Cincinnatus-like qualities: he was a warrior drawn from civilian life to save

²⁴⁹ For Grant's good judgement, see 'The Story of Donelson', *Delaware Gazette* (Delaware, Ohio), 2 October 1868; "'Now's the Time to Drive Them,'" *Belmont Chronicle* (St. Clairsville, Ohio), 22 October 1868; and 'Grant as a Strategist', *The Vermont Transcript* (St. Albans, Vermont), 14 August 1868. For his economy, see 'Grant's Economy', *The Emporia News* (Emporia, Kansas), 4 September 1868; 'Congress and Proceedings', *The Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), 23 July 1868. For his efforts to rid the army of corruption, see 'Gen. Grant and Cotton Speculators', *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, 2 September 1868. For his selflessness, see 'Grant in the Mexican War—A Leap For Life', *The Emporia News* (Emporia, Kansas), 9 October 1868; and 'Grant – Colfax', *The Jeffersonian* (Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania), 4 June 1868.

²⁵⁰ See 'Congress and Proceedings', *The Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), 23 July 1868; and 'Grant's Way of Expressing Great Truths', *The Jeffersonian* (Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania), 30 July 1868.

²⁵¹ 'General Grant', *Marshall County Republican*, 16 July 1868; 'U. S. Grant', *Perrysburg Journal* (Perrysburg, Wood County, Ohio), 7 August 1868; and 'Grant's Way of Expressing Great Truths', *The Jeffersonian* (Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania), 30 July 1868.

²⁵² See Albert D. Richardson, *Personal History of Ulysses S. Grant* (Hartford, 1868), pp. vi-vii. See also 'Personal History of U. S. Grant', *Raftsmen's Journal*, 8 July 1868; and 'U. S. Grant', *Perrysburg Journal* (Perrysburg, Wood County, Ohio), 7 August 1868.

²⁵³ *Speeches of General U.S. Grant*, p. 3.

the nation from peril before returning to his farm. Though not a direct comparison, it illustrated the republican qualities desired during Reconstruction including a commitment to the public good over personal interests. The second incident reinforced this: it concerned his demotion by his commander General Halleck in 1862 after Grant's capture of Fort Donelson and promotion to Major General. Grant – eager to continue Union successes – had visited Nashville and lost contact with his commander.²⁵⁴ Angry at his own lack of promotion, Halleck complained to his superior General George B. McClellan that Grant had not responded to inquiries on troop numbers and movements.²⁵⁵ Grant protested that he had provided Halleck with this information.²⁵⁶ Lacking the information due to a rogue telegram operator, the disgruntled Halleck sent several messages to Grant, and eventually demoted him for deserting his command.²⁵⁷ Aghast, Grant responded 'I have done my very best ... to carry out the interests of the service. If my course is not satisfactory, remove me at once. I do not wish in any way to impede the success of our arms.'²⁵⁸ Fortunately officials at Washington had been alerted of the situation, and Halleck rushed to rectify the situation.²⁵⁹ Both instances were used to indicate Grant's readiness to place the national interest ahead of his own ambition.

Grant's biographers attested to his desire for fairness, justice and 'republican simplicity'.²⁶⁰ These qualities were shown in how he shared the hardships of his troops. An oft recounted story described the situation before the second day of battle at Shiloh in 1862. Grant gave orders to his commanders before 'he lay down on the ground, with a stump for a pillow, and without shelter from the storm that raged, slept until the dawn called him again to unremitting

²⁵⁴ Smith, *Grant*, p. 172.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 172-178; and Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p. 121.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, pp. 121-122.

²⁵⁸ Crafts, *Life of U.S. Grant*, p. 44.

²⁵⁹ Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, pp. 124-125.

²⁶⁰ Crafts, *Life of U.S. Grant*, p. 105.

labor.²⁶¹ The care that Grant showed for himself during the Civil War was minimal and endeared him to his troops. Washburne told of another incident, which also appeared in several biographies, about Grant's participation in the diversion at Haines' Bluff in 1863. 'His entire baggage for six days was a tooth-brush', Washburne recalled. Grant, he explained, had 'fared like the commonest soldier in his command, partaking of his rations, and sleeping upon the ground with no covering but the canopy of heaven.'²⁶² These stories illustrated Grant's humility and self-restraint: even as a commander he was content to share the fate of his soldiers.²⁶³ This was no aggrandising dictator.

Perhaps in part as a riposte to Grant's expulsion of the Jews, justice formed another key issue in the election campaign. A popular story during the canvass described Grant's troops' first journey home after the Mississippi river opened to trade.²⁶⁴ Grant discovered the captain of a boat had greatly overcharged his troops.²⁶⁵ Once informed of this circumstance, he refused to allow the vessel to disembark until the captain had reimbursed his soldiers and officers the five to seven dollars they had overpaid.²⁶⁶ His staff reported his statement: 'I will teach these fellows, that the men who have perilled [*sic*] their lives to open the Mississippi for their benefit cannot be imposed upon with impunity.'²⁶⁷ Another incident also illustrated this dedication to justice. Grant received news from Union troops that the Confederates were executing African-American soldiers and their white officers in 1863. In response he wrote to Confederate General Richard Taylor, who commanded troops in Louisiana, whom he reminded that '[t]he government, and all officers under the government are bound to give the same protection to these troops that they do to any other troops.'²⁶⁸ This example reinforced

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁶² Abbott, *The Life of General Ulysses S. Grant*, p. 115.

²⁶³ *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 6 January 1868.

²⁶⁴ Crafts, *Life of U.S. Grant*, pp. 129-130.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ J. T. Headley, *The Life of Ulysses S. Grant: General-in-Chief USA* (USA, 1868), p. 233.

²⁶⁷ Crafts, *Life of U.S. Grant*, p. 130.

²⁶⁸ Abbott, *The Life of General Ulysses S. Grant*, p. 158.

Grant's statement in his acceptance letter that he would protect all citizens of the United States and uphold their rights. It also helped to dispel uncertainties regarding General Order No.11, and sought to assure Radical Republicans that Grant was committed to African-American equality, while equating that equality with patriotic military service. Grant also made it clear that if this was Confederate policy towards African-American troops, then in the interests of fair treatment, he would deny quarter to all Confederate troops.²⁶⁹ Grant's actions in this case showed that, regardless of colour, he would uphold and protect the rights of his soldiers who endeavoured to win the Civil War.

The Republicans were also eager to attest to Grant's magnanimous self-restraint, not least as they saw this as a way to entice the votes of the white Southern electorate. In an effort to portray this type of restraint, they reprinted Grant's message to troops on assuming command of the Army of the Tennessee in February 1862.²⁷⁰ Speaking directly to his troops, Grant proclaimed:

Let us show to our fellow-citizens of these States that we come merely to crush out this rebellion, and restore them to peace and the benefits of the Constitution and the Union, of which they have been deprived by selfish and unprincipled leaders. *They have been told that we come to oppress and plunder. By our acts we will undeceive them. We will prove to them that we come to restore, not violate, the Constitution and the laws. In restoring to them the glorious flag of the Union, we will assure them that they shall enjoy under its folds the same protection of life and property as in former days.*²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ *Speeches of General U.S. Grant*, p. 5.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

The message illustrated Grant's magnanimity and statesman-like qualities, and indicated he was a national candidate who desired peace and prosperity on both the battlefield and in the halls of power. To further stress this aspect of Grant's character, numerous newspapers reminded their readers of Grant's gracious behaviour at Appomattox Court House (where he ended the Civil War), when he allowed the enemy to keep their horses as they would need them for the spring sowing.²⁷² Pro-Grant newspapers repeated this incident in an effort to convince the white South that not only was Grant above partisan concerns but that he was self-restrained in victory.²⁷³ Once more fears he would be a vindictive tyrant were allayed by pointing to moments where he had near absolute power, but chose not to wield it capriciously.

Republicans also sought to answer doubts about Grant's capacity for office. For material they referred to both Grant's military career as well as his duties after the war. To reinforce Grant's republican credentials they contrasted his use of power with Johnson's. In particular, they sought to hold up the purity of Grant against the corruption of Johnson. In the nineteenth century, corruption encompassed 'misuse of power' or 'the social, economic, and moral changes that could undermine the basis of republican society.'²⁷⁴ This could entail anything from the abuse of patronage to the enlargement of the United States' debt.²⁷⁵ 'Honest graft,' in the form of government employees using their positions to supplement their income through a variety of illegal or extralegal means' was nevertheless 'the norm', and provoked

²⁷² For praise of Grant at Appomattox Court House, see 'That Radical Howl', *Public Ledger* (Memphis, Tennessee), 25 July 1868; 'Speech of Hon. Ellison S. Keitt', *The Newberry Herald* (Newberry, South Carolina), 14 October 1868; 'Our System of Government', *Wyoming Democrat* (Wyoming County, Pennsylvania), 30 September 1868; and *Sunbury American* (Sunbury, Pennsylvania), 24 October 1868. Also significant in courting Southerners was the speech of General Curtis H. Brogden, a Democrat who turned Republican in 1867. See 'Speech of Gen. Curtis H. Brogden', *The Weekly North-Carolina Standard*, 16 September 1868.

²⁷³ For examples of this tendency, see 'The Difference', *The Union Flag* (Jonesborough, Tennessee), 3 July 1868; *Lancaster Gazette* (Lancaster, Ohio), 18 June 1868; 'Grant and Butler', *Nashville Union and Dispatch*, 22 August 1868; and *The Emporia News* (Emporia, Kansas), 11 September 1868.

²⁷⁴ Smith, *The Enemy Within*, p. 2 and Watson, *Liberty and Power*, p. 46.

²⁷⁵ Smith, *The Enemy Within*, p. 3.

great concern.²⁷⁶ Republicans therefore emphasised instances when Grant vigorously fought corruption in the army. In 1862 Grant had written to the Quartermaster of the Department of Missouri that ‘*[e]xtravagance seems to be the order of the day, and now I am investigating every Department, and all that is done here. I find that contracts are not given to the lowest bidders. I would recommend that Capt. Baxter, A. Q. M., now the purchasing Quartermaster here, be allowed to purchase in open market until the atmosphere is purified somewhat.*’²⁷⁷ Grant continued to explain that ‘*nearly twenty per cent can be saved to the Government by annulling present contracts, made without my knowledge, and adopting the purchasing system.*’²⁷⁸ Grant later stated to General Halleck that ‘*[a] law should be passed providing that ‘all fraudulent contractors be impressed into the ranks, or, still better, into the gunboat service, where they could have no chance of deserting.*’²⁷⁹ Biographers used this affair to indicate their candidate’s economy of administration and his fidelity to reducing the debt of the United States. Once more self-restraint was the key.

American voters tended to conflate high White House expenditures with partisan rulers. Campaign biographers therefore highlighted Grant’s economy during his tenure as *ad interim* Secretary of War and Commanding General of the United States Army where he reduced the expenses of government significantly.²⁸⁰ These examples were of great importance as finance formed one of the main campaign issues in the 1868 presidential election. A pro-Grant Wisconsin newspaper reported that Grant ‘saved millions to the Treasury’ while he was *ad interim* Secretary of War.²⁸¹ Grant’s actions in this respect built on his behaviour during the Civil War and earlier in his life. Republicans cited several instances of Grant’s economy during the Civil War, and during his time in St Louis, Missouri, in the 1850s whilst out of the

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *Speeches of General U.S. Grant*, p. 5.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *Wisconsin State Register* (Portage, Wisconsin), 3 October 1868.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

army. They cited Grant's frugality as a civilian in Missouri when he helped his father-in-law install a more efficient system of coal-fired heating in his house.²⁸² Analogies between domestic and national economy were not uncommon in mid-nineteenth century American politics – Lincoln famously compared the nation to a house – but here it helped connect Grant's thrifty personal character to his public administration.

The debt contracted from the war greatly concerned many citizens. The issue was highly divisive and both parties initially attempted to avoid it.²⁸³ However, in 1867, despite its controversy, the local Democratic Party in Ohio had run successfully on a platform which sought to reduce the debt.²⁸⁴ The Pendleton Plan (named after Senator George H. Pendleton) promised to repay the war bonds contracted by the federal government in greenbacks.²⁸⁵ But the Plan split the Democrats, with the party's wealthy New York backers opposed, and Pendleton failed to secure the Democratic presidential nomination.²⁸⁶ Yet despite Seymour's nomination, Pendleton's plan was still included in the Democratic platform.²⁸⁷ This brought the issues of finance, taxation and debt to the forefront of the campaign. The fragile state of the economy remained a concern in a country unused to such high indebtedness, and this only increased the desirability of a candidate who had a history of economy. It was hardly surprising then that campaign biographers would make so much of Grant's frugal ways. Both the Republicans and Grant made clear that repudiation was not acceptable: the debt and the bonds issued to fund the Civil War would be paid in gold as a matter of honour regardless of the economic situation of the country.²⁸⁸ This commitment would later cause great problems within the Republican Party and federal government, but as the Republicans had highlighted,

²⁸² Dana, and Wilson, *The Life of Ulysses S. Grant*, p. 38.

²⁸³ Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, pp. 207, 212.

²⁸⁴ Chester McA. Destler, 'The Origin and Character of the Pendleton Plan', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 24.2 (September 1937), pp. 174-175.

²⁸⁵ Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p.212.

²⁸⁶ Destler, 'The Origin and Character of the Pendleton Plan', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, pp. 175-182

²⁸⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 177-178.

²⁸⁸ Ely, Burnham and Bartlett, *Proceedings of the National Union Republic Convention*, p. 84.

Grant was not a man to change course when he believed he was pursuing the right action.²⁸⁹

The antipartisan, tenacious man whom they had championed could not be controlled for political purposes when circumstances suited a change in direction for the Republican Party.

Nowhere was this antipartisanship better represented than Grant's role in Johnson's power battles with Congress. Biographers highlighted how Grant's staunch antiparty conception of politics and his adherence to the law helped foil Johnson's attempts to relax enforcement of the Reconstruction Acts. After Johnson dismissed Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, General Grant agreed to act as *ad interim* Secretary to protect Southern Reconstruction from the President's politicking.²⁹⁰ Grant accepted this role despite the compromised position in which it placed him; many political commentators – especially Radical Republicans – interpreted it as support for Johnson's actions and policies.²⁹¹ During the last days of Johnson's presidency, Grant's supporters leaked many of his letters to the press, which were widely reprinted during the 1868 campaign, to indicate why he had reluctantly agreed to serve.²⁹² In one of these missives Grant contrasted 'the expressed wish of the country' to the decision of the President to remove a general from command.²⁹³ 'This is a republic,' Grant claimed, 'where the will of the people is the law of the land. I beg that their voice may be heard.'²⁹⁴ The correspondence

²⁸⁹ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, pp. 239-241.

²⁹⁰ Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, pp. 191-193.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

²⁹² For some of the Stanton letters which objected to his suspension, see 'Washington', *New York Tribune*, 13 August 1867; and 'Washington', *New York Tribune*, 30 August 1867. For commentary see 'Washington', *New York Tribune*, 14 August 1867; and 'General Grant, Mr Stanton, and the President', *The Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), 23 August 1867. For the Sheridan letter, see 'The Johnson-Grant Correspondence', *Evening Star* (Washington D.C.), 26 August 1867. See also 'Washington Specials', *Wheeling Daily Intelligence* (Wheeling, West Virginia), 23 August 1867. For commentary on the Sheridan letter, see 'The Grant Correspondence', *The Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), 24 August 1867; and also 'Sheridan Removed', *Delaware Gazette* (Delaware, Ohio), 23 August 1867. For the Stanton letters given to Congress, see 'The Cabinet Correspondence', *The Wilmington Journal* (Wilmington, North Carolina), 21 February 1868; and 'Congressional', *Public Ledger* (Memphis, Tennessee), 5 February 1868. For commentary on these letters see 'The Letters', *The Evening Argus* (Rock Island, Illinois), 11 February 1868; 'Grant and the President' and 'President Johnson and Gen'l Grant', *Staunton Spectator* (Staunton, Virginia), 11 February 1868; and 'Grant and The Will of the People', *Public Ledger* (Memphis, Tennessee), 5 February 1868.

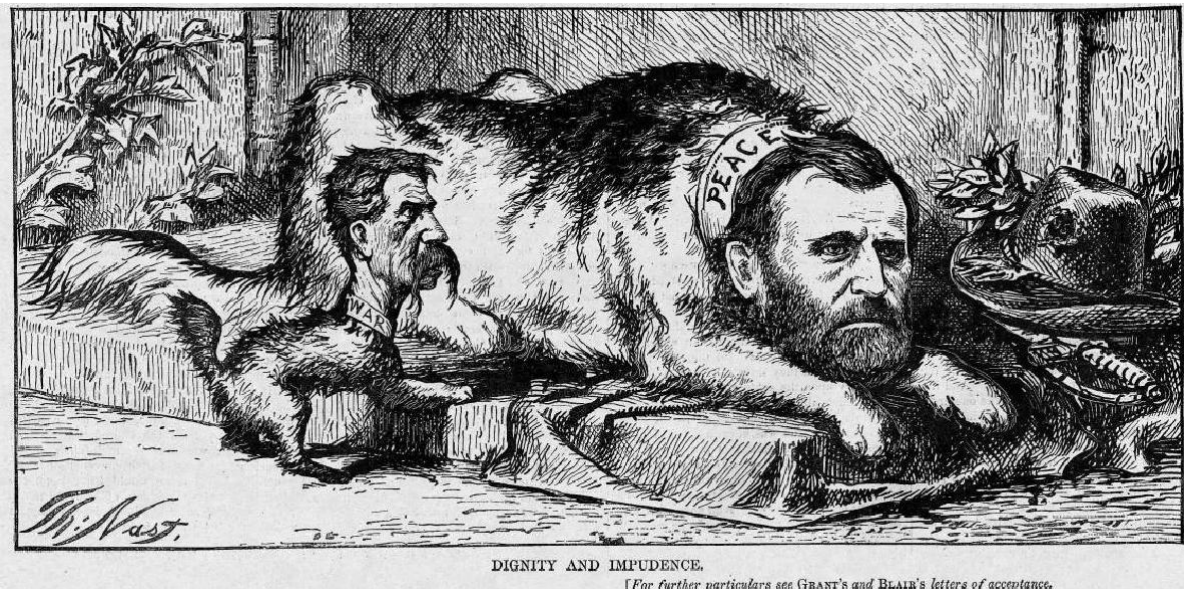
²⁹³ Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, pp. 208-209, and Crafts, *Life of U.S. Grant*, p. 145.

²⁹⁴ Crafts, *Life of U.S. Grant*, p. 145.

once more contrasted Johnson and Grant, but this time pitted a selfish politician against a man who respected the popular will.

The silent man – named for his refusal to give speeches or express his political opinions – demonstrated his strong opinions on the use of power in these battles over Reconstruction with Johnson. Such episodes were grist for the mill of campaign biographers whose job was to sell their nominee and counter Democratic narratives about a drunk despot. Yet Grant’s refusal to make public speeches, while encouraging his supporters to look to his past, also presented a challenge. The stance intrigued journalists who both denigrated him (the *Daily National Intelligencer* called him a ‘speechless sphynx’ and ‘a silent, stubborn man’) and lauded him for his dignity.²⁹⁵ The *Harper’s Weekly* artist and loyal Republican, Thomas Nast, addressed this point in a cartoon (see Figure 1.1) shortly before polling commenced.²⁹⁶

Figure 1.1 ‘Dignity and Imprudence’



Source: Thomas Nast, ‘Dignity and Imprudence’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 24 October 1868.

²⁹⁵ For *Daily National Intelligencer* quotation, see ‘Large losses of voters to the Grant ticket’, *Daily National Intelligencer*, 29 July 1868. For the cartoon, see Thomas Nast, ‘Dignity and Imprudence’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 24 October 1868.

²⁹⁶ Thomas Nast, ‘Dignity and Imprudence’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 24 October 1868.

Grant's silence indicated a statesmanship which many orators and journalists praised. His stance contrasted sharply with Blair's revolutionary and undignified statements.²⁹⁷ Nast praised Grant's dignified and statesman-like behaviour, while many Republican newspapers expressed their preference for gracious silence over the 'yappy' Democratic ticket.²⁹⁸ Yet as we have seen, some Democratic newspapers – and Blair himself – used Grant's silence to their advantage, by claiming his tight-lipped stance hid authoritarian sympathies. Nast addressed the claims that Grant would become a dictator through this drawing; Grant's representation as a relaxed and benign German Shepherd – with his sword to the side under his laurel-decorated hat – emphasised his guardianship of the nation in the time of war and indicated that he now intended to guard the nation against the outbreak of a similar conflagration. Blair in comparison – depicted as a young agile terrier with the collar 'War' – was attempting to rouse the disinterested old warrior, and looked far more ready for a fight than the sad, tired dog content to repose in peace. Grant – who knew war – was ready to lay aside his sword and bring harmony to the country, and his silence – which was here read as an asset – indicated this. In some ways, indeed, it was a logical extension of Grant's own take on party political culture. If politicians were a self-serving lot, who in pursuing selfish interests undermined the public good, then the less they said the better.

Grant had always been a man of few words but the words he used conveyed his thoughts perfectly. Grant's orders during the Civil War were noted for this tendency: they were brief but concise. Grant, it was said, never left a man in doubt over his intentions. Where Grant differed from previous presidential election nominees – notably his two predecessors, Johnson and Lincoln – was his reticence before his nomination to give speeches offering his

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ 'Gen. Grant's Way', *Nebraska Advertiser*, 6 August 1868; *Evening Star* (Washington D.C.), 9 April 1868; and 'The Rebel Yell', *Delaware Gazette* (Delaware, Ohio), 21 August 1868. For Democratic testimony of this preference and the merits, begrudgingly accepted, of Grant's silence, see 'Incredible Audacity', *The New Orleans Crescent*, 1 November 1868; and 'The Radical Penitentiary Steal', *The Evening Argus* (Rock Island, Illinois), 11 May 1868.

beliefs and preferred policies; there was no Cooper Union address for Republicans to fall back on. The nation – as journalists and biographers noted – had in the previous seven years become used to pithy speeches and long declarations of policies and beliefs from their candidates. For Radical Republicans and former slaves, who would have been reassured to know more about Grant’s own beliefs, his silence was hardly satisfactory.²⁹⁹ But Grant’s stance indicated that his conception of the presidency differed from career politicians’ understanding of the office. Blaming partisan political culture for many of the nation’s travails over the past ten years, he sought to purify the presidency, and from his acceptance letter to the stories his biographers told about him, he was presented to the electorate as a man of true probity: a pure and simple republican.

Conclusion

The General received news of the election results at Washburne’s house in Galena, Illinois.³⁰⁰ Grant trounced Seymour in the electoral college by winning 214 electoral votes to his rival’s 80 votes.³⁰¹ The Republicans carried 26 states including several Southern states such as Alabama, North and South Carolina, and Tennessee.³⁰² In comparison, the Democrats only won eight states including Louisiana, Georgia and Kentucky.³⁰³ The states of Mississippi, Texas and Virginia were unable to vote as they remained unreconstructed. Yet the popular vote was much closer: Grant achieved 52.7 percent whilst Seymour gained 47.3 percent.³⁰⁴ The Republican majorities in many Southern states were very low. Grant won by under 20,000 votes in some states and by as few as 4,000 votes in Alabama.³⁰⁵ African-American votes – despite the prevalence of violence by the white supremacist Ku Klux Klan – proved

²⁹⁹ *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 18 August 1868.

³⁰⁰ Adam Badeau, *Grant in Peace. From Appomattox to Mount McGregor* (Hartford, 1887), p. 149.

³⁰¹ Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union*, p. 423.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 343.

³⁰⁵ Xi Wang, *The Trial of Democracy: Black Suffrage and Northern Republicans, 1860-1910* (Atlanta, 1997), p. 41.

decisive in several of the Southern states: black men cast 400,000 votes in the South giving Grant an overall majority of 300,000 votes.³⁰⁶ Historians have understandably looked at the 1868 race from the perspective of the South, where former slaves cast ballots for the first time, but elsewhere, in a highly partisan election, support for antipartisanship may have swung the balance in Grant's favour. Certainly Republicans saw this as a great asset to the Grant candidacy.

The 1868 presidential election illustrated the continuing importance of republicanism in the late 1860s. It showed that the concept was not merely rhetoric but had a much greater significance within American politics and society in the Reconstruction era. Both parties focused on different aspects of the concept throughout the election, while also trying to work through how the implications of the upheavals of the previous three years had shaped the electorate's expectations of the presidency. The Democrats focused on the necessity of vigilance against tyranny, seeing the actions of Congress as despotic and warning that Grant would merely extend the reign of unrepublican misrule. They used republican anxieties over tyranny and drunkenness to caution voters about the supposed dangers of the Republican candidate. Although often considered a campaign tactic, concerns about despotism were genuine in a politically fragile nation still recovering from the Civil War, and would haunt Grant long after 1868. The Republicans in response drew on republican tropes to illustrate how their candidate would not plunge the country into darkness but rather had the personal qualities to act for the universal prosperity of the nation. A significant part of the campaign revolved around which Grant was more plausible: the unrepublican tyrant or the patriot and self-restrained war hero? Enough votes ended up opting for the latter to put him into power.

A statement repeated throughout the campaign claimed that Grant had earned the Republican nomination 'not because he was a politician, but because he was not a politician; and he is

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42. See also Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p. 131; and Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 342-343.

trusted now because it is believed he will not seek mere party ends but the country's highest good.³⁰⁷ This encapsulated his own ideas of what a president should be rather well. In 1868, partisan Republicans found Grant's hostility to party politics a useful route to office, but they would be less pleased when he started to put these ideas into practice.

³⁰⁷ 'The Presidential Election', *The Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review*, 1 November 1868.

The One Term Principle: A Battle over Presidential Power

It came as a surprise to many Republicans in March 1869 that the republican simplicity of General Ulysses S. Grant, which they had championed during the 1868 presidential election, had more than a semblance of truth. The battles over presidential power – which came to dominate the presidency of Andrew Johnson – were seemingly over. They thought that despite their failure to convict Johnson on impeachment charges, Congress had won, and the new president would acquiesce to their will.¹ Republican congressmen believed that the period of a strong, independent presidency had come to an end, and that they would exercise control over the executive during Grant's presidency.² The General's acceptance letter to the Republican convention in 1868 had indicated he perceived his role as 'a purely Administrative officer' who would accede to the will of the people.³ Congress, most congressional Republicans believed, was the representative of the people.⁴ It followed, then, that loyal Republican politicians would be given a share in distributing Grant's spoils and dictating his policies. Yet, in March 1869, when Grant revealed his cabinet appointments, Republican congressmen were severely disappointed to find the antipartisan general they had sold to the electorate the previous November had become an antipartisan president.

Republican congressmen had expected places within Grant's cabinet in order to shape his administration both inside and outside the White House.⁵ At the very least they expected to

¹ Bergeron, *Andrew Johnson's Civil War and Reconstruction*, pp. 145-146.

² Milkis and Nelson (eds.), *The American Presidency*, pp. 174-179.

³ Ely, Burnham, and Bartlett, *Proceedings of the National Republican Convention*, p. 141. For the original draft, see John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 18, pp. 263-265.

⁴ Urofsky (ed.), *American Presidents*, pp. 206-209.

⁵ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, p. 281. See also University of Sheffield Library: Charles Sumner MSS, Western Bank Library Wolfson Microfilm 509, Series 2, Reel 82, Charles Sumner to a friend, 29 December 1868; and Joseph Schafer (ed.), *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz 1848-1869* (Madison, 1928), p. 475. In secondary literature, see Ari Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils: A History of the Civil Service Reform Movement, 1865-1883* (Urbana, 1961), p. 60.

be consulted on his choices.⁶ As the people's representatives, they believed they had a right to guide and direct the President in his endeavours.⁷ Yet Grant chose few congressmen for appointments, preferring instead former politicians, businessmen and military figures.⁸ Grant's refusal to consult the party outraged many Republicans who saw the shadow of Johnson's intransigence in the President's independence.⁹ The legal and political restraints they had placed on the White House over the preceding years seemed in danger of slackening.¹⁰ Republicans dissatisfied with aspects of Grant's course looked to retighten the shackles.

The new president's independence from the familiar machinery of party politics led to a rift between the executive and legislative branches in his first term. Historians who hold the Grant administration in low esteem often blame this on his incompetence or his desire to reward his friends.¹¹ However, reviewed in light of the literature on the enduring strength of antipartyism in U.S. politics, Grant's presidency appears as an attempt to change the way politics was practiced. This vision inevitably placed the President on a collision course with Republican congressmen as Grant's republican conception of the executive office chafed with the congressional desire to rein in the President. Congressional critics of Grant avowed that the President should be subject to their direction.¹² In Grant's contempt for politics as usual and his autonomy from the legislative branch they saw a familiar trend towards tyranny: Grant's predecessor had attempted to use his patronage to build a new party which

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Urofsky (ed), *American Presidents*, pp. 206-209.

⁸ Smith, *Grant*, pp. 468-472.

⁹ Schafer (ed.), *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz 1848-1869*, p. 475. See also Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils*, p. 60. See also John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 19: July 1 1868-October 31 1869 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1991), pp. 129-131.

¹⁰ Milkis and Nelson (eds.), *The American Presidency*, pp. 174-177. See also Summers, *A Dangerous Stir*, p. 173, and Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils*, p. 32.

¹¹ See Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*, pp. 120-121, and Hesselstine, *Ulysses S. Grant*, pp. 145-156.

¹² Urofsky (ed.), *American Presidents*, p. 209. See also Schafer (ed.), *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz 1848-1869*, pp. 471-175.

would re-elect him president, and so too could the former general.¹³ The President's republican outlook, which needs to be understood as more than political naiveté or incompetence, could ironically seem like the harbinger of despotism.

The solution to this problem, many Republicans believed, lay in civil service reform.¹⁴

Historians have often seen civil service reform as a modernizing impulse originating in the desire to remove corruption from politics.¹⁵ Committed civil service reformers identified the potential savings to the nation by removing partisan interests from the nation's administration.¹⁶ Thus the cry for administrative independence was part of a wider post-war reform movement which sought to limit the partisan style of politics. However, historians have overlooked how concerns over presidential power specifically preoccupied congressmen in the early 1870s, and spurred their reform efforts. For Liberal Republicans, civil service reform was a method of reining in presidential power. But the most recent historian of the Liberal Republican movement, Andrew L. Slap, does not really consider the centrality of presidential power to his subjects' efforts to enact reform.¹⁷ Yet these men believed that only by reforming the methods through which the President chose his appointees could they guard against despotism.¹⁸ Admittedly, the proposals for reform were often wider-ranging. In contrast to the Johnson-era Tenure of Office Act, which controlled only the president, for example, the various civil service reform bills presented to Congress also sought to exert control over congressional representatives by curtailing their right to recommend men to office.¹⁹ However, as the people's representatives, many congressmen did not believe they

¹³ Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 265-267. See also 'General Grant', *New York Herald*, 12 November 1867 and 'General Grant', *New York Herald*, 19 November 1867.

¹⁴ Schafer (ed.), *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz 1848-1869*, pp. 471-175.

¹⁵ Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils*; Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*, pp. 92-95; and Summers, *The Era of Good Stealings*, p. 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-16.

¹⁷ Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*.

¹⁸ Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils*, pp. 70-75.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

needed controlling.²⁰ As a result, when the Civil Service commission appointed by the President reported to Congress in December 1871, its recommendations were rebuffed by Republican Senator Charles Sumner who announced that the only civil service measure worth discussing was a constitutional amendment limiting the president to a single term.²¹

The one term principle, as the amendment came to be known, sought to reform patronage appointments by preventing the re-election of a president. Sumner's idea revolved around the belief that presidents used their patronage to ensure re-election by appointing men who could be relied upon to support the president both personally and financially.²² This army of appointees, loyal only to the president, could then be relied upon to re-elect their commander-in-chief perhaps not just once, but two, three or more times.²³ The drastic increase in presidential powers that came with the war and Reconstruction made the executive increasingly susceptible to tyrannical actions; both Lincoln and Johnson had faced accusations of tyranny for attempting to direct the nation's affairs without consulting Congress, while as the previous chapter discussed, Democrats accused Grant of coveting imperial power before the 1868 presidential election.²⁴ It followed that banning the president's re-election would not only prevent despotism but lead to more responsible patronage appointments: Congress was seeking to reassert control over the wayward executive branch. The President's independence, by accumulating power in the executive, simultaneously made him a model antiparty republican and a potential despot.

Sumner's proposal failed to garner enough support to procure a vote from either house of Congress, but it proved extremely popular with those discontented with Grant's

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²¹ Charles Sumner, *Works of Charles Sumner* Volume XIV (Boston, 1883), p. 320.

²² *Ibid.*, and Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils*, pp. 50-53. For an examination of how deeply ingrained fears over the potential of a president to use patronage to build up a political base was, see William W. Freehling, *Road to Disunion, Volume 2: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (Oxford, 2008).

²³ Charles Sumner, *Republicanism vs. Grantism*, p. 5.

²⁴ Urofsky (ed.), *American Presidents*, p. 208, and Cunliffe, *American Presidents and the Presidency*, p. 130. See also Bergeron, *Andrew Johnson's Civil War and Reconstruction*, pp. 71, 74.

administration, especially a faction of the Republican Party which broke away and created a new party: the Liberal Republicans.²⁵ These renegade Republicans perceived the one term principle as an effective method of restraining executive power and supported it in the 1872 presidential election.²⁶ Their support for the principle emanated from their inability to control a president who seemed to be arrogating power to himself by manipulating antipartisan sentiment. Their concerns about unrepudican rule were heightened by the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871 – which enabled the President to bypass state authorities in prosecuting outrages by the Klan – and Grant’s doomed attempt to annex the Caribbean republic of Santo Domingo.²⁷ These principled dissenters worried that this unprecedented amount of power concentrated in the hands of one man could destroy the republic; executive power, they argued, needed constraints, and the one term principle became their weapon. Their republicanism led them to very different conclusions to Grant.

The Liberal Republicans illustrated that exaggerated fears over executive power continued to play a vital role in the perception of the President’s actions during Reconstruction, and the images of the President derived from these anxieties proved powerful in diminishing his political capital.²⁸ The image of an unrestrained, despotic President was used vigorously throughout the 1872 presidential election by the Liberal Republicans in an effort to persuade the electorate of the necessity of deposing the incumbent president. Grant’s attempt to redefine the presidency in a republican vein was misinterpreted by these congressional representatives who saw tyranny in his independence. Regardless of Grant’s support for

²⁵ One the rise of the Liberal Republicans, see Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 488-511 who gives an overview of what he terms ‘the rise of liberalism’. See also John G. Sproat, “*The Best Men*”: *Liberal Reformers in the Gilded Age* (New York and London, 1968), and Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*.

²⁶ Library of Congress: Carl Schurz MSS, Reel 8, Carl Schurz to E. L. Godkin, 23 June 1872 sent from Pittsburgh; Carl Schurz to Horace Greeley, 26 June 1872 sent from St. Louis, Missouri; and Horace Greeley to Carl Schurz, 8 July 1872 sent from New York. These letters indicate the basis upon which Schurz chose to support Greeley’s nomination, but the basis for others’ support can be seen in Schurz’s correspondence after the Liberal Republican Convention through the months of May, June and July 1872 on the same reel.

²⁷ Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*, pp. 113-115.

²⁸ Summers, *A Dangerous Stir*, pp. 201-222.

numerous Liberal Republican issues, such as specie resumption and the reform of the patronage appointments system, the President's reluctance to consult Congress renewed fears of executive aggrandisement increasingly apparent since the outbreak of the Civil War in April 1861.²⁹ The fears emphasise how the nature of Reconstruction and the ever expanding boundaries of executive power continued to cause concern for many Republicans, who, acting on their fears, proceeded to hinder the ability of the President to implement Reconstruction. Republican conceptions of power continued to define the presidency, both augmenting and subtracting power from the President.

The one term principle signifies a different conception of Grant's presidency to familiar depictions of a naive, incompetent, and weak President who conceded his powers to an emboldened Congress.³⁰ Instead it shows a strong executive, who, in exerting his independence, continued the battles over presidential power which had critically undermined his predecessor's administration.³¹ In examining the role of the one term principle in Grant's first administration and the 1872 presidential election, this chapter illustrates how the President's republican antipartisan independence from Congress ironically led to accusations of unrepublican despotism by influential members of his own party. The accusations, though

²⁹ Urofsky (ed.), *American Presidents*, pp. 208-209, and Cunliffe, *American Presidents and the Presidency*, p. 130. See also Bergeron, *Andrew Johnson's Civil War and Reconstruction*, pp. 71, 74.

³⁰ This is the way most historians of Grant's presidency depict the former general. Revisionist historians such as William B. Hesseltine and William S. McFeely have portrayed Grant as President in this way, see Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant*, and McFeely, *Grant*, pp. 288-304 (on his cabinet appointments). McFeely suggests that Grant's selections illustrated his belief that his name alone had elected him (p. 295). Yet neither has Grant fared well with post-revisionists, who still view him as a naive man in politics, especially in his political appointments. See Smith, *Grant*, pp. 468-478, and Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union*, pp. 429-434. For political scientists who believe Grant's presidency was weak, see Milkis and Nelson (eds.), *The American Presidency*, pp. 178-179.

³¹ Most historians and political scientists writing on Grant's presidency do not consider the one term principle important, most likely because they view Grant as a weak executive. Few historians have considered the topic, and those who have wrote very briefly on it. See for example Ari Hoogenboom in his book on civil service reform, and Hesseltine's account of Grant's presidency. Hoogenboom does not mention that Sumner introduced an amendment on the resolution, nor does he discuss the principle in great depth. See Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils*, pp. 100, 113-115; Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant*, pp. 256, 266. However, Hesseltine too, discusses the issue very briefly considering it of little consequence to Grant's presidency. It is evident that historians consider the amendment to be unimportant in the wider problems of Reconstruction and Grant's presidency. Studies of the presidency, especially by political scientists, also fail to discuss this principle, believing that Grant was a weak executive who did not need restraining. See Milkis and Nelson (eds.), *The American Presidency*, pp. 178-179. See also Cronin and Genovese, *The Paradoxes of the American Presidency*, pp. 93, 131.

as unsuccessful in undermining Grant's power in 1872 as similar Democratic charges had been four years earlier, would haunt him in his second term by fuelling genuine fears over the undefined limits of presidential power.

The Model Republican

The nomination of General Ulysses S. Grant as the Republican presidential candidate seemed to herald an end to the battles between the President and Congress. Yet despite 'the accession of a friend to the Executive Chair' the political infighting over presidential power continued unabated.³² Even before his inauguration, some within the party anticipated that Grant would follow Johnson's lead and abuse his power before long.³³ The Republican Party had promoted General Grant during the 1868 presidential election as the epitome of republican simplicity – he was said to embody the virtues of antipartisanship, sacrifice and honour – only to discover how close the representation reflected reality when Grant became president. Republicans – especially the Radicals – had believed that Grant's silence masked his true sentiments.³⁴ Many in the party – along with plenty of historians since – did not believe the republicanism of Grant; they were convinced Grant's stance was a clever election strategy.³⁵

The Republicans needed to look to history to predict Grant's path. The General's hero, the Mexican War victor President Zachary Taylor, provided a clue as to how Grant would act. A classical republican, like Grant, Taylor believed his election in 1848 rested on a broad coalition, which had come together on account of an antiparty election campaign by the

³² Allan Nevins, *Hamilton Fish: The Inner History of the Grant Administration* (New York, 1936), p. 313.

³³ University of Sheffield Library: Charles Sumner MSS, Western Bank Library Wolfson Microfilm 509, Series 2, Reel 82, Damon Y. Kilgore to Charles Sumner, 13 January 1869.

³⁴ Wendell Phillips, 'The "Perils of the Hour"'. *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 30 November 1867. See also Wendell Phillips, 'General Grant', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1 February 1868.

³⁵ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 208-217. For historians, see McFeely, *Grant*, pp. 270-273; Smith, *Grant*, pp. 468-473, 587-590; and Hesselstine, *Ulysses S. Grant*, pp. 102-103, 139-148.

Whigs.³⁶ In many ways the historical circumstances bore similarities, which Grant almost certainly noticed. Taylor, like Grant, had come to the presidency after leading the nation to victory in a divisive war, and with the divisions caused by the war very much still in evidence. Taylor had been presented to the electorate as a man of patriotism and honour and little else: the Whig platform that year was silent on the salient issues of the day as Grant would be in 1868.³⁷ And Taylor's hostility to partisan culture is hinted at in his claim to have never voted before 1848.³⁸ In power Taylor dispensed patronage equally between different political factions, and despite being one of the nation's richest slaveholders, appointed a significant number of antislavery men to his cabinet.³⁹ Taylor, like Grant, fervently believed that his duty lay in placing the public good above partisan interests.⁴⁰ Grant's history as an antiparty man can be seen in his correspondence during the war and in Johnson's presidency. He had already expressed his disgust for 'mere trading politicians' in an 1868 letter to General Sherman, to whom he explained how politicians subverted the public good to the detriment of the gains of the late Civil War.⁴¹ The phrase 'mere trading politicians' had been popular in pre-Civil War antiparty discourse, which suggested Grant's familiarity with the tradition.⁴² Heralded by Republican supporters as the purest incarnation of republicanism since Washington, Grant promised to be true to his word.

The first indication that Grant's antipartisan image was not simply rhetoric came in the form of his cabinet appointments. Grant's hostility to the spoils system is evident even before the Civil War. In 1859, he had written to his father regarding the position of County Engineer

³⁶ Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*, pp. 67-76.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73. See also Smith, *No Party Now*, pp. 19-20; and Voss-Hubbard, *Beyond Party*, pp. 40-47.

³⁸ Thomas G. Mitchell, *Antislavery Politics in Antebellum and Civil War America* (Westport, Connecticut, 2007), p. 40.

³⁹ Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*, pp. 70, 73-76. See also William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume 1: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (Oxford, 1990), p. 497.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-76.

⁴¹ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 18, pp. 292-293.

⁴² *Ibid.* For an examination of this antiparty discourse in the antebellum era, see Voss-Hubbard, *Beyond Party*, pp. 11, 14, 125, 176. The term 'wire-pulling' was another way of describing – often corrupt – machine politics.

which he had applied for and lost upon a vote.⁴³ Grant sought to clarify that, although the Democratic Commissioners had voted for him, he was not a Democrat.⁴⁴ In his letter, Grant explained that he only voted a straight Democratic ticket once.⁴⁵ ‘In all other elections,’ he claimed, ‘I have universally selected the candidates that in my estimation, were the best fitted for the different offices and it never happens that such men are all arrayed on one side.’⁴⁶ This method of ‘scratching’ pre-printed ballot papers was strongly encouraged by critics of partisan culture. And such principles continued to inform his wartime behaviour. After he received a position in the Union Army in 1861, Grant wrote to his father that ‘he was perfectly sickened at the political wire pulling for all these commissions and would not engage in it’, a stance that resulted in him receiving a lower position than would be expected considering his West Point background.⁴⁷ Little did the Republicans realise they had elected an antipartisan man for whom character mattered as much as policy.

Eager to avoid the influence of ambitious politicians, Grant kept as silent on his cabinet picks as he had on policy. He even shielded his recommendations from his wife. Her questioning led Grant to issue a light-hearted warning: ‘Jule, if you say anything more about it I’ll get a leave of absence, go off West, and not come back till the 4th of March.’⁴⁸ Grant later commented that he slept with his vest under his pillow and woke up several times during the night to check that his wife had not found his list with the names of his chosen cabinet.⁴⁹ Only Alexander T. Stewart – Grant’s Treasury appointment – received advance notice of his

⁴³ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 1, pp. 351-352.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

⁴⁷ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 2, pp. 20-22.

⁴⁸ George William Curtis (ed.), *The Correspondence of John Lothrop Motley* Volume 2 (New York, 1889), p. 302.

⁴⁹ Adam Badeau, *Grant in Peace: From Appomattox to Mount McGregor: A Personal Memoir* (Hartford, 1887), p. 410.

selection – and this was only due to his business commitments.⁵⁰ With the exception of Elihu B. Washburne – who received the temporary position of Secretary of State to give him gravitas as Minister to France – Grant’s choices were based entirely on his own judgement.⁵¹ As he affirmed with Stewart’s appointment, Grant sought appointees for their aptitude in each area, not their party loyalty; Grant desired Stewart as he ‘wanted the Treasury conducted on strict business principles.’⁵² The appointments illustrated that Grant wished to have experts in charge of each department rather than treat each position as a political reward.

Indeed, just as in 1856, when he voted on his estimation of a candidate’s merit rather than his faction, Grant chose his appointees based upon their abilities (or rather his perception of them) regardless of party, race, colour or gender. Particularly striking here were his appointments of Ely S. Parker – a Native American – and Elizabeth Van Lew to influential patronage positions. Parker, from the Seneca tribe, was made Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the first Native American to hold this position, while Van Lew became the postmaster at Richmond, a politically-sensitive position given it had been the Confederate capital and a role much coveted by partisan politicians eager to broaden their base.⁵³ Grant chose independently – apparently he consulted no-one – in order to shield himself from the machinations of office seekers.⁵⁴

Historians have tended to attribute Grant’s cabinet appointments to incompetence or as rewards for gifts.⁵⁵ They have recalled Henry Adams’ claim that Grant was ‘a baby

⁵⁰ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, pp. 289-290.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ For information on Parker see McFeely, *Grant*, pp. 305-307. For details on Van Lew, see Elizabeth R. Varon, *Southern Lady, Yankee Spy: The True Story of Elizabeth Van Lew, a Union Agent in the Heart of the Confederacy* (New York and Oxford, 2005), pp. 3-5, 216-220.

⁵⁴ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, p. 289.

⁵⁵ In recent years historians such as Jean Edward Smith in *Grant* (2001) have argued that Grant followed the policies employed within the army which saw loyal officers appointed to a General’s staff as the explanation for Grant’s seemingly confusing choices. However, Grant’s choices were deliberate and non-army related; after all, many politicians had become generals too.

politician' who did not know how politics worked to explain his choices.⁵⁶ Yet Grant's correspondence illustrates that his selections were a calculated move derived from his conception of politics. Grant strongly believed in the separation of powers and the necessity for executive independence in order to implement the peoples' will. He sought to redefine the presidency by re-establishing Washington's republicanism in the executive office. As an avid watcher of politics and an astute political thinker, Grant followed politics with great interest.⁵⁷ He argued with his father-in-law over slavery and carefully weighed up the merits of various candidates in each election.⁵⁸ The new president also was knowledgeable about previous administrations: in 1878, for example, he asserted that Hamilton Fish, his Secretary of State, had been the best 'in fifty years'.⁵⁹ The only possible exception, he noted, was Taylor's appointee, William Marcy.⁶⁰ These were not the opinions of someone with a limited knowledge of politics. By claiming Grant had no interest in politics (and only voted once in his life) historians – who have measured political engagement by party loyalty – have created a skewed portrait of the President as an apolitical man rather than an antipartisan man. Grant's selections astounded congressmen, but praise came from newspapers of all stripes. The shock which the country expressed is evident in the nation's press. One of the leading independent dailies, the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* – run by a close Grant ally – noted that '[f]or the first time in many years a State secret has been so well kept as to baffle the most ingenious and persistent efforts to worm it out, for when the telegraph brought the nominations to the public, they were entirely different from the 'slates.''⁶¹ The *Ledger* was impressed. 'These gentlemen', it concluded, 'have all been invited into the public service by the President without any agency or procurement of their own—a circumstance as rare in

⁵⁶ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (Boston and New York, 1918), p. 262.

⁵⁷ Kelly, 'The North American Crisis of the 1860s', *Journal of the Civil War Era*, pp. 342-343.

⁵⁸ Matthew G. Stewart, 'Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site', *Journal of American History* 99.3 (2012), pp. 840-843.

⁵⁹ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, p. 289.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ 'The Cabinet', *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), 6 March 1869.

these latter days as it is honorable to both the President and the recipients of his confidence.⁶² Newspapers of all stripes agreed on the candidates' independence and distance from political circles, and commended the new president for his choices. Several commented on 'the absolute independence of every member of [the cabinet] upon any merely [*sic*] party ties'.⁶³ '[T]hey are all untrammelled', remarked one.⁶⁴ Grant's cabinet in this way was more astute than it might have seemed. Ex-Confederates – who had sometimes looked forward to the promise of Grant acting in an authoritarian manner in 1868 – welcomed the absence of Radical Republicans.⁶⁵ For the Northern middle class, meanwhile, the subordination of party politicians had its own appeal. The *New York Times*, a moderate Republican newspaper known for its independent leanings, commented that the cabinet's 'members are business men rather than politicians, and are likely to make the practical interests of the country their first care'.⁶⁶ The *Public Ledger* called one nominee 'an able and intelligent representative man of his class, and a man of the strictest honor and integrity ... he is a man of the highest type of mercantile honor and probity, and universally esteemed for his purity of character.'⁶⁷ Many newspapers – mostly Northern – regarded Grant's appointments highly despite his unusual choices.⁶⁸

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ 'The New Cabinet', *The Newberry Herald* (Newberry, South Carolina), 17 March 1869. See also 'The New Cabinet', *Evening Star* (Washington DC), 6 March 1869, and 'The New Cabinet', *New York Tribune*, 6 March 1869 (p.4). See also 'Grant's Cabinet', *The States and Union* (Ashland, Ohio), 10 March 1869.

⁶⁴ 'The New Cabinet', *The Newberry Herald* (Newberry, South Carolina), 17 March 1869. This edition contained extracts from many of the nationwide city newspapers, including the *New York Times* where this quotation originated.

⁶⁵ Newspapers as diverse as national newspapers such as the Democratic *New York World*, the independent *New York Herald*, the Republican *New York Tribune*, as well as sizable newspapers such as the independent *Washington Evening Star*, the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, the Southern Democratic Memphis *Public Ledger* (Memphis, Tennessee) and the unreconstructed Democratic *Nashville Union and American* commented on the antipartisan choices of the new president. See 'The New Cabinet', *New York Herald*, 6 March 1869; 'The New Cabinet', *New York Tribune*, 6 March 1869 (p. 4), 'President Grant's Cabinet', *New York Times*, 6 March 1869; 'The Cabinet', *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), 6 March 1869; 'Grant's Cabinet', *Public Ledger* (Memphis, Tennessee), 6 March 1869; 'The Cabinet', *Nashville Union and American*, 6 March 1869. See also 'The New Cabinet', *Evening Star* (Washington D.C.), 6 March 1869; 'The New Cabinet', *Charleston Daily News*, 10 March 1869; 'Grant's Cabinet', *The States and Union* (Ashland, Ohio), 10 March 1869.

⁶⁶ 'President Grant's Cabinet', *New York Times*, 6 March 1869.

⁶⁷ 'The Cabinet', *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), 6 March 1869.

⁶⁸ Most of the New York newspapers were impressed by Grant's choices, including the Democratic *New York World* (see 5 and 6 March 1869 editions). Grant also received approval from independent newspapers such as

Leading newspapers across the country did note the ‘disappointment’ of the politicians with the President’s appointments, but as the *New York Times* observed ‘[t]he considerations which lead partisans to view with impatience the composition of the new Cabinet are precisely the considerations which make it satisfactory to the main body of people.’⁶⁹ But, the *Times* perceived, ‘[t]he politicians regard coldly, if not with dislike, the application of a principle which exacts capacity, integrity, efficiency, instead of mere party prominence and zeal.’⁷⁰

There was dissent from familiar quarters. The Democratic *New York World* – a paper which was uneasy about the tone of Seymour and Blair’s campaign in 1868 – commented that Grant’s selection ‘fills his political opponents with wonder’ and conceded that he ‘had not only deviated from the beaten path, but deviated into absolute oddity’.⁷¹ The ‘only hypothesis’ the journal could come up with was ‘that General Grant means to be the candidate of the Republican party for a second term, and will tolerate in his Cabinet no statesman from whom he would have anything to fear as a rival.’⁷² The paper’s analysis of Grant’s choices hinted at more sinister motives in the President’s selections: Grant was not merely antipartisan but potentially tyrannical in his intent to control those around him as he pursued, at least, a second term. It was an accusation levelled at Grant during the 1868 presidential election and one the Democrats would continue to use throughout his presidency. Yet despite the deviation from the traditional method of appointing the foremost members of the party, there was a general acceptance that the appointees meant business, for it was ‘not

the *Evening Star* (Washington D.C.), 6 March 1869, and Southern Democratic newspapers such as the *Public Ledger* (Memphis, Tennessee), 6 March 1869.

⁶⁹ The Politicians and the Cabinet’, *New York Times*, 8 March 1869. For descriptions of politicians’ disappointment see ‘The Administration’, *The New York Sun*, 6 March 1869; ‘What is Said About the Cabinet’, *New York Evening Post*, 6 March 1869; ‘President Grant’s Cabinet’, *Daily Eastern Angus* (Portland, Maine), 8 March 1869; ‘Telegraphic Dispatches ... What the Radicals Think of the Cabinet’, *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 6 March 1869; and ‘Grant’s Cabinet’, *Public Ledger* (Memphis, Tennessee), 6 March 1869.

⁷⁰ ‘The Politicians and the Cabinet’, *New York Times*, 8 March 1869.

⁷¹ ‘The New Cabinet’, *The Newberry Herald* (Newberry, South Carolina), 17 March 1869.

⁷² *Ibid.*

an ornamental Cabinet'; the *World* conceded that 'the new Cabinet is 'fearfully and wonderfully made'', indicating the possibility of an oncoming tyranny but also highlighting that the President was neither incompetent nor a slave to patronage.⁷³

Stronger opposition came from within the Republican Party. The contempt felt towards the President for his antipartisan-style cabinet was palpable. Grant's deviation from the use of patronage for party rewards – the spoils system associated with President Jackson – met with intense dissatisfaction from the politicians. Many Republicans, especially the Radicals, believed the ascension of a Republican president meant the return of access to presidential prerogatives.⁷⁴ Sumner wrote to a friend on 29 December 1868 that 'the Senate is again in the cabinet'.⁷⁵ His words indicated how many congressmen felt they had a natural role in the President's inner circle.⁷⁶ Similarly, when Missouri Senator Carl Schurz approached the President to discuss the selection of the St Louis postmaster (a significant patronage position), he was appalled to find Grant had already made the appointment.⁷⁷ Schurz's 'remonstrance' was met with Grant's delightful response: 'Why, Mr Schurz, I know Missouri a great deal better than you do.'⁷⁸ Over in Cincinnati, Republican newspapers publicly bickered between themselves over the role of the party in appointments, leading the *Enquirer* to question whether 'the *Gazette* think[s] [the President] ought to pay no attention to those men who elected him?'⁷⁹

Republicans who wanted the prioritisation of Reconstruction and Radical policies, such as the civil rights of African Americans, remained discontented with the antiparty cabinet. Veteran

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ University of Sheffield Library: Charles Sumner MSS, Western Bank Library Wolfson Microfilm 509, Series 2, Reel 82, Charles Sumner to a friend, 29 December 1868.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils*, p. 60, and Schafer (ed.), *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz 1848-1869*, p. 475.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ 'The Cabinet', *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 2 March 1869.

abolitionist Wendell Phillips complained that Grant's choices '[gave] no indication of the President's plans. It rather shows that he has none, for it means nothing.'⁸⁰ Moreover, Phillips claimed that Grant 'excludes every one that any body ever thought of.'⁸¹ Other partisans, such as Schurz, insisted that Grant did not understand politics, and sought to give the President lessons, boasting that after 'several conferences with [Grant] ... he is becoming steadily more cooperative.'⁸² Schurz – amongst other Radical Republicans – desired to be involved in Grant's decisions, and hinted at his coming conflict with the new president in letters to his wife.⁸³ Writing of Grant's collision with Congress over Stewart, Schurz informed his wife that the President had 'ask[ed] Congress to repeal the troublesome law', however, 'Congress showed itself so little disposed to do it that Grant quickly saw his mistake and recalled his message.'⁸⁴ Though Schurz was satisfied with Grant's conduct, in this instance, it was clear that tension already existed between the two branches of government. The letters illustrated that the President and congressmen held two different conceptions of the presidency and its role within politics which would inevitably clash in due course.

But Republican opposition rested on more than fears over the future of Reconstruction. Naturally, many members of Congress did not appreciate Grant's attempt to remain above party. Lyman Trumbull, in particular, believed the president was 'just as much subject to our control as if we appointed him, except that we cannot remove him and substitute another in his place.'⁸⁵ Schurz, too, after the Stewart debacle, announced the necessity for the President to consult Congress in patronage matters, claiming in its aftermath that 'Grant received a

⁸⁰ Wendell, Phillips, 'President Grant', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 13 March 1869.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Schafer (ed.), *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz 1848-1869*, p. 472.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Urofsky (ed.), *American Presidents*, p. 209. Carl Schurz also believed that the President needed to acquiesce to the suggestions of congressmen in patronage as this was the style of politics by which they governed. See Schafer (ed.), *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz 1848-1869*, pp. 471-175.

most salutary lesson in this connection.⁸⁶ Their comments indicated that the battles over presidential power would inevitably continue to define the presidency. The *New York Herald* correctly analysed the motives of the executive noting ‘the moral of this Cabinet is that it is President Grant’s Cabinet, and he intends to be master of his administration.’⁸⁷

Whilst Republicans like Schurz and Trumbull believed it was the party’s role to shape and guide the President’s administration, Grant indicated with his appointments and correspondence that administrative duties were best kept in the hands of capable and disinterested public servants.⁸⁸ Office seekers, especially politicians, sought power to sate their own ambition, and not with the country’s best interests in mind. A statement attributed to Grant cropped up in a number of newspapers which claimed that the new president had said ‘he would tolerate no idlers in any department of the Government ... the people were too poor to pay salaries as a mere bonus to professional politicians.’⁸⁹ Whether hearsay or not, the statement had a ring of authenticity, as it corresponded to the President’s previous statements and actions which had indicated that he did not believe his appointive powers should be used for mere party political reward.⁹⁰

Many congressmen interpreted this attempt to define the presidency as an abuse of power. These figures, still suspicious of presidential power in the wake of Johnson’s presidency, saw Grant’s departure from the status quo as a sign that he would rely upon his own ideas of governance, as Johnson did, and would act aloof from Congress; fears abounded that Grant was ‘about to Johnsonize.’⁹¹ Where Grant saw the republicanism of Washington, then,

⁸⁶ Schafer (ed.), *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz 1848-1869*, pp. 472.

⁸⁷ ‘The New Cabinet’, *New York Herald*, 6 March 1869.

⁸⁸ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 19, pp. 129-130, and Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 2, pp. 20-22.

⁸⁹ *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, 6 March 1869. See also ‘Minor Offices—No Idlers’, *The New York Sun*, 6 March 1869.

⁹⁰ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 19, pp. 129-130, and Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 2, pp. 20-22.

⁹¹ *The Evening Argus* (Rock Island, Illinois), 16 March 1869.

congressmen saw tyranny. The ascension of a Republican did not diminish their fears of the potential abuses of power that a president could commit in the name of the nation. After years of misrule by Johnson, they regarded deviations from ‘established practice’ as a sign of corruption.⁹² The *New York Sun*, a Grant supporter in 1868, gave an indication of this train of thought when it wrote of how ‘a ring of disappointed politicians has been formed, with the intention of smashing the ring [of disappointment] at all hazards’⁹³ The implication, here, was that the President, by refusing to nominate the leading Republican politicians, operated upon sinister, corrupt objectives which the Republicans sought to destroy. Grant’s antipartisanship, then, was corruption.

In particular, those who disliked his appointments – especially some Republican congressmen and Democratic newspapers – hinted that behind the nominations lay nepotism. Soon after the cabinet selections were made, Schurz wrote to his wife with the charge that Grant’s decision not to nominate ‘the most conspicuous lights and managers of the dominant party’ rested upon his wish to reward friends and provide for his family.⁹⁴ Similarly, a Democratic Illinois newspaper noted that ‘the General adheres to his friends’.⁹⁵ An Ohio Democratic paper, too, alleged that Republicans believed Grant’s choices were ‘not because of any special fitness, but because they were all warmly attached to him, and had promoted his personal ends.’⁹⁶ It was an indication of the allegations which would later be levelled at the President. Nepotism, after all, was decidedly unrepugnant.

However, though the likes of Schurz and Trumbull perceived Grant’s selections as relying on nepotism and cronyism, Sumner read even more sinister motives into Grant’s actions, seeing a dangerous trend towards the militarisation of civil offices. Sumner understood Grant’s

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ ‘The Slate is to be Smashed’, *The New York Sun*, 6 March 1869.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, and Schafer (ed.), *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz 1848-1869*, p. 475.

⁹⁵ ‘Grant’s Cabinet’, *Cairo Evening Bulletin* (Cairo, Illinois), 5 March 1869.

⁹⁶ ‘Grant’s Cabinet’, *The Democratic Press* (Ravenna, Ohio), 11 March 1869.

appointments as ‘breathing the military spirit’ into government, and called it ‘a species of Caesarism or *personalism*’.⁹⁷ The independent nominations, as well as the appointment of a high number of military men to civil service positions, unnerved these reformist Senators who feared the presence of the ‘military ring’ which they believed corrupted and controlled power in the presidency.⁹⁸ Only a month later, a semi-satirical newspaper, *The Imperialist*, would mock these fears by hinting that Grant was using the Union veterans’ organisation, the Grand Army of the Republic, as a route to perpetual power.⁹⁹ The paper had plenty of material to work with. Some newspapers, especially those in the Democratic camp, alleged that ‘Grant has formed his Cabinet on the military principle—that is to say, just as he would have appointed a general staff’, thus implying that ‘his Cabinet are only there to obey his orders ... he does not propose to have any bickering among his advisers to the Presidential succession’.¹⁰⁰ The newspaper insinuated that military behaviour had seeped into the highest echelons of civil life and Grant would firmly control his administration. The infiltration of military power into civilian politics foreshadowed the end of the republic. Americans, after all, believed it was a victorious general – Julius Caesar – who had turned Rome into an empire.

Power and Patronage

These fears motivated the first of many power battles over executive power during Grant’s first term. Even before Grant announced his cabinet appointments, Sumner’s correspondence highlighted fears among abolitionists of the potential abuse of power by the new president. One wrote to Sumner that he hoped ‘the Senate will not be in haste to repeal laws which

⁹⁷ Sumner, *Republicanism vs. Grantism*, p. 5.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5, and ‘The Military Ring’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 23 March 1872.

⁹⁹ Heath, “‘Let the Empire Come’”, *Civil War History*, pp. 152-189.

¹⁰⁰ ‘The New Cabinet’, *The Daily Phoenix* (Columbia, South Carolina), 18 March 1869. See also a Republican newspaper (at least in 1868-1869): ‘The Administration’, *The New York Sun*, 6 March 1869.

lessen the President's power. It is now too great and although Grant might not abuse it no one can tell how soon we may have another Johnson who will.'¹⁰¹ The motion to repeal the Tenure of Office Act came before the Senate prior to the receipt of Grant's appointments. Although passed by the House, the Senate rejected repeal by 35 to 15 votes.¹⁰² But Grant desired its removal which led the House to lead the battle for repeal again, though senators remained cautious.¹⁰³ It was only natural for them to regard Grant's actions with suspicion in light of Johnson's behaviour. Instead, then, senators compromised on an amendment to the Act after Grant promised only to fill vacant offices.¹⁰⁴ This would allow Grant to remove and appoint officers subject to approval by the Senate; but it removed the presidential necessity to justify dismissals to the Senate.¹⁰⁵ The battle illustrated that although senators were willing to compromise they were still reluctant to concede power to the President.

A more significant battle was going on concurrently to the Tenure of Office repeal debate which may have affected the senatorial reticence to increase presidential power. Grant's nomination of Stewart to the Treasury contravened Alexander Hamilton's little known 1789 law which prohibited the appointment of a person who 'directly or indirectly [was] concerned or interested in carrying on the business of trade or commerce'.¹⁰⁶ None the wiser, the Senate had unanimously confirmed the appointment; upon learning of the restriction, Senators John Sherman and David Patterson had moved to repeal 'this disabling provision.'¹⁰⁷ It was suggested by the press that initially a majority of Republican senators, especially conservatives and moderates, were inclined to acquiesce, until Sumner intervened.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ University of Sheffield Library: Charles Sumner MSS, Western Bank Library Wolfson Microfilm 509, Series 2, Reel 82, Damon Y. Kilgore to Charles Sumner, 13 January 1869.

¹⁰² Smith, *Grant*, p. 479.

¹⁰³ Hesselstine, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p. 150.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 152-153.

¹⁰⁶ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 19, pp. 147-148.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, and Pierce, *Memoirs and Letters of Charles Sumner* IV, p. 374.

¹⁰⁸ Pierce, *Memoirs and Letters of Charles Sumner* IV, p. 374. The *Congressional Record* states that after the repeal motion was introduced by David Patterson, and an amendment suggested by John Sherman, Sumner

Motivated by fears over the abuse of power, Sumner suggested the motion should first face ‘consideration by a committee.’¹⁰⁹ Shortly afterwards Congress received a message from the President which asked for Stewart’s exception from the law.¹¹⁰ Sherman reacted by attempting to pass his motion, only for Sumner to interject stating ‘the bill ought to be most profoundly considered before it is acted upon by the Senate’; years later the *New York Tribune* suggested ‘that Sumner’s ‘sonorous voice’ arrested the proposed exemption’ and after consideration, senators – especially Radicals and moderates – appeared reluctant to exempt Stewart, which led Grant to recall his request.¹¹¹ Schurz, for his part, remarked that ‘the matter looked quite threatening for some days’.¹¹²

Some historians have contended that this opposition derived itself from lingering malice over patronage appointments, especially among those who later became Liberal Republicans.

Sumner, in particular, had been tipped for the Secretary of State position by numerous friends and commentators, such as John Russell Young of the *New York Tribune* and Samuel Bowles of the *Springfield Republican*.¹¹³ Sumner never explicitly stated he desired the cabinet position, just as he never expressed a desire for the vacant Massachusetts Senate seat, instead he remained coy stating he would accept the position if the country wanted him.¹¹⁴ The Senator wrote to a friend the day after Grant was elected in 1868 reiterating that ‘[n]obody has ever heard me say that I would accept a place out of the Senate,’ but he conceded that, ‘if it were offered to me ... I admit, however, that my country has a right to determine where I

interjected. Except for a note of support from Senator William Sprague of Rhode Island, no other Senators, with the exception of the reading of the President’s message, spoke. See *Congressional Globe*, Debates and Proceedings 1833-1873, 41st Congress 1869-1871, 1st Session March 4 1869-April 10 1869., pp. 21-22, 34.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 19, pp. 147-148.

¹¹¹ Pierce, *Memoirs and Letters of Charles Sumner* IV, p. 374, and Schafer (ed.), *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz 1848-1869*, p. 471.

¹¹² Schafer (ed.), *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz 1848-1869*, p. 472.

¹¹³ Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, p. 369, and University of Sheffield Library: Charles Sumner MSS, Western Bank Library Wolfson Microfilm 509, Series 2, Reel 82, Damon Y. Kilgore to Charles Sumner, 13 January 1869.

¹¹⁴ Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, p. 369.

can work best.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, he told a friend that he ‘was still expecting ‘the possible or probable offer to him by General Grant of the office of Secretary of State’’.¹¹⁶ His acquaintance commented that ‘[h]e would dislike to leave the Senate, and still I fancy he would like the Secretaryship.’¹¹⁷ One of his letters to William H. Seward, Johnson’s Secretary of State, contained a hint of this desire: instead of writing ‘Secretary of State’ underneath his name to mark the intended recipient of the letter, Sumner wrote it adjacent to his own name perhaps indicating to Seward the future direction of foreign affairs.¹¹⁸ Yet, despite this wish, there is no indication that Sumner’s course was determined by ambition. Indicating his principled stance to executive power, Sumner had objected to legislation increasing presidential power before the Senate received Grant’s nominations. It implies, then, that his actions were motivated by republican concerns over presidential power heightened by Johnson’s abuse, and his desire to protect the gains of Reconstruction which many Radicals believed Grant would fritter away.

However, whilst Sumner’s opposition arose from genuine worries, there exists less evidence to suggest that the hostility of other senators such as Schurz and Trumbull’s arose from principled concerns. Trumbull, in particular, had engaged in fraudulent actions in Congress. During Johnson’s presidency, Grant – as *ad interim* Secretary of War – sought legal services from Trumbull in relation to a Supreme Court case from Mississippi for the War Department.¹¹⁹ Trumbull initially accepted before passing the case onto Senator Matthew H. Carpenter, yet Trumbull demanded a fee of 10,000 dollars to which he had no entitlement as

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ University of Sheffield Library: Charles Sumner MSS, Western Bank Library Wolfson Microfilm 509, Series 2, Reel 82, Charles Sumner to William Seward, 11 January 1869.

¹¹⁹ *The Reform Leaders: Trumbull, Schurz, Doolittle, Farnsworth, and Hassaurek Before the Bar of Public Opinion* (n.p., 1872), p. 1. See also Horace White, *The Life of Lyman Trumbull* (Boston and New York, 1913), pp. 330-332. White was the Liberal Republican editor of the *Chicago Tribune*.

he did not present the case in court.¹²⁰ Similarly, Schurz's correspondence indicates a similar disregard for principle. His letters indicate his desire to return to the status quo when it came to patronage appointments, and this seems to have been a priority ahead of any genuine objections to Grant's misuse of power.¹²¹ In a letter to his friend James Taussig, Schurz described Grant's system of appointments as 'a lottery', and claimed 'heaven knows upon what mysterious theory the distribution of prizes is made.'¹²² He explained: 'I have worked very hard for my friends' to little avail.¹²³ Schurz also claimed that this system made the job of a senator 'the meanest drudgery a human imagination ever conceived' and labelled Grant's system one of 'utter absurdity'.¹²⁴ Though he claimed a lifelong affinity for civil service reform, his claim was slightly dubious and seemed to rely more upon his belief that the best men should gain office; it was upon this basis that Schurz vowed to pursue civil service reform.¹²⁵ Grant himself would later complain that calls for civil service reform often came loudest from those most in want of patronage 'who expected offices as a right.'¹²⁶

Yet despite their personal desire for patronage, both senators with genuine fears and those who misinterpreted Grant's motives in his selection of cabinet officers sought legislative redress to curtail executive abuse of power. Under Johnson they had moulded genuine civil service reform efforts into an attempt to undermine executive power, and they pursued an identical route with Grant. Senator Thomas A. Jenckes desired civil service reform to reduce both executive and congressional power, but his bill, which would have made 'competitive open-examinations' for civil service appointments not chosen by the president compulsory, and created an administering board of three commissioners with fixed five year terms,

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

¹²¹ Hans Louis Trefousse, *Carl Schurz: A Biography* (New York, 1998), pp. 182-183.

¹²² Frederic Bancroft, *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz* Volume 1: October 20 1851-November 26, 1870 (New York and London, 1913), pp. 482-283.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, and Trefousse, *Carl Schurz*, pp. 182-184.

¹²⁶ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, p. 281.

received scant attention when first introduced in December 1865.¹²⁷ Only when President Johnson broke with the Republican Party did civil service reform gain popularity in the legislature.¹²⁸ However, despite increased interest – and the tailoring of Jenckes’ bill to cater to the anti-Johnson sentiment – Congress remained more interested in a bill which promised to curb executive power without weakening congressional power.¹²⁹ A majority of Republicans remained convinced ‘that executive power was dangerously strong and needed clipping’, while Congress could be safely left alone.¹³⁰

Despite Jenckes’ lack of success with his Civil Service bill, he raised the issue again during Grant’s first term. Here, he garnered Grant’s support, but his bill still lacked a congressional majority. However, just as Johnson’s missteps led to the curbing of executive power, Grant’s attempt to define the presidency led to renewed interest in a measure which would lessen executive power. Both Schurz and Trumbull – the breakaway leaders of the Liberal Republican Party – brought forth civil service reform bills which vested more powers in Congress than anything Jenckes’ had proposed.¹³¹ Schurz’s bill failed to remove the practice of rotation in office, which denied civil servants’ tenure beyond the incumbency of the president who had appointed them, whilst Trumbull’s effort endeavoured to keep congressmen’s role in making recommendations.¹³² Both their efforts illustrated their discontent with the President’s attempt to enforce the separation of powers and a lack of sympathy with genuine civil service reform.

These Senators’ disillusionment with the President’s course, especially over patronage appointments, led them to desire the creation of a new party. Schurz, in a speech at Nashville,

¹²⁷ Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils*, pp. 15-19.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 86.

¹³² *Ibid.*

Tennessee, in September 1871, pronounced ‘the need for reform and a new party’.¹³³ Of all Grant’s policies, the first Schurz spoke about in his speech was civil service reform. He described how Grant’s ‘system of government patronage has scandalously demoralized our political life’ and that the ‘civil service ought to be reformed, the abuses of patronage abolished, and all good citizens should cooperate to restore our public life to the purity and high tone of the first years of the republic. Shameless corruption, open and covert, has developed itself in many places.’¹³⁴ Schurz charges rarely contained any specifics, but as Andrew L. Slap has indicated, he did have concerns over executive corruption and abuse of power which were rooted in his German heritage.¹³⁵ Yet these anxieties seemed less apparent in his desire for genuine civil service reform which embodied itself most poignantly in the Liberal Republican support for the one term principle. But neither Schurz nor Trumbull crafted the principle.

Yet despite Schurz and Trumbull’s accusations of corruption and executive abuse of patronage, the President declared his support for reform of the civil service in his second annual message to Congress on 5 December 1870. Several senators had raised the issue and Grant approved of the prospective measures. Grant highlighted the inadequacies of the present system of appointing men to civil service offices stating that it was not conducive to securing ‘the best men, and often not even fit men, for public place’.¹³⁶ Grant stated in his message that:

Always favoring practical reforms, I respectfully call your attention to one abuse of long standing which I would like to see remedied by this Congress. It is a

¹³³ Frederic Bancroft, *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz* Volume 2: December 13 1870-February 27 1870 (New York and London, 1913), p. 257.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

¹³⁵ Bancroft, *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz* Volume 1, pp. 482-283, and Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*, p. xi-2.

¹³⁶ Ulysses, S. Grant, *Second Annual Message*, 5 December 1870, *UCSB American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29511&st=&st1=> [accessed 21 September 2013].

reform in the civil service of the country. I would have it go beyond the mere fixing of the tenure of office of clerks and employees who do not require ‘the advice and consent of the Senate’ to make their appointments complete. I would have it govern, not the tenure, but the manner of making all appointments. There is no duty which so much embarrasses the Executive and heads of Departments as that of appointments, nor is there any such arduous and thankless labor imposed on Senators and Representatives as that of finding places for constituents. The present system does not secure the best men, and often not even fit men, for public place. The elevation and purification of the civil service of the Government will be hailed with approval by the whole people of the United States.¹³⁷

It was clear Grant desired reform, though beyond identifying with the cause, he did not make any suggestions. He does hint though at a system of examinations through the reference to ‘elevation’ and ‘purification’: a possible nod to removing nominations from the hands of both the executive and legislators.¹³⁸ But his message signalled his distaste for the scramble over offices by politicians and their constituents at every level of the civil service. It bred, Grant implied, incompetence and inefficiency, which was not in the interest of the public good. Patronage, he suggested, was burdensome and desperately required reform. Yet Congress did not echo Grant’s support for this measure despite the drafting of several different bills, and after much infighting, some members managed to set up a commission through the addition of a rider to a civil appropriations bill (a result of the immense opposition to bills on civil service reform itself).¹³⁹ When the commission finally reported, Grant adopted the measures

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils*, pp. 86-87.

through executive orders. However, Sumner raised an objection to the new rules, stating that civil service reform would mean nothing without the one term principle.

Grant, Sumner, and the One Term Amendment

Perhaps taking inspiration from Senator Benjamin Wade, who raised the issue in 1866 with presidential power in his sights, Sumner introduced, on 21 December 1871, ‘a Joint Resolution proposing an Amendment of the Constitution confining the President to one term.’¹⁴⁰ The Senator claimed this amendment ‘is the initial point of Civil Service Reform; that is the first stage in that great reform.’¹⁴¹ Without the one term amendment, he argued, civil service reform would be ineffectual, as it would not curb executive power.¹⁴² Sumner’s actions had precedent: he had previously introduced a civil service reform bill – without mention of the one term principle – in 1864 just before the Republican convention in order to derail President Lincoln’s re-nomination, but there was little interest in his measure then.¹⁴³ Along with other Republicans he had fought to ensure Johnson remained a one term president. Now, in 1871, his long battle to augment congressional power continued. The one term principle was an attempt to illustrate the supremacy of the legislative branch whilst rebuking the President by accusing him of using corrupt methods in dispensing patronage appointments.¹⁴⁴ Congress and the party represented the people, Sumner affirmed, and the president must bow to their will.¹⁴⁵

However, the resolution greatly confused other Republican senators, who failed to understand Sumner’s motivations. Ostensibly, Sumner targeted the President’s power, yet the proposal

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10, and Sumner, *Works of Charles Sumner* Volume XIV, p. 320.

¹⁴¹ Sumner, *Works of Charles Sumner* Volume XIV, p. 320.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils*, p. 10. Hoogenboom notes that Sumner’s bill had been ready for some time but that he had waited three months before introducing it in order to focus attention on Lincoln’s flaws with regard to the civil service and prevent his re-nomination.

¹⁴⁴ Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, pp. 183-185; and Sands, *American Public Philosophy and the Mystery of Lincolnism*, p. 99.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, and Korzi, *A Seat of Popular Leadership*, p. 1. See also Sands, *American Public Philosophy and the Mystery of Lincolnism*, p. 99.

would not have come into effect until the 1876 presidential election: too late to stop a Grant second term. Seemingly, then, it was an attempt ‘to embarrass the Administration’, and those who opposed the measure regarded it as ‘merely an electioneering document, designed to injure Grant.’¹⁴⁶ The amendment – especially the portion of it suggested by a constituent of Sumner’s that made any known drunk ineligible for office – comprised an attempt to deprive Grant of the 1872 Republican presidential nomination.¹⁴⁷ Whilst Grant’s civil service reforms aimed to remove congressional influence by enforcing independent examinations to ascertain a candidate’s fitness for office, Sumner’s amendment sought to curtail executive power. Although it would have placed no legal limit on Grant’s candidacy in 1872, it marked a symbolic assault on the sitting President’s hopes of re-election, borne out of Sumner’s fears that Grant was becoming too powerful.

The amendment in this regard must be understood as part of a battle over presidential power tied to the President’s attempts to annex Santo Domingo (the present day Dominican Republic). For Sumner the Santo Domingo case was particularly dangerous as it threatened the independence of a black nation in the Caribbean. But it also illustrated for him the dangers of executive usurpation. Sumner had previously opposed annexation when it was suggested by Fish’s predecessor Seward, and he had not changed his mind in the intervening years. Sumner and his allies in the Senate interpreted Grant’s pursuit of Santo Domingo as a sign of executive aggrandisement, and the one term principle offered them a means to curb what they argued was a dangerous instinct.

¹⁴⁶ Hesselstine, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p. 266.

¹⁴⁷ *Congressional Globe*, Debates and Proceedings 1833-1873, 42nd Congress 1869-1871, 2nd session, pp. 259-260, 424. It is very interesting to note that the constituent in question was one Henry Pierce, possibly a relative of Sumner’s close friend Edward L. Pierce who wrote his memoirs. Both resided in Massachusetts.

The proposal arose when the Santo Domingo President Buenaventura Baez offered the United States the opportunity to annex his country to protect it from European empires.¹⁴⁸ Grant negotiated a treaty for annexation as per his executive powers. Breaking with precedent, though, Grant called on Sumner (as the Chairman of the Committee of Foreign Relations in the Senate) at his house to discuss the treaty rather than call him to the White House.¹⁴⁹ The President arrived unannounced but was welcomed into Sumner's house for discussion.¹⁵⁰ Grant left with the impression that Sumner would support annexation – he had said nothing to suggest otherwise – though Sumner's exact words to the President have been debated with the three witnesses present changing their statements.¹⁵¹ He purportedly told Grant: 'I am a Republican and an Administration man, and I will do all I can to make your Administration a success. I will give your subject my best thought, and will do all I can rightly and consistently to aid you.'¹⁵² Later, Sumner, in an attempt to denigrate the President's reputation, would say Grant showed up at his house drunk.¹⁵³ Grant felt betrayed by Sumner's efforts to destroy his treaty, incorrectly asserting that it had little to do with the merits of the treaty, and everything to do with his decreasing power in the Senate.¹⁵⁴

Ironically, though, the President and Sumner were vying over different means to the same end. Grant desired annexation as he believed it would help improve race relations in the United States.¹⁵⁵ A memorandum he wrote sometime between 1869 and 1870, which he

¹⁴⁸ Love, *Race Over Empire*, p. 37.

¹⁴⁹ Blue, *Charles Sumner and the Conscience of the North*, p. 190.

¹⁵⁰ Library of Congress: Charles Sumner MSS, Charles Sumner to unknown, 10 March 1871, and Guyatt, 'America's Conservatory', *Journal of American History*, p. 979.

¹⁵¹ Guyatt, 'America's Conservatory', *Journal of American History*, p. 979; Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, p. 437; and Love, *Race Over Empire*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁵² Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, p. 437.

¹⁵³ McFeely, *Grant*, p. 351.

¹⁵⁴ Roscoe Conkling, 'The Presidential Battle of 1872', (Buffalo Commercial Advertiser Campaign Document No.1, 1872), p. 11. See also John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 22: June 1 1871-January 31 1872 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1998), pp. 231-232, and John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 23: February 1 1872-December 31 1872 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 2000), p. 238.

¹⁵⁵ Love, *Race Over Empire*, pp. 43-47, and Guyatt, 'America's Conservatory', *Journal of American History*, p. 978.

never sent to the Senate, explains his views.¹⁵⁶ He wrote ‘[t]he present difficulty in bringing all parts of the United States to a happy unity and love of country grows out of the prejudice to color. The prejudice is a senseless one, but it exists.’¹⁵⁷ Grant then clarified that ‘[t]he colored man cannot be spared until his place is supplied, but with a refuge like San Domingo his worth here would soon be discovered, and he would soon receive such recognition as to induce him to stay’.¹⁵⁸ He viewed annexation as a way for ex-slaveholders to learn the value of their former property’s labour, and hoped it would improve conditions in the South for African Americans. Grant also believed that annexing Santo Domingo would accelerate the demise of hemispheric slavery. The President asserted that ‘San Domingo in the hands of the United States would make slave labor unprofitable and would soon extinguish that hated system of enforced labor.’¹⁵⁹ He clarified that the United States remained ‘the largest supporter of that institution’ as the country received the majority of exports from slave countries Cuba and Brazil, who both charged export duties ‘to support slavery and Monarchy.’¹⁶⁰ Like Sumner, then, Grant saw his stance as elevating people of African descent.

Sumner, however, interpreted annexation very differently and, despite Grant’s good intentions for African Americans, the harder the President tried to convince the Senate to pass the treaty, the harder Sumner opposed him. Initially, Sumner simply planned ‘to smother [rather] than to stab Grant’s favourite project’ by delaying a vote on it, but Grant’s wish for annexation meant Sumner could not bury the treaty.¹⁶¹ After Sumner successfully highlighted problems with the treaty and prevented a vote on it, Grant suggested that the

¹⁵⁶ John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 20: November 1 1869- October 31 1870 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1995), pp. 74-76.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

¹⁶¹ Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, p. 439.

Senate appoint a commission to visit Santo Domingo and report on the issues raised.¹⁶²

Sumner even taunted the President, questioning why he bothered to consult the Senate, when he had – in Sumner’s opinion – already disregarded its prerogatives during the negotiation process.¹⁶³ Sumner implied Grant had usurped his constitutional powers in pursuing annexation, and he seemed to be attempting to push Grant to continue in this vein rather than consulting Congress as the Constitution decreed.¹⁶⁴ In an effort to kill the treaty, Sumner launched – during a debate on whether to send a fact-finding commission to Santo Domingo – what one Boston newspaper called ‘a violent personal attack upon the President for the Santo Domingo negotiation.’¹⁶⁵ Sumner’s speech, entitled ‘Naboth’s Vineyard’, seemed incongruous with the Senator’s commitment to racial equality.¹⁶⁶ Sumner relied upon racial prejudices and used popular theories regarding races and climates, promoted by the Harvard scientist Louis Agassiz, in order to undermine the annexation scheme.¹⁶⁷ Agassiz’s theory rested on the idea that those with light skin tones flourished in temperate climate zones, whilst those with dark skin tones thrived in hot climates, thus explaining the proliferation of slavery in the South.¹⁶⁸ In his desire to prevent annexation, Sumner was turning to ideas others’ used to justify white supremacy, which illustrated how strongly he believed the scheme must be prevented. Sumner had decided to use improbable weapons in his arsenal to stop the passage of the treaty.

The Senator analysed the situation in Santo Domingo as more detrimental to the continent than favourable. Whilst Grant and Sumner were men of similar intellect, they each interpreted the proposed annexation in completely different ways. The President saw a safe

¹⁶² Guyatt, ‘America’s Conservatory’, *Journal of American History*, p. 981; and Blue, *Charles Sumner and the Conscience of the North*, p. 193.

¹⁶³ Conkling, ‘The Presidential Battle of 1872’, p. 11.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ ‘Sumner and Grant’, *Boston Daily Globe*, 3 June 1872.

¹⁶⁶ Sumner, *Works of Charles Sumner* Volume XIV, pp. 89-131.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Love, *Race Over Empire*, pp. 31-32.

haven for the former slaves – a place where they could be United States citizens but without the discrimination they faced in the South associated with the country – and the triumph of free labour in the Western Hemisphere. Sumner, in contrast, saw danger for the 800,000 black citizens of the adjacent Republic of Haiti.¹⁶⁹ Though Grant did not wish to annex Haiti, acquiring Santo Domingo would open up the possibility of future annexation of its neighbour. Sumner found this an unacceptable prospect that would violate the Haitians' right to self-government and would never have been attempted on a white republic.¹⁷⁰ Just as many senators – including Sumner – had ratified the treaty to buy Alaska in the hope of acquiring Canada, Sumner feared the acquisition of Santo Domingo would lead to the annexation of Haiti. It was upon this fear that Sumner initially opposed annexation.

However, as Sumner discovered the process which led to the negotiation of the treaty, he also began to oppose it on the basis of his fears over executive power. Particularly appalling to the Senator was the grandiose name assumed by Grant's presidential secretary during the negotiations on the treaty: General Orville E. Babcock referred to himself as the 'Aide-de-camp to his Excellency, Ulysses S. Grant'.¹⁷¹ A discussion with a supporter of annexation unaffiliated with Grant's administration – General Joseph W. Fabens – also suggested plans existed to annex other Caribbean countries.¹⁷² These two fears – danger for the freedom of Haitians and the abuse of executive power – merged to form the substance of Sumner's opposition to the annexation of Santo Domingo. Sumner's correspondence shows these fears: he wrote that Grant 'was guilty of the greatest crime in our political history, revealing a heartless, lawless & tyrannical nature.'¹⁷³ He also clarified his motivations for his actions

¹⁶⁹ University of Sheffield Library: Charles Sumner MSS, Western Bank Library Wolfson Microfilm 509, Series 2, Reel 84, Charles Sumner to Heman Lincoln Chase, 20 July 1872.

¹⁷⁰ University of Sheffield Library: Charles Sumner MSS, Western Bank Library Wolfson Microfilm 509, Series 2, Reel 84, Charles Sumner to Dr William H. Wormley and others, 29 July 1872.

¹⁷¹ Pierce, *Memoirs and Letters of Charles Sumner* IV, p. 430.

¹⁷² Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, pp. 440-441.

¹⁷³ University of Sheffield Library: Charles Sumner MSS, Western Bank Library Wolfson Microfilm 509, Series 2, Reel 84, Charles Sumner to Mr Smith, 17 July 1872.

stating '[y]ou know well I look to principles and care nothing for the names I am called. Call me whatever you choose, I shall do what I can always for Human Rights.'¹⁷⁴ Referring to Haiti, Sumner wrote to another recipient that Grant's behaviour towards the republic 'is one of the crimes of our history, and has exercised a painful influence on that struggling people.'¹⁷⁵ Sumner's concern lay fully with the Haitians and he expressed this sentiment most poignantly in a letter of advice to a number of African Americans who had requested his opinion on the presidential canvass. Sumner claimed that Grant's actions towards Santo Domingo showed 'he cared nothing for the colored race', as he threatened the existence of Haiti 'with its eight hundred thousand blacks, engaged in the great experiment of self-government.'¹⁷⁶ Sumner believed the incident was 'a most instructive antecedent, revealing beyond question his true nature, and the whole is attested by documentary evidence.'¹⁷⁷ He then proceeded to recount his perception of events, in which he claimed:

Conceiving the idea of annexing Dominica, which is a Spanish part of the island, and shrinking at nothing, he began by seizing the war powers of the government, in flagrant violation of the constitution, and then at a great expenditure of money, sent several armed ships of the navy, including monitors, to maintain the usurper Baez in power, that he might obtain the coveted prize. Not contented with this dictatorship, he proceeded to strike at the independence of the black republic, in open menace of war, and all without the sanction of Congress, to which is committed the warmaking power.¹⁷⁸

Sumner illustrated his two-pronged objection to Grant's actions in this extract, which proceeds in the same vein as the letter continues. Human rights and sympathy for the African

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Charles Sumner to Heman Lincoln Chase, 20 July 1872.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Charles Sumner to Dr William H. Wormley and others, 29 July 1872.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

race strongly intertwined with concerns over the expansion of executive power, especially in foreign policy. Sumner contended that the militaristic Grant had usurped congressional powers, used those powers to support another usurper, and threatened a free republic: a threat, he believed, that would not have been made ‘to any white ruler’.¹⁷⁹ The fears of executive tyranny and the abuse of a weaker nation with a black population weighed heavily on Sumner and formed the basis of his principled opposition towards Grant. Propelled by a sense of honour, Sumner told one correspondent: ‘[a]s a servant of duty and a devotee of principle, I cannot accept Grant’.¹⁸⁰

Yet in public, Sumner seldom opposed the treaty on human rights grounds, preferring to attack Grant on issues which appealed to other senators – such as executive usurpation – and topics which appealed to popular belief about the President, especially his reputed drunkenness and corruption. Power was a central part of Sumner’s speech against annexation. At one point, the Senator declared that ‘[w]hen I think of all this accumulated power in those waters, those three war-vessels, with the patronage naturally incident in their presence, it is not astonishing that there is on the seaboard, immediately within their influence, a certain sentiment in favor of annexation.’¹⁸¹ Patronage, Sumner charged, had enabled the President to pursue his wishes in Santo Domingo. By surrounding himself with military men and personal friends, Grant, Sumner suggested, had bought unswerving allegiance to his presidency and could use the military tyrannically as a result. Sumner believed that Grant had degraded the presidency by allowing a ‘military spirit’ into government which submitted to him alone.¹⁸² The loyalty of these military men, Sumner argued, allowed Grant to abuse power. The misuse of executive power and the usurpation of congressional powers formed the basis of Sumner’s argument. Sumner was echoing the case against a Bonapartist Grant

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Charles Sumner to Mr Smith, 17 July 1872.

¹⁸¹ Sumner, *Works of Charles Sumner* Volume XIV, p. 108.

¹⁸² Sumner, *Republicanism vs. Grantism*, p. 5.

presidency made by the Democrats in 1868, but in his eyes, he was using the argument to preserve rather than destroy the advances towards racial equality made in the Civil War and Reconstruction.

The one term principle formed one part of Sumner's attempt to highlight the President's misrule. In his efforts to rid the Republican party of Grant, Sumner publicly attacked the President in two speeches – one in the Senate on 31 May 1872 and one in print in August 1872 (due to illness).¹⁸³ His Senate speech, given immediately prior to the Republican convention on 5-6 June 1872 in Philadelphia, tore into the President and his first administration's record. As he had been conspicuously absent from the Liberal Republican convention of May 1872, his position was of great interest in the political arena due to his influential position within the African-American community. The speech, entitled 'Republicanism versus Grantism', amounted to a vicious tirade against the President.¹⁸⁴ The Senator levelled myriad accusations against the President, claiming he had turned the presidency into a 'personal government' and a 'one man government'.¹⁸⁵ Sumner intended to deny Grant the Republican nomination and boasted afterwards that '[t]here will not be 3 states to vote for him'.¹⁸⁶

Sumner's principal biographer David Donald has labelled the speech as 'one of Sumner's poorest efforts'.¹⁸⁷ Containing little substance and much slander, Sumner alleged Grant had become 'autocratic', successfully converting the nation's republican government into a 'despotism' where 'nepotism' and 'gift-taking' became its main attributes.¹⁸⁸ Sumner claimed

¹⁸³ The first speech was entitled 'Republicanism vs. Grantism', which was printed in pamphlet form for wide distribution. The second speech was printed by the Liberal Republicans after Sumner was too ill to appear at Faneuil Hall to give it in person. See Charles Sumner, *The Presidential Election: Grant or Greeley?* (Boston, 1872), p. 2.

¹⁸⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Congress, 2nd session, pp. 4110-4122.

¹⁸⁵ Sumner, *Republicanism vs. Grantism*.

¹⁸⁶ Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, p. 548.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 549.

¹⁸⁸ Sumner, *Republicanism vs. Grantism*.

that '[i]n exhibiting this autocratic pretension, so revolutionary and unrepugnant in character. I mean to be moderate in language and to keep within the strictest bounds'.¹⁸⁹ Yet Sumner was anything but restrained.¹⁹⁰ His perception of Grant's misuse of power featured prominently in his accusations as he claimed the President treated his position 'as little more than a plaything'.¹⁹¹ In his attempt to portray Grant as unfit for the presidency, Sumner used every accusation ever voiced against Grant. Sumner even recounted Democratic slurs from 1868 which charged Grant was a Caesar.

These charges took root in a soil fertilised by the ongoing battle over Reconstruction. As a quasi-military occupation, Reconstruction raised many of the same issues as the annexation of Santo Domingo over the influence of the army. Sumner himself actually supported the further use of military power in the South. He backed the Enforcement Act of 1871 (also known as the Ku Klux Klan Act), which allowed Grant to bypass the States in prosecuting Klan outrages, and argued against the Liberal Republicans who accused the bill of perpetuating a 'despotism' and having no constitutional basis.¹⁹² Trumbull, for instance, said he would not sanctify the federal government interfering in the States 'against their authority', because, if given the power, the federal government (most likely referring to the President but not explicitly) would enforce 'despotism' and 'tyranny'.¹⁹³ Schurz, too, refused to support a measure which allowed the President to intervene 'in a State without the request of the Governor or the Legislature, when in his (the President's) opinion the State authorities do not enforce their own laws'.¹⁹⁴ He further contended that the Act contained 'the first step toward a doctrine of constructive treason' whereby the President could use his 'discretionary power' to suspend the writ of *habeas corpus* upon the slightest suspicion of 'conspiracy, with

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5

¹⁹² *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Congress, 1st session, p. 579.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 578-579.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 687.

the mere purpose and ability' by people in the States 'without having actually by overt act attempted to do any of them'.¹⁹⁵ Effectively the President could arbitrarily arrest men suspected of criminal activity towards African Americans without any evidence. This, they claimed, was despotism in its very essence, yet Sumner supported this great extension of presidential power.

Sumner shocked those in attendance during the Senate debate on the Enforcement Act when he countered both Liberal Republican and Democratic assertions of despotism by arguing that it was 'a just centralism ... a generous imperialism' which would allow the President to intervene in the states, 'for the safe-guard of rights national in character, and then only as the sunshine, with beneficent power, and like the sunshine, for the equal good of all.'¹⁹⁶ It illustrated Sumner's willingness to break all the rules, in regard to his fears and tyrannical conceptions of executive power, when the human rights of the African race were concerned: in a Senate speech from February 1869 he had announced '*anything for Human Rights is constitutional*.'¹⁹⁷ Yet Sumner failed to see the irony of his position, even when challenged by an abolitionist who asked him to consider '[i]f you weaken the confidence of the country ... in our President, will you not palsy the arm on which we depend to save life and liberty in the Southern States?'¹⁹⁸ Either Sumner hoped there would soon be a new president to implement this Act or he could not see the correlation between his efforts to hamper executive power and the effective protection of African-American civil rights.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, p. 517, and *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Congress, 1st session, p. 651.

¹⁹⁷ Charles Sumner, *The Works of Charles Sumner* Volume XIII (Boston, 1880), pp. 37-38.

¹⁹⁸ Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, p.520, and University of Sheffield Library: Charles Sumner MSS, Western Bank Library Wolfson Microfilm 509, Series 2, Reel 84, H. C. Ingersoll to Charles Sumner, 21 March 1871.

¹⁹⁹ His friends believed, at the time of his attack on Grant, that Sumner was gravely ill, and his illness was affecting his mental capabilities. They ensured that instead of campaigning for Greeley he departed for Europe to recover his health. See Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, pp. 554-555.

The abolitionist's question was a pertinent one. For the most serious charge Sumner raised – that of Caesarism – would have potent repercussions in later years. Sumner's influence ensured it carried weight, and it acquired a life of its own soon after he dropped it. The Senator accused Grant of 'breathing the military spirit, being a species of Caesarism or *personalism*' into the presidency.²⁰⁰ Here, he targeted Grant's appointment of military figures in his cabinet; this 'military ring', he alleged, would support the White House without question.²⁰¹ Caesarism, he contended, had allowed Grant to abuse and usurp power in his quest to acquire Santo Domingo, and had equipped him to act tyrannically towards both Congress and Haiti. Sumner's accusation implied that the military gave Grant the power to act as he wished, potentially allowing him to continue as president indefinitely. The Caesarism accusations were tied to Sumner's allegations of nepotism. Sumner gave a long history of nepotism which begun in ancient Rome, moved to Britain, and subsequently crossed the Atlantic to America. He accused Grant of using nepotism to a greater extent than any other president. Untold numbers of Grant's relatives had received patronage positions, the Senator insisted, yet Sumner's inability to account for all these family members undermined his claim.²⁰² Still, Sumner argued that Grant's system of choosing his cabinet constituted 'good rules unquestionably for the organization of a household and the choice of domestics', but rather less useful ones for running a republican administration.²⁰³ Summarising his accusations, he alleged that – with the exception of George Washington and Andrew Jackson – military men were unsuitable for the presidency.²⁰⁴ This suggestion, grounded in republican suspicions of military rule, would fuel fears of executive power and the danger of maintaining a large peacetime army; by attacking these aspects of federal government Sumner, unwittingly, threatened the foundations of Reconstruction.

²⁰⁰ Sumner, *Republicanism vs. Grantism*, p. 5.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5, and 'The Military Ring', *Harper's Weekly*, 23 March 1872.

²⁰² Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, p. 549.

²⁰³ Sumner, *Republicanism vs. Grantism*, pp. 15-19.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Sumner's principled stance, which fused his desire for racial equality with his worries that untrammelled executive power in Grant's hands would lead to the very opposite, would be misunderstood by his contemporaries who interpreted it as simply 'disappointed malice'.²⁰⁵ Several Republican senators took to the floor of the Senate to refute Sumner's allegations in the succeeding days. They denounced Sumner's speech as 'brutal,' 'vile,' and 'malignant', and suggested it cast 'aspersion', 'falsification' and 'slander' upon the President.²⁰⁶ John A. Logan, a Grant supporter from Illinois, accused both Sumner and Schurz of supporting a cause 'so weak to-day before the land that they must vomit forth their venom on the heads of at least as good men I will say as they are themselves, and no time can be afforded in Congress for a reply to it, be it so.'²⁰⁷ Another party man, Roscoe Conkling of New York, called the speech 'an unjust and bitter speech aimed at another ... an effort full of joy for his enemies—full of sorrow for his friends.'²⁰⁸ James Flanagan of Texas urged Grant 'to stand firm against the internal foes who have tried to pour their fire upon him'.²⁰⁹ He offered further support when in response to allegations of nepotism, he claimed that 'if I was President of the United States, and I had a thousand relatives who were worthy I would bring them in every one, and help them as far as I could, but I would hold them to a strict responsibility.'²¹⁰ It was both an illustration of how widespread nepotism was within senators' distribution of offices and evidence of the lengths loyal Republicans would go to defend their chief against accusations they believed were without evidence.

Just as loyal congressmen rose in support of the President, so did the loyal Republican press. A Republican Ohioan newspaper claimed Sumner had merely repeated the slanders 'run for months by the Democratic Press, and a few Republicans who have allowed their personal

²⁰⁵ 'Sumner and Grant', *Boston Daily Globe*, 3 June 1872.

²⁰⁶ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Congress, 2nd Session, p. 4155.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4153.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4150.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

hostility to isolated acts of the administration to warp their judgement, and lead them to condemn it as a whole.²¹¹ The paper accused Sumner of producing ‘the stale charges of nepotism, ignoring the fact that it has been proved beyond cavil that the President has not erred in this respect to a greater extent than nearly all our public men’.²¹² Another newspaper mocked the suggestion of using the speech as a Democratic electioneering document stating ‘Sumner’s speech would disgust any honest Democrat.’²¹³

Even supporters of Sumner’s speech did not understand much of its substance. The Democratic anti-Reconstruction *Atlanta Constitution*, though pleased with the assault on the President, could not comprehend Sumner’s attacks on military reconstruction which upheld African-American civil rights.²¹⁴ As a vigorous supporter of the military in the South, Sumner’s attack on this aspect of the President’s Reconstruction policies made little sense. Democratic newspapers heralded the speech with great mirth: the *Constitution* described how Sumner ‘nabbed Grant as we have seen a vicious terrier clutch a rat, and the way he used him was terrier all over.’²¹⁵ It reflected with unbridled glee on its substance and declared that these points were but ‘a portion of the sugar-plums showered with a lavish hand over this portion of this robustious [*sic*] denunciation.’²¹⁶ The *New York Sun* (now Democratic) wrote that though the accusations were not new ‘they have never before been summed up in so impressive a manner or presented with historical illustrations so instructive and so forcible.’²¹⁷ The *New York World*, too, rejoiced that such allegations ‘from a man whose

²¹¹ ‘Sumner Against Grant’, *Findlay Jeffersonian* (Findlay, Hancock County, Ohio), 7 June 1872.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Belmont Chronicle*, 20 June 1872.

²¹⁴ ‘Sumner on Grant’, *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 June 1872.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* See also “‘Our Smokey Caesar’”, *The Charleston Daily News*, 4 June 1872; ‘Mr Sumner’s Speech’, *The New York Sun*, 3 June 1872; ‘A Terrible Arraignment of the Administration’, *The Daily Phoenix* (Columbia, South Carolina), 4 June 1872.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* See also a Democratic Ohio newspaper which assiduously kept Sumner’s speech in the press: ‘Gems From Sumner’s Last’, *The Democratic Press* (Ravenna, Ohio), 27 June 1872. Another Democratic Ohioan newspaper which clearly enjoyed Sumner’s speech was *The Spirit of Democracy*. See ‘The Military Family Fluttering’ and ‘Senator Sumner’s Speech’, *The Spirit of Democracy*, 11 June 1872.

²¹⁷ ‘Mr Sumner’s Speech’, *The New York Sun*, 3 June 1872

biography is the history of the Republican party, will carry conviction where Democratic voices would pass as idle wind.’²¹⁸

But in 1872 the intensity of Sumner’s attack negated much of its influence. By levelling too many accusations at Grant – and denying the administration’s achievements – Sumner obscured the real concerns, held by many, over the use of executive power and its potential tyranny. Even Liberal Republican newspapers balked at the charges stating ‘that Sumner’s portrait was ‘drawn in such colors that ... the people will reject it as a truthful representation of General Grant’s character’’.²¹⁹ ‘Mr Sumner has consulted rather his resentments and prejudices than his judgement’, concluded the *New York Evening Post*, which lamented that his attack did ‘not assail the administration in its more vulnerable places’.²²⁰ The Republican *New York Times* alleged that Sumner’s friends ‘were disappointed and embarrassed at the exhibition ... and some of them [had] advised him never to make it.’²²¹ The speech failed to achieve its aim: Grant received unanimous re-nomination from the 1872 Republican convention.

Yet Sumner espoused real fears about the expansion of presidential power. The danger of Caesarism in particular would arise again the following year in a series of editorials written by a supporter of Grant.²²² The Liberal Republican championing of the one term principle in the 1872 presidential election illustrated these fears. The issue was chosen by the Liberal Republicans as a central plank of their platform and they rallied behind their candidate –

²¹⁸ ‘New York – The Press on Sumner’s Speech’, *Whig and Tribune* (Jackson, Tennessee), 15 June 1872.

²¹⁹ Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, p. 549. See also *Springfield Republican*, 1 June and 2 June 1872; and ‘Mr Sumner’s Tirade’, *New York Evening Post*, 3 June 1872.

²²⁰ ‘Mr Sumner’s Tirade’, *New York Evening Post*, 3 June 1872.

²²¹ ‘Washington News’, *New York Times*, 1 June 1872.

²²² I say ‘supporter of Grant’ because the author, John Russell Young, initially attempted to separate the dangers of the office from the current incumbent, whom he had supported before. Later editorials, however, do implicate Grant. However, it is clear from Young’s accompaniment of Grant on his world tour that he remained an admirer of the former president, despite his fears of future presidential tyranny. His collection of Grant autographs in his personal papers (at the Library of Congress) certainly suggests that he retained a favourable opinion of the President.

Horace Greeley – partly as a result of his keenness to endorse the measure.²²³ Carl Schurz, in particular, backed Greeley principally because he supported a term limit.²²⁴ Schurz told Greeley that civil service reform was ‘of great interest’ when sounding him out on policy.²²⁵ He asked Greeley of ‘how the problem of civil-service reform presents itself to [his] mind’ after he announced support for the issue ‘in general terms’ in his acceptance letter of the nomination.²²⁶ Greeley’s response would form the substance of a campaign speech by Schurz which linked the candidate to the reform.²²⁷ In his letter, Greeley had confirmed his belief that the problem with patronage originated with ‘the eligibility of our President to reelection [*sic*]’; this, he affirmed, was ‘the main source’ of this corruption.²²⁸ ‘Let it be settled that a President is not to be reelected [*sic*] while in office,’ Greeley stated, ‘and Civil Service Reform is no longer difficult.’²²⁹ The president, Greeley believed, was the real culprit in circumventing reform, though he also saw the necessity of examinations for candidates.²³⁰ For Schurz, this confirmation was evidence enough for him to pronounce his support for Greeley.

Greeley had a lifelong commitment to the one term principle and he had heartily endorsed Sumner’s amendment.²³¹ His support originated from the belief that the executive through patronage could ‘coerce a renomination’ by leaving a man in a patronage position unable to support another candidate lest ‘he seals his own official death-warrant’ due to ‘hostility to the

²²³ Library of Congress: Carl Schurz MSS, Reel 8, Carl Schurz to E. L. Godkin, 23 June 1872 sent from Pittsburgh; Carl Schurz to Horace Greeley, 26 June 1872 sent from St. Louis, Missouri; and Horace Greeley to Carl Schurz, 8 July 1872 sent from New York. These letters indicate the basis upon which Schurz chose to support Greeley’s nomination, but the basis for others support can be seen in Schurz’s correspondence after the Liberal Republican convention through the months of May, June and July 1872 in the same reel.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, Carl Schurz to Horace Greeley, 26 June 1872 sent from St. Louis, Missouri, and Horace Greeley to Carl Schurz, 8 July 1872 sent from New York.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, Carl Schurz to Horace Greeley, 26 June 1872 sent from St. Louis, Missouri.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, Carl Schurz to E. L. Godkin, 23 June 1872 sent from Pittsburgh, and Horace Greeley to Carl Schurz, 8 July 1872 sent from New York.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, Horace Greeley to Carl Schurz, 8 July 1872 sent from New York.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ ‘Presidential Speculations’, *New York Tribune*, 31 January 1872. See also ‘Washington’, *New York Tribune*, 22 December 1872.

Administration'.²³² Patronage, in his view, bound men to the incumbent president as strongly as a slave was bound to his master.²³³ It was clear that Greeley fervently supported the one term principle and had not, with the exception of Lincoln, wavered in his support.²³⁴ While he may have disagreed with Liberals on other matters – not least free trade – here he was perfectly in accordance with their views. Their republican fear of executive power appeared in the fifth plank of the Liberal Republican platform. The plank stated:

The Civil Service of the Government has become a mere instrument of partisan tyranny and personal ambition, and an object of selfish greed. It is a scandal and a reproach upon free institutions, and breeds a demoralization dangerous to the perpetuity of republican government. We therefore regard such thorough reforms of the Civil Service as one of the most pressing necessities of the hour; that honor, capacity, and fidelity constitute the only valid claim to public employment; that the offices of the Government cease to be a matter of arbitrary favoritism and patronage, and that public station become again a post of honor. To this end it is imperatively required that no President shall be a candidate for re-election.²³⁵

Here, the Liberal Republicans read Grant's own understanding of republicanism which entailed independence from party as corruption. The President's desire to act above-party ironically made him more open to accusations of unrepublican aggrandisement. The phrase 'arbitrary favoritism' illustrated the Liberal Republicans' inability to understand how Grant dispensed patronage.²³⁶ These men perceived the President's desire to keep patronage appointments above the political fray and award positions on the basis of his perception of

²³² 'One Presidential Term', *New York Tribune*, 15 April 1872.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ 'Presidential Speculations', *New York Tribune*, 31 January 1872

²³⁵ *Proceedings of the Liberal Republican Convention, in Cincinnati 1st, 2d, and 3d, 1872* (New York, 1872) p. 20.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

the candidates' merits as either disregarding political etiquette (in the case of disappointed partisans) or Caesarism and nepotism (in the case of those who feared a despotic White House). Grant used the presidency as he wished ignoring recent precedent: Sumner called it his 'plaything'.²³⁷ An independent president was not the weak executive which many historians have seen in the Grant administration, but rather a strong presidency, which, if left unchecked, could act tyrannically.

The prominence of power in all these arguments over civil service reform and the one term principle was conspicuous. It did not escape many Americans – especially the newspapers – that Sumner (who joined the new party in August 1872 after he published another venomous attack on Grant) and the Liberal Republicans sought to remove power from the President but not from their own hands.²³⁸ The power to elect or re-elect a president had been the prerogative of the people since the 1820s, yet Sumner in his one term amendment – and throughout Grant's first administration – had sought, as the *Cleveland Morning Herald* so succinctly described the one term amendment, to abrogate power to Congress by controlling the executive and preventing reforms which would limit congressional power: '[n]othing more completely shows the arbitrary rule of party than this very suppression of public opinion', the paper argued.²³⁹ The division of the Republican Party in the 1872 election and the Liberal Republican championing of the one term principle illustrated this 'arbitrary rule of party'.²⁴⁰ The one term principle sought to prevent misuse of executive power whilst failing to acknowledge that fidelity to party could be as tyrannical as the President's independence from party. Some at least in the press did not miss this point.²⁴¹

²³⁷ Sumner, *Republicanism vs. Grantism*, p. 5.

²³⁸ Sumner, *The Presidential Election*.

²³⁹ *Cleveland Morning Herald*, 26 September 1871.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ *Ibid.* See also *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, 29 September 1871, and 'Horace Greeley's Game', *Holmes Country Republican* (Millersburg, Holmes County, Ohio), 15 February 1872.

Conclusion

The one term principle illustrated that republican anxieties over the strength of the executive branch, especially in relation to the enlarged patronage, continued under Grant's administration to the detriment of Reconstruction. Fears of despotism caused by the President's independence ensured the continuation of battles over presidential power which had raged since the outbreak of the Civil War. The fight over constricting executive power showed that Johnson's near-conviction by the Senate on impeachment charges had not dampened fears of a strong White House: these were embedded within republican ideology which cautioned of the necessity to guard liberty vigilantly. Grant's independence – which reminded critics of Johnson's actions – concerned Republicans like Sumner. Their accusations of tyranny proved powerful, especially when levelled by influential (and principled) Republicans. By undermining presidential power, these men hindered the President's ability to exercise his prerogatives. Symbolic as the one term amendment may have been – and limited though Sumner's speeches against 'Grantism' might have proved in their immediate impact – they had practical implications for Grant's power.

By accusing Grant of tyranny and pushing for the one term principle, the Liberal Republicans fuelled concerns over executive power by implying that the President had abused and usurped power. They contributed to the groundwork laid by the Democrats in the 1868 presidential election by giving some credibility to fears over the undefined limits of executive power. Essentially, these Republicans alerted their fellow Americans of the need to be wary of Grant's use of power and his potential to abuse it, which would come to the fore when Grant pursued unprecedented actions in pursuit of justice to the newly enfranchised African Americans.

This contrasts starkly with the existing picture of Grant's presidency in Reconstruction historiography. The principle indicates a different conception of Grant's presidency and shows how his role in Reconstruction has been misunderstood. Grant's attempts to redefine the presidency by acting independently and refusing to appoint leading Republican politicians to his cabinet fuelled exaggerated concerns over executive power. His independence showed a willingness to conduct his administration upon his own rules and not the wishes of Congress. His actions – backed up by his strong personal popularity among the electorate – threatened to create a much stronger White House than historians have observed. The independent, antipartisan President, backed by loyal patronage appointees, was perceived as a threat to the safety of the republic. The model republican had the potential to be a tyrant.

By accusing Grant of un-republican activities Sumner inflamed existing fears of presidential power and impeded future efforts to use executive power to protect African-American civil rights. Sumner seemed to realise his mistake when allegations of Caesarism surfaced the following year; then, he remained conspicuously quiet throughout the debate. It is small consolation – and probably unknown to Grant – that in the months before Sumner's death he informed a fellow Massachusetts Congressman that he had been wrong about Grant.²⁴² Yet the republican fear of aggregated power which motivated the principled Sumner to oppose Grant would hinder the Reconstruction Sumner wanted.

²⁴² Anna L. Dawes, *Charles Sumner* (New York, 1892), p. 316.

‘Even now we have all the tyranny and despotism of an empire, with the outward forms and semblance of a republic’:

Caesarism and the Third Term Movement 1873

A few months after the inauguration of President Ulysses S. Grant for his second term, the *New York Herald*, one of the country’s most popular and influential newspapers, published a series of editorials whose reverberations were still being felt years later. On 5 July 1873, during the dry days of the congressional recess, the newspaper printed the first piece in a series named Caesarism, or the Third Term Movement as it was sometimes called. The *Herald* warned its readers over the course of six days of the dangers of the power of the executive office and how – in the wrong hands – it could lead to despotism.¹ It lectured its readership on the fallibility of the country’s Constitution and how – unlike European countries, such as France and Spain – Congress was unable to control or overthrow a dictator, citing (rather dubiously) the case of the un-convictable tyrant President Andrew Johnson as evidence. The author – a well-respected journalist and former editor of the *New York Tribune* John Russell Young – suggested the solution to the problems of executive power resided in the one term principle that Charles Sumner had advocated prior to the 1872 election.²

The editorials have been dismissed as a hoax invented to drum up newspaper sales in a slow news season by the only historian to explore them, but the response to the articles in the press indicated that they drew upon real fears of presidential power which were increasingly

¹ The first editorial appeared on Saturday 5 July 1873 but the rest continued publication from Monday 7 July 1873 even though the newspaper had just launched a Sunday edition. However, the Sunday edition tended to be a summary of the week’s news, which led the owner – James Gordon Bennett Jr. – to publish the second article on Monday instead.

² The editorials themselves were published without mention of the author’s name which led to much speculation over their provenance. Many newspapers mentioned Young’s name in connection with the editorials (and some were certain of his complicity) but in 1873 none could verify their suspicions. However, his authorship was revealed in his autobiography (published posthumously and subsequently edited by his wife). The *New York Herald* in 1912 also re-published shortened versions of the articles complete with Young’s picture in the middle of the spread.

prevalent since the outbreak of the Civil War.³ By exploring the newspaper reaction to the editorials this chapter intends to illustrate how the coverage, though initially greeted with ridicule, heightened anxieties over the growth of presidential power when support for a third term for Grant was raised in response. These concerns led to a discussion in the press over the dangers of the ever-expanding powers of the executive office and exacerbated worries over the future of the republic. The response by the press to the *Herald's* articles illustrates that unease existed over the apparently boundless powers of the President and that many Americans contemplated whether these powers threatened the very safety of the nation's liberty.

Although initially dismissed by some as sensationalist nonsense, the editorials had roots in real fears of executive power that had increased dramatically since the outbreak of the Civil War. Though not a Liberal Republican supporter, Young had concerns over the abuse of federal power, and in particular, the arbitrary application of patronage by the President, which he had discussed in his own newspaper, the *New York Standard*, which had since ceased publication.⁴ As the last chapter showed, warnings over the power of the presidency had been raised during the 1872 presidential election by the Liberal Republicans, who charged Grant with abuse of the patronage system for personal gain. In particular, the late Liberal Republican convert Charles Sumner played a central role in fighting fears of 'Grantism'.⁵ In advocating his own one term amendment, Sumner coined the phrase 'Caesarism', which

³ Summers, *The Press Gang*, pp. 268-278. Summers also wrote about Caesarism in his book: *The Era of Good Stealings*, pp. 249-253. Caesarism also appears in his newest book, albeit attributed to the wrong year (1874). See Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, pp. 357-358, 375. Summers has never named John Russell Young as the author of the editorials – and his bibliographies do not include Young's autobiography – which makes it difficult to say whether he knew Young was the author. In all likelihood, the lack of the authorship from his works suggests he did not. No other historian exploring Grant has examined, or mentioned, the Caesarism editorials from 1873 in their works. However, H. W. Brands, in the latest biography of Grant, briefly mentions Sumner's accusation of Caesarism in the 1872 presidential election. See Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union*, pp. 495-497.

⁴ 'Mr Jenckes' Civil Service Bill', *New York Standard*, 4 May 1870; and 'The Defeat and Its Cause', *New York Standard*, 19 May 1870.

⁵ Sumner, *Republicanism vs. Grantism*.

spoke to concerns over the number of military men given patronage appointments by the White House.⁶ The Senator believed these men – who were loyal to their commander – enabled the President to use undemocratic means to carry out his personal plans: most notably the proposed annexation of Santo Domingo.⁷ Though Grant saw himself (not without reason) as simply enforcing a strict republican separation of powers, his antiparty stance accumulated power in the executive office, and restricted congressional influence. This, in turn, heightened fears of an aggrandizing presidency: a familiar concern in the Civil War era. The election of the model republican had not diminished republican fears of executive tyranny.

The White House's reaction to the post-election situation in Louisiana particularly troubled those anxious about executive power. Reconstruction politics in Louisiana had rarely been peaceful but the election results of 1872 had further deteriorated democratic politics in the state. The elections were marred by voter fraud and intimidation, and as one historian has noted, 'ballot-box stuffing, ballot-box vanishing acts, [and] secret polling places' were common place.⁸ The disputed election returns saw the returning board split and declare victory for both parties, which encouraged the rival factions to inaugurate their own officers throughout the state.⁹ Violence gripped Louisiana as each party struggled for dominance, and the contest culminated in the Colfax Massacre of 13 April 1873, when a fierce battle raged between white conservatives and black Republicans for control of the parish.¹⁰ The battle ended in the deaths of three white men and between seventy to one hundred African Americans.¹¹ In the aftermath, the assailants were arrested and the disputed election results

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War*, p. 131.

⁹ Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, p. 171.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, and Joel M. Sipress, 'From the Barrel of a Gun: The Politics of Murder in Grant Parish', *Louisiana History* 42.3 (2001), pp. 303-305.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

referred to Congress.¹² However, Congress adjourned without decision leaving the issue for the President to adjudicate.¹³ In May 1873, Grant ruled that the Republicans had won the election and supported the new Governor with federal troops.¹⁴ Despite the difficulty of the situation and the loss of life, the President's intervention gave the impression of executive tyranny: the usurpation of state power, congressional power, or both.¹⁵

White House interventions in state politics therefore stoked fears of executive power and vividly reminded political observers of the most recent usurper of the republic: Andrew Johnson. Observers worried that Grant's action in Louisiana marked an executive coup made possible by the powers he had accrued and the patronage he had to dispense. Moreover, there were suggestions that Grant already planned a third presidential term. Grant's campaign manager in Virginia – former Confederate Colonel John S. Mosby – had announced around the time of the President's inauguration that he would support Grant in 1876.¹⁶ The seemingly arbitrary use of power in Louisiana and the suggestion of a third term proved alarming coincidences for republican citizens who were alert to threats to their liberty.

If on the one hand the Caesarism scare stoked these fears of a permanent presidency, they also hinted at concerns about the workings of American democracy. Indeed the two issues were not disconnected. As historians like Sven Beckert have noted, opposition to universal suffrage was on the rise among the Northern upper-class in the 1870s.¹⁷ Public figures, among them some Liberal Republicans, believed less educated or property-less voters could

¹² Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*, pp. 114-120

¹³ Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, p. 171.

¹⁴ John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 23: 1 February – 31 December 1872 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 2000), p. xii.

¹⁵ Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War*, p. 138.

¹⁶ 'Virginia Journalists on the Subject', *New York Herald*, 15 August 1873.

¹⁷ Sven Beckert, 'Democracy and its Discontents: Contesting Suffrage Rights in Gilded Age New York', *Past and Present*, 174.1 (2002), p. 116. See also Sven Beckert, *Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 218-224; and Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York, 2009), pp. 94-138.

not be trusted to use their suffrage sensibly.¹⁸ Charles Francis Adams, for example, claimed that ‘[u]niversal suffrage can only mean in plain English the government of ignorance and vice’.¹⁹ Such figures advocated for a reduction of elected men in favour of appointed men, and ‘educational and property qualifications for voting’.²⁰ The prospect of Grant using his immense personal popularity to win office for a third time from an ignorant electorate unaware of the consequences of their decisions troubled critics of the President. Grant here could appear like other ‘demagogues’, not least the New York Democratic political boss William M. Tweed, who had, in his opponents’ eyes, used popular issues and monetary bribes to mobilise an easily-swayed people.²¹ Caesar himself, after all, had supposedly destroyed the Roman Republic through winning the support of the mob.

The response to the Caesarism editorials epitomised these underlying fears of executive power and democracy during Reconstruction. Initially, Republican newspapers treated the editorials with derision, with journals calling them the ‘third-term babble’, and ‘a bugaboo’ or ‘bugbear’.²² Some Republican newspapers even wrote their own pieces of sensationalist ridicule to mock the *Herald*’s suggestions. See for example, an editorial by Melville Landon – better known as the humorist Eli Perkins – in the *New York Daily Graphic* which was reprinted in many newspapers, including the popular *Atlanta Constitution*.²³ Landon’s satirical article depicted Grant as a Roman warrior who took pleasure in summary executions, human sacrifice and cannibalism.²⁴ Others cautioned that although a third term was not inimical to the future of the republic – and an amendment unnecessary – they opposed such a

¹⁸ Beckert, ‘Democracy and its Discontents’, p. 123.

¹⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 497.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 492.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 490-492, 497.

²² *Western Reserve Chronicle* (Warren, Ohio), 23 July 1873; ‘The Third-Term Babble’, *Andrew County Republican* (Savannah, Missouri) 22 August 1873 (some dedicated Republican newspapers continued to claim the editorials were a scam long after some Republican newspapers declared their support for the third term); and ‘“Caesarism.”’, *Juniata Sentinel*, (Mifflintown, Pennsylvania) 23 July 1873.

²³ ‘Eli Perkins on Caesarism’, *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 September 1873.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

possibility. Only Grant's opponents took the warnings seriously: Democratic and Liberal Republican newspapers warned of impending doom for the republic if Grant served a third term. However, the debate changed when a few influential Republican newspapers declared their support for the third term in late July 1873. Immediately, the response transformed into a discussion of the dangers of such an eventuality. Humour and ridicule gave way to real anxieties as even Republican newspapers began pointing towards Louisiana for evidence of the administration's undemocratic use of executive power, and the possibility of further abuse if Grant was elected a third time. The response to the Republican support for an unprecedented third presidential term illuminated the genuine concerns many Americans held about the reach of the federal government and presidential power during Reconstruction.

The transformation of the discussion illustrated that even if the editorials were simply a hoax intended to fill the dry news season, real concerns over the extent of presidential power shaped Reconstruction politics long after Johnson's near-conviction on impeachment charges. The Caesarism scare highlighted the treacherous path the White House had to tread in protecting civil rights without falling foul of accusations of tyranny. As long as Republicans and Democrats feared the centralizing tendencies of the presidency, any attempt to use the presidency to enforce Reconstruction risked diminishing the White House's political capital. In 1868, Democrats Horatio Seymour and Frank P. Blair had tried to bring Grant down in that manner; in 1872, it was the unlikely figure of the committed advocate of black equality, Sumner. A year later Caesarism played the same role.

The Republic in Peril

John Russell Young was an unlikely man to have been behind the Caesarism scare. In April 1870, he had begun his own newspaper – the Republican *New York Standard* – but due to poor sales it folded in 1872, and Young joined the staff of the *New York Herald*. Young

certainly admired Grant in the early days of his presidency, having compared his repute to George Washington, and he supported the White House's quixotic bid to annex Santo Domingo when other Republicans wavered.²⁵ But in the *Standard*, Young had expressed concerns over 'legislative corruption' and patronage allocation.²⁶ It is possible, though, that Grant's intervention in Louisiana left him troubled by the grasp of the executive on power, especially the power to direct Reconstruction. His editorials in his own paper attest to his concerns about corruption and his awareness of the ability of the executive to control and influence politics. It is difficult to know for sure as Young's personal papers do not mention Caesarism and his autobiography simply claims the idea belonged to *Herald* publisher James Gordon Bennett Junior who assigned the project to him.²⁷ To what extent Young's wife (who finished the book) edited this segment is unknown, but in a letter to two congressmen Young defended his honourable intentions in writing the editorials by stating his loyalty to Grant: a point he made in the editorials themselves.²⁸ His motivations for accepting the commission – which was dreamt up by Bennett in conversation with a group of Americans in Paris – remain obscure too, but Young appears to have been a principled man and it is not unreasonable to conclude that the sentiments expressed in the articles reflected his genuine concerns.²⁹

Voicing fears of executive power and patronage, the articles explored the position of the president in the nation's history, by describing how powerful and dangerous this one man could be for the country. The first two editorials discussed how the country's most popular Presidents – George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln – had exercised extraordinary powers well beyond the remit allowed in other republican

²⁵ 'The Defeat and Its Cause', *New York Standard*, 19 May 1870.

²⁶ 'Mr Jenckes' Civil Service Bill', *New York Standard*, 4 May 1870.

²⁷ See Library of Congress: John Russell Young MSS and May D. Russell Young (ed.), *Men and Memories: Personal Reminiscences* (New York and London, 1901), pp. 212-214.

²⁸ Young (ed.), *Men and Memories*, pp. 212-214.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

countries, and had encountered no checks on their use of these powers.³⁰ Young ventured that Congress remained ineffectual in its ability to counter such might, which led to eras named after the powerful man who controlled and influenced them.³¹ He argued this constituted a dangerous precedent, and illustrated the delicate nature of the country's political order, which was further compromised by the never-ending stream of men seeking patronage, wealth, and honours.³² The paper warned that this political system remained open to abuse by an unprincipled figure, and history had shown that Congress was ill-equipped to deal with such threats to the republic.³³

The *Herald*, picking up on Sumner's concerns of a few months earlier, cautioned that the open-ended nature of re-election was a potent feature of American politics, and warned that calamities would befall the country if Grant secured a third term. Though Young stated his belief that Grant would not abuse the country's republican heritage, he asserted that plenty of men could not be trusted with the power of the presidency. He warned that Reconstruction and the retention of a sizeable peacetime army made the government particularly susceptible to a potential third term candidate. His suggestion implied recent events had shown that the President had too much power vested within his office which needed controlling for the safety of the republic. Young claimed that the unwritten precedent was not a sufficient

³⁰ John Russell Young, 'New Lines of Political Departure-How History Repeats Itself-What is the issue of the Future?', *New York Herald*, 5 July 1873; and John Russell Young, 'What We May Learn from the Old World-The War Against Caesarism in France and Spain-Have We a Republican Form of Government?', *The New York Herald*, 7 July 1873. For the absence of checks on the president's power, see John Russell Young, 'The Presidential Office—Is it Consistent with True Republicanism?—The Danger of Caesarism.', *New York Herald*, Tuesday 8 July 1873.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Young, 'The Presidential Office—Is it Consistent with True Republicanism?—The Danger of Caesarism.', *New York Herald*, Tuesday 8 July 1873.

³³ *Ibid.* See also Young, 'New Lines of Political Departure-How History Repeats Itself-What is the issue of the Future?', *New York Herald*, 5 July 1873; Young, 'What We May Learn from the Old World-The War Against Caesarism in France and Spain-Have We a Republican Form of Government?', *The New York Herald*, 7 July 1873; John Russell Young, 'Sentimental Issues in Our Politics—Graver Questions Than Suffrage or Protection—The Apathy and Silence of the Republican Party', *The New York Herald*, 9 July 1873; John Russell Young, 'General Grant's Power and Opportunity—Let Him Build a Vendome Column of Peace—The Country Demanding a Generous Policy', 10 July 1873; and John Russell Young, 'The Mission of the Press in Our Politics-The Meaning of the New Departure-The Spirit of Caesarism Pervading Our Public Life.', *The New York Herald*, 11 July 1873.

safeguard: it would not do to ‘depend upon the patriotism of one man for freedom.’³⁴ He suggested that the time was right for the one term principle to be enshrined in the Constitution.

The only historian to explore in-depth the Caesarism editorials – Mark W. Summers – has argued they were a creation of the *Herald* to increase sales during the congressional recess.³⁵ His claim is built on the *Herald*’s appetite for sensationalist articles which proved popular with its readership.³⁶ A well-known independent newspaper that had leaned Democratic in the 1860s under James Gordon Bennett Senior, it became under his son – James Gordon Bennett Junior – an independent again from 1869 and attacked both parties during the 1872 presidential election.³⁷ Bennett Junior favoured creating news rather than merely reporting it, as for example in his financing of an expedition to Africa in 1871 to find the famous explorer Dr Livingstone.³⁸ Yet part of the impetus for the Caesarism editorials rested with the paper’s foreign correspondent and known Grant-supporter Young.³⁹ His desire, at first, to separate the incumbent from the office in his warnings of executive power implied genuine concerns over the presidency itself.⁴⁰ The timing of the articles – over a month after Grant’s Louisiana decision – also suggested that, far from sensationalist scaremongering, they were a studied response to fears of executive power.

Moreover, the response of the majority of newspapers to the editorials, surveyed over a period of five months, suggests that the expansion of presidential power to enforce

³⁴ Young, ‘What We May Learn from the Old World-The War Against Caesarism in France and Spain-Have We a Republican Form of Government?’, *The New York Herald*, 7 July 1873.

³⁵ Summers, *The Press Gang*, pp. 268-278. See also Summers, *The Era of Good Stealings*, pp. 249-253; and Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, pp. 357-358, 375.

³⁶ James L. Crouthamel, *Bennett’s New York Herald and the Rise of the Popular Press* (Syracuse, 1989), pp. 23-27.

³⁷ Summers, *The Press Gang*, p. 268; and Joseph I. C. Clarke, *My Life and Memories* (New York, 1925), pp. 131-132.

³⁸ Clarke, *My Life and Memories*, pp. 145-148.

³⁹ Young (ed.), *Men and Memories*, p. 214.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 212-214, and Young, ‘New Lines of Political Departure-How History Repeats Itself-What is the issue of the Future?’, *New York Herald*, 5 July 1873.

Reconstruction remained a concern for a significant portion of the American public. The scenario replicated another incident only a few years earlier, in 1869, when several satirists created a fictional newspaper which expounded on the merits of monarchism.⁴¹ Though intended as a joke, the publication of the newspaper resulted in serious contemplation of the satirists' suggestions by some sections of the American public, especially former Confederates.⁴² As Andrew Heath has highlighted, these Southerners, fearing what they saw as 'a majoritarian tyranny' aided and abetted by their former property, believed monarchy provided a solution to the protection of their former positions.⁴³ Surprised by the interest in their venture, the founders continued their 'prank' for several months.⁴⁴ Saliently, the response to the newspaper – called *The Imperialist* – indicated that the possibility of monarchism in the United States 'was far from unimaginable to readers.'⁴⁵

Caesarism, on the classical model, rested on the idea that democratic or republican government gave way to a more or less benevolent dictatorship.⁴⁶ The response indicated that the possibility of monarchism subsuming the United States occupied enough minds for *The Imperialist* to be taken seriously. Even former President Johnson lent his support to this belief during the Caesarism scare when he told a reporter that '[t]he tendency of affairs is certainly toward a third term, if not a monarchy' before ending his discussion of Caesarism with a direct quotation from *The Imperialist*: '[t]he magnificent destiny of this nation is predetermined and inevitable, and it is borne to empire on the resistless current of fate.'⁴⁷ Indeed a more serious publication also disturbed many Americans over the tyrannical use of executive power. The *American Bastille* written by John A. Marshall and first published in

⁴¹ Heath, "“Let the Empire Come”", *Civil War History*, pp. 152-189.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 152-156.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁴⁶ Peter Baehr, *Caesar and the Fading of the Roman World: A Study in Republicanism and Caesarism* (New Brunswick, 1998), pp. 285-287.

⁴⁷ Paul H. Bergeron (ed.), *The Papers of Andrew Johnson* Volume 16, May 1869-July 1875 (Knoxville, 2000), pp. 444-449.

1869 detailed the history of unlawful arrests by Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War.⁴⁸ A convention held in New York in February 1868 had voted for Marshall to write the history of those detained and imprisoned without *habeas corpus* so a record would be available of this part of the nation's past.⁴⁹ The book aimed to inform Americans of the extent to which 'their rights' had 'lately been trampled upon, and their liberties disregarded', so another incident of this kind could be avoided.⁵⁰

Talk of Emperors and Bastilles highlighted concerns regarding the fragility of the nation which had beset the country since the outbreak of the Civil War. Another historian, Gregory P. Downs, has also explored these anxieties, which were sometimes espoused in the discourse of 'Mexicanization'.⁵¹ Many Americans feared the war had left the nation too frail to withstand further fragmentation through conflicts like the battle of legitimacy in Louisiana.⁵² The discussions, which became widespread after the disputed election of 1876, highlighted concerns that the republic was on the road to ruin, brought down by corrupt, power-hungry politicians.⁵³ Crisis points in the nation's stability, such as the events in Louisiana, seemed to reveal citizens' inability to govern themselves, which in turn spurred both hopes and fears that a Caesar would rise to power to hold the Union together. In this context the Caesarism scare – whatever the motives of Bennett Junior and Young – should be taken seriously. Years after Johnson's impeachment, indeed, the presidency still seemed the most likely seat from which that Caesar would emerge.

The publication of the Caesarism editorials sparked great debate over the presidency and the

⁴⁸ Marshall, *American Bastille*. There were supposedly twenty-seven editions of the *American Bastille*; however, Mark E. Neely Jr. has disputed this number by pointing out that the OCLC actually suggests only eleven editions existed by the time the twenty-seventh was published in 1885. See Neely Jr., *Lincoln and the Triumph of the Nation*, p. 84.

⁴⁹ Marshall, *American Bastille*, p. v. See also 'The Prisoners of State', *The Columbian* (Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania), 13 March 1868.

⁵⁰ Marshall, *American Bastille*, p. xi.

⁵¹ Downs, 'The Mexicanization of American Politics', *American Historical Review*, pp. 387-409.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 387.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 387-396.

use of executive power. The *Herald* published six editorials initially, with the first appearing on Saturday 5 July 1873 and the rest following from Monday 7 July 1873, with each exploring aspects of the presidency and Reconstruction. At least one newspaper believed these were written in advance of publication and posted to the *Herald*'s office, but the lack of cohesiveness in the articles suggests they were written shortly before they went to print especially as Young often responded to their reception in other newspapers.⁵⁴ Though they lacked the coherence of a pre-prepared series, the overarching argument was clear: the enormous power granted by the Constitution allowed the presidency to become a personal office which strong figures dominated, making commanders-in-chief the 'master' not only of their parties, but of an era, which took their name. The control exerted by these men gave them the potential to transform the republic into a dictatorship, and left the nation's security reliant only upon their magnanimity in relinquishing power. The fault for this situation lay with the Constitution, which, as Sumner and the Liberal Republicans had complained, allowed for re-election.⁵⁵ The great patronage at the President's disposal, Sumner had insisted, albeit in less detail than Young, allowed his administration to become corrupted in the pursuit of re-election.⁵⁶ To protect the republic's liberty, Young asserted, the one term principle must be codified.

These threats, Young claimed, had existed since the creation of the republic, but the power of the executive office had grown a great deal over the Civil War years, which had paved the way for less scrupulous men to enter politics and benefit from the increased patronage opportunities in government. The articles therefore tied together fears of republican decay with a liberal critique of the character of political representation. Though, Young believed, some previous presidents had abused their powers even after they relinquished power, he

⁵⁴ For the suggestion they were written in advance of publication, see 'The New York Herald's Caesarism [From the Washington Republican]', *Richmond Whig*, 5 September 1873.

⁵⁵ Sumner, *Works of Charles Sumner* Volume XIV, pp. 320-326.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

argued that the present state of politics was more open to abuse than ever before.⁵⁷ He admitted the danger lay not in the current president, but an office with augmented Civil War powers, and the prospect was all the more dangerous given the men in control were much younger and less experienced than the statesmen of other eras. Their lack of experience combined with the now extensive patronage of the executive office allowed for more widespread corruption; by extension, the presidency had entered a more powerful and dangerous era than previously experienced. Young echoed the sentiments of Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner's *Gilded Age* novel – written but unpublished at the time – that greed and corruption beset the republic, but the focus of Young's concern was the presidency.⁵⁸

The corrupting influence of power formed a central preoccupation of Young's editorials as he argued that men changed on assuming the office. The first editorial highlighted this transformation by describing how Washington, as President, had commanded both Alexander Hamilton and Jefferson to 'serve his purpose', despite their differing views on governance.⁵⁹ Similarly, when Jefferson assumed the executive office, he used his influence to name two presidents who succeeded him, despite his 'war upon ancestral rights, primogeniture, the aristocracy ... all the forms and expedients by which monarchs strengthened their thrones'.⁶⁰ So 'absolute' was Jefferson's power, Young argued, that even 'when he retired his power remained', which meant he 'dominated politics from the death of Washington to the advent

⁵⁷ Young, 'New Lines of Political Departure-How History Repeats Itself-What is the issue of the Future?', *New York Herald*, 5 July 1873.

⁵⁸ The manuscript for this famous novel was finished in April 1873 but not published until November 1873. It is possible that John Russell Young – who met Mark Twain while working as managing editor at the *New York Tribune* – could have seen at least part of the unpublished manuscript before writing these editorials. Even after Young left the *Tribune* in 1869, the two men remained friends and worked in Europe together for the *New York Herald* in the 1870s. They exchanged letters in June 1873 and dined together in December 1873. Though not evidence that Twain shared his manuscript with Young, it suggests that he could have been privy at least to the ideas contained in the novel. Twain also requested his publisher send Young a copy of the book in January 1874. See Lin Salamo and Harriet Elinor Smith (eds.), *Mark Twain's Letters*, Volume 5: 1872-1873 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997), pp. 373, 383-384, 527-528; Michael B. Frank and Harriet Elinor Smith (eds.), *Mark Twain's Letters*, Volume 6: 1874-1875 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2002), p. 15; and also Richard Kluger, *The Paper: The Life and Death of the New York Herald Tribune* (New York, 1986), p. 120.

⁵⁹ Young, 'New Lines of Political Departure-How History Repeats Itself-What is the issue of the Future?', *New York Herald*, 5 July 1873.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

of Jackson.’⁶¹ Young sought to show that even those most fervently against concentrated power could still find themselves susceptible to its charms when given the opportunity. No one was incorruptible.

Yet, Young argued, the true power of the presidency was not revealed until the ascent of Andrew Jackson, who had illustrated how tyranny could be exercised by a president in the name of the public good. Jackson, he asserted, used the powers of the executive office to their fullest extent, bringing out into the open many aspects of the office which previous presidents, such as Jefferson, had ‘concealed’.⁶² Jackson dominated the presidency with ‘a rule of ever-mastering will’ and the belief ‘that degenerate courage makes one majority.’⁶³ Rather than represent the public will, Young claimed, Jackson had used the executive office as an outpost of his personal will, removing opposition to control the direction of politics even when motivated by his own prejudices rather than any coherent policy.⁶⁴ Jackson’s potency, like Jefferson, was evident too in his ability to direct politics long after surrendering the office.⁶⁵ However, Young contended, most Americans remained unaware of Jackson’s dangerous rule, which illustrated that the public was ill-equipped to block a tyrant from obtaining high office.⁶⁶ Part of the problem with the office was the regard which many Americans held for the president, and the trust they put in a good officer. Democracy here was part of the problem.

Although he asserted that the office was more problematic than the officeholder, Young claimed that Grant was more powerful than Jefferson, Jackson, and Lincoln; his only equal was Washington, due to the faith the country had in both presidents. Especially concerning for Young was that despite all of Grant’s errors during his first administration, he was not

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

only re-elected, but returned to the White House by a landslide majority; his position had not been weakened by his mistakes in office. Young cried that Grant was ‘master’ of his time period – ‘because the country feels that Grant is the legitimate successor of Lincoln and means in honesty and good faith to carry out his governing ideas’ – and this left the incumbent in a position to demand a third term or at least to name his successor.⁶⁷ Public reverence, Young believed, caused many Americans to overlook unrepugnant actions by their presidents; he feared his countrymen were in danger of revering the man who saved the Union, and in doing so, would give party men the freedom to beseech him to accept a third term and compromise the sanctity of the republic.

Furthermore, the Constitution had endowed the nation with another flaw: the inability of Congress to remove a tyrannical president. Young argued that the power of the presidency did not have powerful checks on it. Johnson had shown the inadequacy of the impeachment process and thus the powerlessness of Congress in the face of a despot.⁶⁸ Unlike the republics of Europe, he contended, it was near impossible to remove the President of the United States without creating ‘a revolution’; the United States’ system of government remained far more akin to monarchical England than to the republics of France and Spain, and would need ‘a revolution like that which overthrew Charles I. and James II. [to] remove a President who had become politically obnoxious.’⁶⁹ Suspicions of executive power were further exacerbated by the tendency of Americans to elect their most celebrated soldiers; Young pointed to this danger by frequently referring to Grant by his former military rank, and through the titular allusion in the article to Julius Caesar, a soldier-hero who had reduced a republic to ruin.⁷⁰ In sum the editorials contended that the powers available to the President – patronage, a

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Young, ‘What We May Learn from the Old World-The War Against Caesarism in France and Spain-Have We a Republican Form of Government?’, *The New York Herald*, 7 July 1873.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, and Young, ‘The Presidential Office—Is it Consistent with True Republicanism?—The Danger of Caesarism.’, *New York Herald*, Tuesday 8 July 1873.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

standing army, and the impotency of impeachment charges – once combined with Grant’s popularity and the corruption of the Republican Party constituted a greater danger than the republic had ever faced. Young only had one question for the public: ‘Shall we have Caesarism or republicanism?’⁷¹

‘Mere stuff and nonsense’

The initial response to the Caesarism scare divided upon predictably partisan lines: the majority of Democratic and Liberal Republican newspapers welcomed the discussion of presidential tyranny and questioned why the *Herald* had only just raised the alarm, while most Republican newspapers denounced the editorials as scaremongering. Quite a few Democratic newspapers, though critical of executive power, did not believe Grant would become a tyrant if he gained a third term. Naturally, the opposition newspapers were critical of Grant’s presidency, while his supporters denied that he had abused his power as President, and heaped scorn on the more lurid readings of Young’s accusations. However, both sides united in their opposition to a third term for Grant. Even the Republican newspapers – although uncritical of Grant – did not believe it was wise to go beyond Washington’s precedent of two terms.

Republican newspapers across the country renounced the *Herald*’s claims vigorously stating that although they did not support a third term, nothing in Grant’s character suggested dictatorial instincts. The *Herald*’s editorials, they claimed, were ‘purely sensational’ and merely marked an attempt to create sales during the dry news season rather than raise genuine fears of executive power.⁷² Many Republicans reacted to the claims with derision, calling the editorials ‘mere stuff and nonsense’, insisting no danger existed, and mocking ‘the average

⁷¹ Young, ‘The Mission of the Press in Our Polities—The Meaning of the New Departure—The Spirit of Caesarism Pervading Our Public Life’, *The New York Herald*, 11 July 1873.

⁷² ‘The Third Term Excitement’, *The Daily State Journal* (Alexandria, Virginia), 17 July 1873.

Democrat' for being 'always in terror about something terrible that is going to happen'.⁷³

Numerous newspapers simply ignored the issue, indicating their belief that the articles were a farce not fit for response, while others simply dismissed the whole affair as a scam and stated there was no point in discussing it as a result.⁷⁴ One small Pennsylvanian newspaper summed up this attitude: '[i]t would be pleasant reading to learn from articles from the pen of some of those classical gentlemen something more than nicely dressed assertion.'⁷⁵ Overwhelmingly, those newspapers which supported Grant in the early days of the scare mocked the *Herald* for its editorials on the subject and stated the subject was not worthy enough to garner serious discussion, especially so long before the next presidential election.

The Republican newspapers who took on the challenge of countering the *Herald's* assertions cast Grant as they had in 1868: as the embodiment of true republicanism. They praised the President for his record in government asserting that he acted in the interests of the public good rather than for personal gain. The Pennsylvanian journal noted how Grant 'ha[d] repeatedly through 'State' papers defined his policy to be that of the will of the people as expressed through the ballot box.'⁷⁶ A Virginian paper, meanwhile, claimed that '[t]he simple fact is, that General Grant is trying to do his duty faithfully to the country.'⁷⁷ This moderate Republican journal stated that it was unfair to accuse Grant of planning to abuse his power in a hypothetical third term anymore than he would in his second term.⁷⁸ The newspaper claimed '[t]he charge of 'Caesarism' is flagrantly unjust against *him*. So far from *assuming to exercise doubtful powers*, he has shown himself remarkably sensitive and cautious upon the

⁷³ *Ibid.*, and "'Caesarism'", *Holmes County Republican*, 31 July 1873.

⁷⁴ Summers, *The Press Gang*, pp. 269-271. Summers – although claiming Caesarism was a scam by James Gordon Bennett Junior who used the *Herald* as his own personal toy – argued that the Republicans 'blundered' with their response. He argued that Grant should have refuted the claims instead of staying silent (possibly because his wife desired a longer stay in the White House), whilst acknowledging that the *Herald* stated that such an announcement would be insufficient to the safety of the republic. Summers does not explore the *Harper's Weekly* response beyond Nast's cartoons.

⁷⁵ "'Caesarism'", *Juniata Sentinel*, 23 July 1873.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ 'The Third Term Excitement', *The Daily State Journal* (Alexandria, Virginia), 17 July 1873.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

safe side.’⁷⁹ It celebrated ‘this disposition to be severely just to all interests is one of the most salient points in his character’.⁸⁰ The model republican – the image of Grant his supporters had been presenting to the electorate for years – would not become a tyrant.

The Republicans also gained support for their case from some Democrats who agreed that nothing in Grant’s administration of the country suggested oncoming tyranny. The popular *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* had little time for Grant’s presidency in many respects. ‘We dissent from the tentative policy,’ it argued, ‘we disagree with most of the appointments,’ and ‘[we] do not relish the domestic or foreign tone of the administration.’ But they saw ‘in none of these things the slightest pretext on which to see the shadow of a shade of apprehension about absolutism or Caesarism. On the contrary, the reverse is what we find.’⁸¹ Another Democratic newspaper, the Memphis *Public Ledger*, which had briefly supported *The Imperialist’s* advocacy of monarchism, claimed it was not afraid of ‘the establishment of a Grant empire in this country,’ even though they conceded it was ‘more than likely that the President will succeed to a third term of office.’⁸² But they ‘believed there [was] enough patriotism and love of the republican form of government, even at the North, to prevent the role of Caesar from being played successfully by the man at Long Branch.’⁸³

Grant’s defenders here sought vindication in the antiparty themes which had characterised their portrayal of the President for five years. The powers of patronage, so troubling to Young in the Caesarism editorials (and to Sumner, whose one term principle was defended solely by reference to concerns over patronage), became in the hands of Grant’s supporters evidence of his republican virtue, for his attempt to disperse patronage spoils without regard to party not

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ ‘The Third Term Nonsense’, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 16 July 1873.

⁸² ‘Caesarism’, *Public Ledger* (Memphis, Tennessee), 15 July 1873, and Heath, “‘Let the Empire Come”, *Civil War History*, pp. 152-189.

⁸³ ‘Caesarism’, *Public Ledger* (Memphis, Tennessee), 15 July 1873.

only illustrated his devotion to republicanism but had gained him many enemies.⁸⁴ They reminded their readers that the previous supporter of the one term amendment, Sumner, had desired the Secretary of State position.⁸⁵ They then used the Senator's failed amendment to show their readers that 'where there is one office to be disposed of there are a hundred applicants.'⁸⁶ For them, the power of patronage created a mass of dissidents rather than loyal supporters; it was certainly no route to a permanent presidency, as the likes of Sumner and Young had alleged.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the papers recalled the freedom Grant gave to his cabinet officers by allowing them to pursue their own policies rather than following his lead. If he had not tried to master his cabinet, how could he control the country?

More significant, though unmentioned at the time, was the silence of Sumner on the issue. Although during the scare Sumner was away in Europe recuperating his health, plenty of newspapers in the United States printed the European, especially British, response to the *Herald's* editorials.⁸⁸ The *Herald* was popular in Europe, especially in London (where it had an office), and which Sumner visited, so it seems unlikely that the affair was not brought to his attention and his opinion sought. Yet there is no correspondence from Sumner on the topic in either the press or in his personal papers. The reason for this situation may well be that Sumner had realised his mistake in accusing the President of Caesarism, especially for the former slaves whose rights became the *raison d'être* of his life. Sumner did concede after the 1872 election that he had been wrong about Grant, though he never made this change of heart public.⁸⁹ Such a vocal opponent of Grant – and such a supporter of the one term principle – would have been unlikely to keep quiet if he agreed with Young's assertions.

⁸⁴ Sumner, *Works of Charles Sumner* Volume XIV, pp. 320-326.

⁸⁵ 'The Third Term', *The Orangeburg News* (Orangeburg, South Carolina), 26 July 1873.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ See 'Work For the Next Congress', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 August 1873.

⁸⁹ Dawes, *Charles Sumner*, p. 316.

In attempting to portray the President as the model republican Grant's allies recalled a conversation from 1868 which showed the President did not consider himself vital to the future of the republic. Whilst discussing the necessity of certain men to the Republican Party and the country among army friends, Grant addressed his chief-of-staff, John A. Rawlins, and stated that 'my experience during the war convinced me that when an officer thought success depended upon his existence, army discipline required that such an officer should be disabused of his conceit.'⁹⁰ Grant continued 'when I hear politicians prate about 'What can the party do without him?' I say to myself, 'What will the poor country do when that man dies?'' Indicating his disregard for the necessity of a man over principles, Grant exclaimed that '[i]t seems to me such notions are inconsistent with our form of government, where no man has absolute authority, and all are dependent upon the will of the people.'⁹¹ By repeating such anecdotes, administration journals indicated that Grant was no Caesar, but a true republican who saw government as a temporary stewardship rather than a personal office; he had no desire to stand for a third term.

Grant's supporters also scolded the *Herald* for its casual dismissal of the power of the people and their reverence for Washington's example. Even the Democratic *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reminded the *Herald* that the American 'people are sovereign in a sense which panicky papers are too apt to forget.'⁹² For the *Eagle*, indeed, democracy itself was the greatest check on despotic power. The people, it argued, 'don't intend to tie themselves up from having a man whom they want a second time. Neither do they intend to allow any precedent to be made which will continue an Executive longer than that.'⁹³ This respect for the robustness of popular sovereignty and democratic institutions was repeated in plenty of Republican newspapers, including a Michigan paper which denounced Caesarism, stating that 'whether

⁹⁰ 'The President and Caesarism', *Hartford Daily Courant*, 26 August 1873.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² 'The Third Term Nonsense', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 16 July 1873.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

serious or not, it equally implies a perfect contempt for the popular intelligence.’⁹⁴ Others found security in past precedent. ‘The austere example of Washington’, one paper noted for example, ‘is something that it is more difficult to disregard than even a constitutional provision.’⁹⁵ It insisted that ‘the severe majesty of that character,’ with, ‘its cold, snowy purity of patriotism, cannot be forgotten nor obliterated.’⁹⁶ If the American electorate were not an effective block on Caesarist ambitions, then the ghost of Washington would be.

It was clear, then, that many Republican journals, and even a few prominent Democratic voices did not consider the scare to be genuine and worthy of attention.⁹⁷ The President, they claimed, epitomised the republican ideal of a government servant, and would not violate the sanctity of the republic. Others asserted, like a Southern Democratic paper, that the people would not allow Grant to become a dictator even if the possibility existed.⁹⁸ The *Herald* was, at best, mistaken, or, at worst, stirring suspicions over executive power for financial gain. Though, at least initially, these newspapers did not believe Grant presented any danger to the republic, they also believed that Washington’s precedent should not be violated – no matter how worthy the claimant – and promised to oppose such an eventuality if ever Grant entertained such a possibility.

Caesar Ascendant

The tone of the responses changed from ridicule to panic, however, when five Republican newspapers declared their support for a Grant third term. These newspapers gave credence to fears over executive power by suggesting that Grant would be willing to violate perhaps the greatest unwritten principle in U.S. politics: Washington’s two term precedent. The *Daily Union-Herald* (Columbia, South Carolina), the *Washington Chronicle* (Washington D.C.),

⁹⁴ ‘Caesarism—An Insult to the People.’, *Jackson Citizen*, 29 July 1873.

⁹⁵ *The Rochester Democrat*, 12 July 1873.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Democratic newspapers include *The Newberry Herald* (Columbia, South Carolina), the *Public Ledger* (Memphis, Tennessee), and *The Abbeville Press and Banner* (Abbeville, South Carolina).

⁹⁸ ‘Caesarism’ *Public Ledger* (Memphis, Tennessee), 15 July 1873.

the *National Republican* (Washington D.C.), the *Boston Journal* (Boston, Massachusetts), and *Harper's Weekly* all declared support for Grant's hypothetical third term between late July and early August 1873. Although, the *Daily Union-Herald* first stated its support, the most influential of the cohort were the *National Republican* – the semi-official newspaper of the administration – and *Harper's Weekly*, a well-known Grant supporter which had national reach. An example of the reach of the scare caused by these newspapers can be seen with the *Boston Journal*, whose support of the third term led one journalist to publish a pamphlet, promoting a third term for Grant, in 1873.⁹⁹ In supporting the hypothetical third term the newspapers gave Young's Cassandra-like cry a credibility it had lacked before. Yet the papers support for the idea actually lessened the prospect of it ever being realised. Indeed their intervention undermined Grant's political capital by lending legitimacy to the idea that he would disregard Washington's guiding principle for power. Grant, it seemed, might yet become the tyrant after all.

Grant, himself, kept strictly silent over the whole affair: a stance which Mark Summers' claimed merely encouraged suspicions over his intentions.¹⁰⁰ The President later revealed in 1875 that he had refused to comment as he believed that 'the cry of Caesarism' was perpetrated by those 'hostile to the republican party'.¹⁰¹ His decision to remain quiet (a not uncommon tactic for him) rested on his belief that it was 'benath [*sic*] the dignity of the office ... to answer such a question before the subject should be presented by competent authority to make a nomination, or by a body of such dignity and authority as to not make a reply a fair subject of ridicule.'¹⁰² Moreover, he expressed astonishment, and disappointment, 'that so many sensible persons in the republican party should permit their enemy to force

⁹⁹ Matthew Hale Smith (Burleigh of the *Boston Journal*), *Caesarism: General Grant For a Third Term* (Riverside, Cambridge, 1873).

¹⁰⁰ Summers, *The Era of Good Stealings*, p. 251. See also Summers, *The Press Gang*, p. 273.

¹⁰¹ John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Volume 26: 1875 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 2003), p. 132.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

upon them, and the party, an issue which cannot add strength to the party no matter how met.¹⁰³ In essence, Grant believed the scare, at least initially, was a weapon intended to weaken his administration, and the party, and as such should simply be ignored as no response would be adequate to calm the furore.

Concerning the third term suggestion, and in the spirit of all good republicans, Grant denied any desire for office. He wrote in a letter to the President of the Pennsylvania State Convention which had passed a resolution opposing the third term, that he ‘never sought the office for a second, nor even for a first, nomination.’¹⁰⁴ Nor did he seek a third term, and if tendered, unless exceptional circumstances demanded he serve, he ‘would not accept a [third] nomination’.¹⁰⁵ He asserted that ‘no one can force an election or even nomination’, and that the choice for the presidency ultimately resided, until Congress decided otherwise, with ‘the will of the people’, whose responsibility it lay upon to decide who was suitable for the office.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, he claimed that Washington’s precedent should not be binding, as a situation might occur ‘in the future history of the country that to change an Executive because he has been eight years in office will prove unfortunate if not disastrous.’¹⁰⁷ It was clear, then, that the President did not fear the presidency falling into unsafe hands, but nor did he believe the violation of this unwritten principle of the nation would descend the country into despotism. The suggestion that one man could rule permanently was an insult ‘upon the intelligence and patriotism of the people’.¹⁰⁸ Like many Republican journals here he asserted his faith in American democracy but did not altogether allay concerns that he might run again.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Those concerned over the potential abuse of power found no consolation, then, from the President or in the articles of his semi-official journal, the *National Republican*, which declared that the slander emanating from Democratic and Liberal Republican newspapers merely resulted in ‘a strong feeling in favor of his renomination among a large body of his supporters’.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the paper stated that this ‘feeling’ was ‘as likely to sweep the country as not, and give him a third term in the Executive Mansion by a majority more overwhelming than he received in ’68 or in ’72.’¹¹⁰ Although as baseless as the accusations of tyranny (it is possible the newspaper was simply testing the waters), the suggestion from an administration paper that a third Grant term commanded such large support genuinely worried many newspapers, for it hinted that Grant was seriously considering standing again and thus planned to violate one of the great uncodified principles of the republic.

However, the most important declaration of support came from *Harper’s Weekly*, which stunned readers by claiming that a good president should not be dispensed with, no matter how long he had served. It noted that the Constitution did not inhibit a president from pursuing three terms, and quoted Jefferson and his contemporaries to show how they did not believe ‘a third term would have involved a violation of the principles of democracy, or a menace to republican institutions.’¹¹¹ The paper intended to prove that the founders did not find fault in such an occurrence, but rather did not wish to pursue another term themselves. *Harper’s*, in the midst of mocking the *Herald* for its ‘sneer’, also questioned the foundation on which the republic existed.¹¹² Other newspapers, it noted, had warned that ‘[i]f the President can be elected thrice ... why not four, five, or six times, or for life?’¹¹³ But *Harper’s* confronted the implication head on: ‘[w]hy not, indeed, if the people say so? If a

¹⁰⁹ ‘[From the Washington Republican (Administration Organ), July 19], *Jacksonville Republican*, 2 August 1873.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ ‘Caesarism.’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 16 August 1873.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

clear majority of the people vote to abolish the republic and set up an empire, who shall hinder them?’¹¹⁴ It asked: ‘[s]hall we, then, go into hysterics in advance? If the people choose to-morrow to establish Mormonism, or human sacrifices, we don’t see who could say them nay.’¹¹⁵ *Harper’s* argument essentially questioned whether democracy or republicanism was more important to Americans, and while its satirical tone took the former to absurd extremes, the journal clearly sided with the rule of the majority over a strict separation of powers. Indeed *Harper’s* intent was clear: it indicated that the people were sovereign, and not Congress, and a president should serve as many terms as the sovereign people determined he warranted. Though *Harper’s* proceeded to comment that the republic was not in jeopardy – and the country ‘would certainly require something more than the re-election of a good magistrate to office to prove its decay’ – its most frightening suggestion for some was the statement that ‘it is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance to the country of retaining the services of a faithful and experienced magistrate.’¹¹⁶

Harper’s Weekly’s argument for the retention of a good president rested upon the danger of entrusting the increased power of the presidency to an incompetent officer. The journal argued that elections for the country’s president had always been ‘a lottery’ – a common claim after a string of weak antebellum presidents – and although this mattered little when the United States was small and its influence inconsequential, a large and powerful country could ‘not afford now to have a blunderer or a blusterer in the Chief Magistracy of the republic.’¹¹⁷ ‘It is vital, essentially vital,’ the journal insisted, ‘that the Presidency should be held by a safe man.’¹¹⁸ The country, *Harper’s* continued, could ‘not afford to make any more experiments’ and have presidents elected ‘who may turn out well, but who, for the sake of personal

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* It should be noted that this was not an isolated argument. A Republican Pennsylvanian and an independent New York paper espoused the same sentiments before the appearance of the *Harper’s Weekly* article. See the *Pittsburg Gazette*, 12 August 1873, and the *Albany Sunday Press*, 12 July 1873.

renown, may involve us in foreign wars, or rekindle the dying embers of domestic strife.’¹¹⁹ It concluded with the statement that ‘[w]e can bear with much for the sake of assured peace and safe government. It is hard to say what price we could not afford to pay rather than elect another *Buchanan* or *Johnson*.’¹²⁰ This claim from such an important journal with a nationwide readership – and by reprinting in other newspapers – created considerable alarm throughout the country.¹²¹ Although *Harper’s* was concerned about the stability of the republic – an incompetent in office, it implied, could lead the country back into war – the implication that stabilisation may have required a third term troubled readers.

For those who feared the extension of executive power – and the potential of the office for abuse – the admission, from a leading Republican supporter, that precedent could be sacrificed to save the country from another weak or incompetent president was truly startling. If *Harper’s Weekly* intended to allay fears after the *Herald’s* supposed scaremongering, it succeeded in achieving precisely the opposite. After the articles supporting a third term appeared in late July to mid August 1873, the focus of press coverage changed. Grant’s supporters’ fell silent as fears about the extension of presidential power grew in intensity. The support for the hypothetical third term gave credence to anxieties over Grant’s abuse of power. Whether the *Herald’s* author was genuine in his fears over presidential power became irrelevant; for a while, Caesar seemed to be waiting in the wings.

These newspapers turned the supportive response and ridicule that met the *Herald’s* scare in July into real concern over Grant’s potential to abuse the republic’s traditions. The prospect of support for the third term led to vehement denunciations of such a prospect in August and September as many Americans worried that the *Herald* had raised a serious possibility.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ The most important reprint that the article received was in the *Herald* itself which was printed before it appeared in *Harper’s Weekly*, see ‘Caesarism’, *New York Herald*, 11 August 1873 (p. 3).

Critiques of the White House's questionable use of power now frequently appeared in articles responding to the *Herald's* Caesarism editorials. Alongside commentary on the intervention in Louisiana, this included the reaction to a general appropriations bill, which had included a retroactive pay rise for congressmen – known as the Salary Grab – which Grant signed into law. For those suspicious of the extension of federal power, both instances highlighted Grant's questionable use of power and called into question his antipartisanship. In this respect, Young's articles were timely, which the *Sacramento Daily Union* acknowledged when it stated that '[t]he Herald's warning voice against Caesarism will not be poo-pooed out of hearing. The discussion has taken an earnest form in spite of the attempts of knaves and fools to ridicule it.'¹²²

Thus in the face of this support for a third term, Democratic and Liberal Republican critiques of Grant's specific use of power gained credence. The suggestion that Grant would violate one of the most fiercely defended principles in politics – Washington's two term precedent – implied a willingness to go further in the march towards executive domination than even the last president to serve two full terms, Jackson, had contemplated. If in 1872, Congress had tried to rein in presidential power, by 1873, plenty saw the executive and legislature marching hand in hand towards despotism. A Democratic Missourian newspaper complained how:

[t]he petty nabobs and nobodies of Washington have seen Congress sit there and pass its tyrannical measures, and a horse-fancier dignified by the title of president enforce them so long, that they have become imbued with the idea that even its little police court overspreads the whole country with its tiny brass scales.¹²³

After the handful of Republican journals legitimised the third term movement, such fears spread beyond old slaveholding states like Missouri, and through the Republican and

¹²² *Sacramento Daily Union*, 16 August 1873.

¹²³ 'The Liberty of the Press', *Troy Herald*, 23 July 1873.

independent press in the North. Previously silent Republicans and indifferent independents began denouncing the third term prospect after it garnered genuine support, whilst the triumphant Democrats became more vocal in their condemnations of the President.¹²⁴ Grant's potential re-election divided the previously united Republican press: the mixture of ridicule for the accusations and support for the White House dissipated as concerns over Grant's ability to violate a vaulted republican principle were given voice.¹²⁵

Though these formerly indifferent newspapers did not assail Grant with the vituperation of some of the Democratic newspapers, their articles clearly indicated that Republican support for Grant's third term disturbed them. Their reaction illustrated that the anxieties over liberty raised in alarmist Democratic newspapers were not simply partisan ploys. Initially, *The Abbeville Press and Banner* in South Carolina had declared that it remained far 'more interested in the proper administration of our State government than even in the question of Caesarism or Republicanism.'¹²⁶ However, it was not long before they began reprinting the *New York World's* request for the Republican Party to define their position on the third term and explaining that their worries centred around 'the increased power and patronage of the President', especially 'the disbursement now of a revenue of four hundred millions.'¹²⁷ The concerns of these previously apathetic journals gave weight to denunciations from more starkly partisan newspapers such as the Democratic *Albany Argus* in New York, which contended that Grant 'stamps popular rights into the ground', 'drown[s] the popular protest' and was 'obtaining despotic control'.¹²⁸ It proceeded to claim 'there is not an oppressor in the land who is not allied to the Imperial Republicanism under whose weight the country is

¹²⁴ Although there were some newspapers that changed their stance after a few Republicans pledged support for Grant in 1876, more common was the entrance of new voices to the fray. For examples of independents who changed their positions from indifference see *The Abbeville Press and Banner* (Abbeville, South Carolina) and the *Holt County Sentinel* (Oregon, Missouri). It should be noted that the latter claimed to be independent but had Radical Republican leanings. See also the *New York Journal of Commerce*.

¹²⁵ *The Montgomery Advance* (Alabama), noted this situation within the Republican press on 11 August 1873.

¹²⁶ 'Caesarism or Republicanism', *The Abbeville Press and Banner* (Abbeville, South Carolina), 23 July 1873.

¹²⁷ 'Caesarism in America', *The Abbeville Press and Banner* (Abbeville, South Carolina), 30 July 1873.

¹²⁸ 'Republican Responsibility', *Albany Argus*, 18 July 1873.

sinking.¹²⁹ Patronage had become imperialism. Such scaremongering, in the context of the widespread discussions of the abuse of federal power, built on unease over the rise of presidential power that had been growing since the onset of the Civil War. And at the height of the Caesarism scare those anxieties were widespread. Some sceptical newspapers even wrote of such concerns as a ‘symptom of the abnormal and pathological condition’ of U.S. politics, thus anticipating the clinical language Richard Hofstadter would use in his *The Paranoid Style* ninety-one years before it was written.¹³⁰

Yet rather than dismiss such fears through reference to mass psychology, we should read them seriously as an outgrowth of a republican political culture and the politics of Reconstruction. Echoing the Caesarism editorials, the newspapers warned that patronage provided Grant with a solid base of supporters, a claim vigorously refuted by Republican newspapers. Through the use of military language these newspapers hinted at his dictatorial ambitions, often using phrases like ‘army of officeholders’ and ‘army of politicians’ to link his appointing powers with his generalship.¹³¹ The *Atlanta Constitution* stated that ‘he is the candidate of the office holders and party magnates, and they can and will dictate the nomination.’¹³² This claim found resonance in many newspapers who warned Grant ‘has the power to force this nomination from his power.’¹³³ Such claims showed how military might, patronage and executive power could reinforce one another, and helped to create a plausible narrative in which Grant turned a republic into a tyranny.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* See also ‘Caesarism in America’, *New York Herald*, 23 July 1873, in particular the sub-title ‘[From the Raleigh (N.C.) Sentinel (opposition), July 15.]’

¹³⁰ *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, 14 July 1873 (quotation taken from the *Springfield Republican*); and Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*.

¹³¹ See in particular ‘Resolutions Adopted by the Ohio Democratic State Convention’, *The Jasper Weekly Courier* (Jasper, Indiana), 22 August 1873. See also a copy of a similar article in ‘Political’, *Nashville Union and American*, 7 August 1873. See also ‘Third-Term Talk.’, *Whig and Tribune* (Jackson, Tennessee), 20 September 1873; ‘Muzzling the Press’, *New York Tribune*, 12 July 1873; ‘The Presidency of the U.S.’, *Essex County Herald* (Guildhall, Vermont), 16 August 1873; and *The Edgefield Advertiser* (Edgefield, South Carolina), 11 September 1873.

¹³² ‘General Grant’s Third Term’, *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 July 1873.

¹³³ ‘Grant and a Third Term’, *Nashville Union and American*, 12 July 1873.

Concerns over Caesarism – in particular the ability of a president to enforce policy through patronage – appeared throughout the Democratic and Republican press, and came to represent a multitude of genuine grievances with increased federal power. Discussions of Caesarism, which tended to start with patronage, often morphed into critiques of presidential support for railroad and canal construction, or denunciations of ‘military despotism’ and the ‘central, imperial power.’¹³⁴ The readiness of papers usually supportive of the administration to voice some of these concerns suggests that Caesarism was no mere party trick. A Californian newspaper which supported Grant in 1872, for instance, expressed similar worries to its Democratic contemporaries on patronage and influence. While the paper conceded, like others, ‘that the *Herald* has magnified the danger’, it agreed that Young raised valid points and called for a one term amendment ‘to be adopted without delay.’¹³⁵ In keeping with Young, indeed, the paper saw the greatest danger lay in future (possibly Democratic) incumbents in the White House. ‘[W]ith a President as popular as Grant, and as ambitious as the second Caesar, supported by such a vast army of the corrupt, the hungry, the knavish, the rich, the alien in heart’, the paper argued, it would be possible ‘to overturn the Government of the people, by the people and for the people, and establish that of one man upon its ruins.’¹³⁶ Patronage provided a path to despotism and a new check on power was needed.

Caesarism, like the one term principle in 1872, focused wider concerns about corruption on the abuse of executive power in particular. This Californian newspaper could see the corrupting influence of power in many sources.¹³⁷ The newspaper detailed how during ‘the last five years treachery and perfidy have been the rule and not merely the exception’ in all

¹³⁴ ‘United States’, *Nashville Union and American*, 27 July 1873.

¹³⁵ ‘The Great Danger to the Republic’, *Sacramento Daily Union*, 31 July 1873.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

levels of government.¹³⁸ It claimed representatives had ‘violated’ without explanation or ‘remorse’ their election promises and ‘invariably sold the people out to the railway corporation’, which profited from the support of the federal government.¹³⁹ Numerous representatives, elected to the previous two congressional sessions, received their votes on the basis of adhering ‘to the closest economy in expenditure, to no more land or bond subsidy for railways, and to the strictest accountability of public officers to the Government’ which they proceeded to disregard once in power.¹⁴⁰ The paper declared that ‘every one of these pledges was studiously and deliberately violated by the majority.’¹⁴¹ As a result, these Californians could easily identify with the warnings issued in the Caesarism editorials as they had encountered these problems themselves. They believed the *Herald*’s fears as they were no stranger to the abuse of power and, in the support for a third presidential term, they saw the prospect of this abuse continuing indefinitely.

However, the California newspaper proposed a more radical solution than the *Herald*: if elective representatives could not abide by the public’s wishes, the people themselves would elect a Caesar to sweep away corruption.¹⁴² Here, the paper echoed some of the support for monarchism that *The Imperialist* had exposed in 1869.¹⁴³ Southern conservative support for a monarch had derived from dissatisfaction with Reconstruction – especially the removal of former Confederates from power – yet this article suggests support for a representative single leader garnered more widespread support than simply those despondent with the post-war settlement.¹⁴⁴ It echoed, indeed, the fears of businessmen and merchants in New York who feared that the inability of the working classes to select the best men for office would

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Heath, ““Let the Empire Come””, *Civil War History*, pp. 152-189.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

eventually lead to despotism.¹⁴⁵ This situation was epitomised in the statement by the paper that the ‘loss of confidence by the people themselves in the men they select for Representatives and Senators’ constituted ‘the greatest danger to the republic’.¹⁴⁶ Though it did not intend to ‘artificially’ scare the public, it warned that if this regime – especially in regard to the railroads – continued, then ‘the desire for a Caesar to release the country from the strong and heartless grasp of the oligarchy will come up from the people themselves, no longer able to bear the burdens put upon them by the perfidy of their representatives.’¹⁴⁷ Caesar, it seems, could be found from within the populace too.

Restrained, serious, and distinctly un-sensational discussion of Caesarism indicates that the scare was not just an amusing joke. Journals discussed what they saw as genuine abuses of power after Grant received declarations of support for the third term. Events in Louisiana particularly concerned those worried about the power of the federal government. Grant’s role in arbitrating the affair, which like Lincoln’s actions during the Civil War had a questionable constitutional basis, led the anti-Reconstruction *Atlanta Constitution*, along with many other papers – Republican ones among them – to declare that Grant ‘uses every inch of his power for the welfare of the party. Does he not steadfastly support the infamous Kellogg conspiracy in Louisiana?’¹⁴⁸ This might have been a predictable line for an anti-Reconstruction paper in the South, but the vituperative Liberal Republican *Chicago Daily Tribune* also claimed the federal government represented a ‘bogus Government which is pushing the people headlong into bankruptcy and ruin’, and stated that the Democratic candidate for Governor had asked for a ‘protectorate’ for Louisiana which Grant denied by deciding in favour of the

¹⁴⁵ Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 488-499, and Beckert, ‘Democracy and its Discontents’, *Past and Present*, pp. 116-157.

¹⁴⁶ ‘The Great Danger to the Republic’, *Sacramento Daily Union*, 31 July 1873.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ ‘General Grant’s Third Term’, *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 July 1873. See also ‘President Grant’s Proposed Third Term’, *The Daily Phoenix* (Columbia, South Carolina), 22 July 1873; ‘Caesarism’, *Daily Patriot* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), 16 July 1873 (this edition is a reprint from the New York *Herald* which includes extracts from several different newspapers across the country); and ‘Is Caesarism Possible?’, *Pomeroy’s Democrat*, 23 August 1873.

Republicans.¹⁴⁹ The request implied republican government no longer existed in Louisiana, which led to the question: would it soon disappear elsewhere?¹⁵⁰

Newspapers around the country, indeed, stated that if Louisiana could fall into despotism, so too could other states. Democratic and independent newspapers all over the country pointed to Louisiana as evidence that corruption and despotism existed in the republic, and that in a manner, Caesarism had already ripened. The *Council Grove* newspaper in Kansas stated that Caesarism had been established in the ‘despotism over Louisiana’.¹⁵¹ One Democratic Louisiana newspaper claimed corruption in the state allied with Grant’s power aided the creation ‘of gigantic rings and monopolies’, which along with Reconstruction attempted to destroy the South.¹⁵² The solution it proposed would be to emancipate Grant from the Republican Party ‘making him Dictator’, which it contended the majority of white Southerners would support if it freed them from ‘carpet-baggers’ (Northerners who had migrated South, and taken up positions of power, after the Civil War).¹⁵³ It was a claim supported by other Southern newspapers, who claimed they preferred the possibility of a magnanimous dictator to the rule of carpet-baggers and freedmen. Despotism, it seemed, in an echo of the pro-monarchist sentiment of 1869, was preferable to republicanism.

Grant’s arbitration role in the electoral dispute in Louisiana in May 1873 caused a great deal of concern, but another incident in Washington D.C. during March 1873 proved particularly unsavoury. The so-called Salary Grab caused great consternation in many quarters, including in the newspapers of both parties. The Act derived its popular name from its objectionable provisions and the method in which those provisions were obtained. Republican Representative Benjamin F. Butler had added the measure as a late amendment to a general

¹⁴⁹ ‘Work for the Next Congress’, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 August 1873.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Is Caesarism Possible?’, *Pomeroy’s Democrat*, 23 August 1873.

¹⁵¹ *Council Grove* (Kansas), 29 July 1873.

¹⁵² *Shreveport Times* (Louisiana), 3 August 1873.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

appropriations bill, which had been delayed by several months, and contained vital provisions for the payment of the armed forces.¹⁵⁴ The amendment doubled the compensation due to the president and the Supreme Court justices, but it also increased the pay of congressmen by fifty per cent, which would be made retroactive to the beginning of the congressional session.¹⁵⁵ Butler thus provided congressmen with a five thousand dollar gift in back pay.¹⁵⁶ Due to the needs of the army (a government shutdown would have occurred otherwise) and most likely out of concern for the volatile situation in Louisiana, Grant signed the bill into law, but recommended the creation of a one-line veto to remove the back-pay clause.¹⁵⁷

Disgusted with Grant, most commentators claimed the President should have vetoed the bill rather than recommend the removal of the clause; otherwise departing congressmen could claim their back pay and would have no reason to compel them to return it. Grant's suggestion of a line-item veto, as it usually known, would not be awarded until Bill Clinton's administration in 1996, though even then it was shortly declared unconstitutional.¹⁵⁸

However, its first appearance in a national government in North America was as a legislative grant to the Confederate States' chief executive, which made Grant the first president to ask for the power in the United States.¹⁵⁹ After the Civil War, both Georgia and Texas gave the power to their governors in 1868, but not until January 1876 would a congressman propose such an amendment to the Constitution.¹⁶⁰ Evidently, Congress was not amenable to

¹⁵⁴ Lee J. Alston, Jeffrey A. Jenkins, and Tomas Nonnenmacher, 'Who Should Govern Congress? Access to Power and the Salary Grab of 1873', *Journal of Economic History* 66.3 (2006), pp. 678-680.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, and John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 24: 1873 (Carbondale and Edwardsville 2000), p. 12.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, and Smith, *Grant*, p. 553.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, and Ulysses S. Grant, Fifth Annual Message, 1 December 1873, *UCSB Presidency Project* <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29514> [accessed 9 August 2013].

¹⁵⁸ Jasmine Farrier, *Passing the Buck: Congress, the Budget, and Deficits* (Lexington, 2004), pp. 165-203, and Virginia A. McMurtry, *Item Veto and Expounded Impoundment Proposals: History and Current Status* (Washington D.C., 2010), pp. 9-13.

¹⁵⁹ Farrier, *Passing the Buck*, p. 177; and Robert J. Spitzer, 'The Constitutionality of the Presidential Line-Item Veto', *Political Science Quarterly* 112.2 (1997), pp. 261-183. For the first mentions of it in the United States see pp. 269-271, and Thomas E. Cronin and Jeffrey J. Weill, 'An Item Veto for the Presidency?', *Congress & the Presidency* 12.2 (2010), pp. 127-151.

¹⁶⁰ Cronin and Weill, 'An Item Veto for the Presidency?', *Congress & the Presidency*, pp. 128-129.

allocating more power to the President. For those concerned about the abuse of presidential power, the President's refusal to veto the Act without more power constituted evidence that corruption reigned supreme in the United States.

Grant's intervention in Louisiana and the Salary Grab provided proof for many Americans that Grant could not be trusted to resist a third term. Those worried about the potential demise of the republic held these actions up as evidence that Grant had become corrupted – drunk on power rather than whiskey – and, if presented with the opportunity, would accept a third term and violate Washington's two term precedent. The Salary Grab, in particular, allowed new arguments about greed, selfishness and monetary gain to enter into denunciations of Grant's power: a precursor to the corruption scandals that would engulf the last years of his administration. One Democratic South Carolinian newspaper charged that 'General Grant loves power as well as money'.¹⁶¹ Another Democratic editor argued that 'Grant desired to have his salary doubled' but 'could not secure the increase without bribing members of Congress by increasing their salaries, also.'¹⁶² His third term bid, they suggested, would be funded by those who, 'through his appointing power' had 'access to the treasury of this gloriously corrupt government'.¹⁶³ After all Grant, an independent charged, had 'again exhibited' his self-indulgence 'in connection with the salary steal.'¹⁶⁴ If Grant could not resist the country's finances, then how could he be expected to resist its honours?

The abuse of the country's finances allowed Democratic and independent newspapers to suggest that partisan politics had entered Grant's presidency. One newspaper alleged that 'wire pullers are quietly at work with a view to nominate Grant for the third term': a novel

¹⁶¹ 'President Grant's Proposed Third Term', *The Daily Phoenix* (Columbia, South Carolina), 22 July 1873. See also 'Our Smoky Cæsar', *The Newberry Herald*, 10 September 1873.

¹⁶² 'Republican Responsibility', *Albany Argus*, 18 July 1873.

¹⁶³ 'The Third Term', *Troy Herald*, 23 July 1873.

¹⁶⁴ 'Grant and a Third Term', *Detroit Free Press*, 15 July 1873. See also a Democratic newspaper: 'Our Future Emperor', *The Tarboro' Southerner* (Tarboro', North Carolina), 31 July 1873. For a Liberal Republican newspaper see 'The Third Term Discussion', *New York Tribune*, 9 August 1873.

argument in Democratic denunciations of Grant.¹⁶⁵ The President, they now alleged, was ‘a party man.’¹⁶⁶ An independent Wisconsin newspaper, which supported Grant in 1872, declared ‘[i]f there is anything in it we cannot too soon array ourselves against a plan that could only have been devised by public enemies, and sordid, selfish, corrupt, and utterly unscrupulous politicians, who would calmly sacrifice the people to keep their hold on place and power.’¹⁶⁷ Grant, it seemed, had become a politician.

Yet, the Democrats did not merely suggest the President had become a partisan, they also began attacking Grant’s antipartisanship as a source of corruption in government. Previously the Democrats had used aspects of republicanism, in particular the importance of self-restraint, to illustrate that Grant was incapable of governing the country. Usually they accused Grant of drunkenness and tyrannical tendencies in an effort to undermine Republican attempts to present him as a model republican. But they had not directly attacked the self-sacrifice and antipartyism that the Republicans had claimed for him. However, the Salary Grab allowed them to now assail Grant in this manner. ‘We merely deceive ourselves’, the *Louisiana Daily Picayune* warned, ‘if we indulge in the delusion of no-partyism.’¹⁶⁸ The people, the paper alerted its readers, must be vigilant if power were not to be abused as no such thing as an antiparty man existed.¹⁶⁹ Another paper, in Alabama, struck at the suggestion of Grant’s self-sacrifice when they retorted that if, as the Republican *Hartford Post* claimed, ‘the masses of the republican party are animated by a self-sacrificing spirit’ then why had they not ‘sacrificed’ their back pay.’¹⁷⁰ Lastly, the *Herald* entered the fray when it ran a story in August which questioned whether Grant was simply a slave to party. It quoted Grant

¹⁶⁵ *Eaton Weekly Democrat* (Eaton, Ohio), 24 July 1873. See also a similar allegation in ‘Caesarism in America’, *New York Herald*, 23 July 1873, sub-title ‘[From the Plattsburg (N.Y.) Republican (democratic), July 19 1873].

¹⁶⁶ ‘General Grant’s Third Term’, *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 July 1873.

¹⁶⁷ *The Daily State Journal* (Alexandria, Virginia), 25 July 1873.

¹⁶⁸ ‘No-Partyism’, *The Daily Picayune* (Louisiana), 1 August 1873.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Jacksonville Republican* (Jacksonville, Alabama), 26 July 1873.

as supposedly declaring to a friend that ‘[i]f the newspapers want to know whether I will be renominated why don’t they quiz the party that elected me?’¹⁷¹ Grant’s commitment to the public duty, then, could turn the country into a dictatorship by his refusal to resist the laurels which the Republican Party, would in theory, repeatedly present to him. In this respect Grant’s republicanism could ultimately endanger, rather than enrich, the country.

Particularly troubling for those afraid of Caesarism was the refusal of Grant to state his intentions, but in lieu of any clear statement on the President’s designs, the *Herald* sought out his close friends who denied he entertained any desire for a third term while giving him their future support. While George W. Childs, of the antipartisan but pro-Grant Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, wisely remained silent, some of Grant’s other friends were not so circumspect. Both Morton McMichael, of the Republican *North American and United States Gazette* – a conservative journal often supportive in principle of antiparty movements – and John W. Forney, of the *Philadelphia Press*, declared their belief that Grant had no interest in another term.¹⁷² However, McMichael also explained that he did not regard the prospect as dangerous if the President decided to run especially as he thought Grant ‘would prove true to his trust.’¹⁷³ He also suggested that, if nominated, he foresaw the re-election of Grant but he believed this situation would only occur if ‘the party was in danger of being disrupted, and it became necessary to run for a third term a man whose prestige would save it.’¹⁷⁴ Again, the party would appeal to the republican who, McMichael asserted, would rush to the Republican Party’s side to save it from disaster; it was a prospect the *Herald* had already suggested could lead to a perpetual presidency in the United States through, not despite, Grant’s republicanism. McMichael’s opinion proved worrying for those disposed to think that Grant coveted a third term.

¹⁷¹ ‘The President and Caesarism’, *Hartford Daily Courant*, 26 August 1873.

¹⁷² ‘Two Terms Enough’, *New York Herald*, 11 September 1873.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Though Forney, too, claimed Grant had more ‘sense’ than to seriously consider running for a third term, he also pressed the importance of denouncing the prospect. Forney’s words were not helped by the *Herald*’s misstatement that he still owned the *Washington Chronicle*, which had pledged itself to Grant’s re-election in 1876.¹⁷⁵ His call for ‘the republican press to place the seal of condemnation upon this third term movement at once’ implied that the idea had genuine support throughout the country.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, he stated that Grant was ‘surrounded by flatterers’ (a tendency good republicans saw in monarchies), who would ‘come to him and say that the democratic party is utterly demoralized, and that anything recommended by the republican leaders will be approved by the republican party and made good at the election’.¹⁷⁷ However, Forney claimed that he did not perceive that there existed ‘any serious intention in any quarter in regard to this third term’, yet his urgency in denouncing it suggests he saw it at least as a political threat.¹⁷⁸

Whether or not the Caesarism scare began as a hoax, it was clear from the response of individuals and the press that genuine anxieties over the substantial extension of presidential power existed, especially after a few influential Republicans supported the idea of the third term. Not only did plenty of Democrats and Liberal Republicans believe in the possibility of Grant’s re-election, but many Republicans feared the situation, too. The Caesarism scare, which initially represented concerns over Grant’s use of patronage, came to encompass numerous grievances over the use of power by all federal representatives. It came to represent broken election promises, the monopoly of railroad companies on public land and finances, corruption among representatives, and the centralisation of power in the federal government. The threat of a third term rallied those who wanted a restoration of republican values to the federal government. But more importantly the serious discussions in the press of the third

¹⁷⁵ ‘[From the Washington Sunday Chronicle (Forney’s), July 13]’, *New York Herald*, 15 July 1873.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Two Terms Enough’, *New York Herald*, 11 September 1873.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

term highlighted the fears of many Americans that the President's power threatened to disintegrate their virtuous republic.

Republicanism versus Democracy

The discussion over Caesarism was often a conversation between major publications, of both national and regional reach, who used their influence to mediate debate in smaller journals.

When papers with regional importance, like the *Sacramento Daily Union*, conceded that Caesarism had genuine roots they helped to transform a debate marked by ridicule and republican platitudes into a serious discussion about executive power. But these journals could only do so after several Republican newspapers seriously raised the prospect of a third term. After *Harper's Weekly* (and other third term supporters) set the tone of the discussion by declaring their support for Grant, the *Herald* began responding to its claims. In particular, the *Herald* took great interest in *Harper's* article that asserted the country would be better off with fewer liberties than it would be under an incompetent president.¹⁷⁹ The *Herald* responded that the United States' system of government made the country susceptible to tyranny. Its riposte was widely reprinted even in papers that had hitherto refuted charges of executive usurpation against Grant. Critiquing the American system of government, the *Herald* highlighted the enormous power yet lack of accountability of the cabinet, which seemingly made Caesarism possible.¹⁸⁰

The president, the *Herald* argued, controlled the cabinet, which in turn dispensed a large amount of patronage and gave Grant substantial unchecked power.¹⁸¹ Moreover, the article implied that the president, in collusion with the Attorney General, could make every law of

¹⁷⁹ 'Caesarism.', *Harper's Weekly*, 16 August 1873.

¹⁸⁰ 'Is the Government Machinery of the United States Fitted for the Rule of Caesar?', *The New York Herald* in the *Stark County Democrat* (Canton, Ohio), 21 August 1873.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Congress amenable to his will.¹⁸² Thus, through patronage, Grant had accumulated immense power at his fingertips allowing him to direct ‘the machinery of the government of the United States’.¹⁸³ In a telling hint of the linkage between political and corporate corruption it stated that the president had more control than a great entrepreneur did over his company.¹⁸⁴ The life appointments system of the Supreme Court also aided the president as it allowed him, in the *Herald’s* eyes, to control the Supreme Court.¹⁸⁵ This enabled the president to become dictator in all but name, as through the Attorney General and the Supreme Court, the president could interpret laws passed by Congress as he pleased.¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, as committees and the Senate controlled Congress, a great deal of power remained unaccountable, which left congressional power open to abuse too.¹⁸⁷ The paper also drew attention to the Congressional Directory (published annually) which listed the top officials in each government department, highlighting the astounding growth of the federal government and how these officials were ‘practically the friends of imperial purple’, especially as civil service reform had removed them somewhat from public censure and practically created life jobs for them.¹⁸⁸ The *Herald’s* message was clear and consistent: the founders had accorded the president too much power and only a constitutional amendment which capped his terms would remedy the problem.

The *Herald* therefore set itself up against ‘too much concentration of power in a few hands’.¹⁸⁹ The great desire among some Americans for ‘centralization and a strong government’ to entrench the gains of Reconstruction had led to danger as ‘the power already

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

exists, and only the throne is wanting.’¹⁹⁰ According to the *Herald*, the republic was not safe when the enormous power of the presidency rested upon the magnanimity of the man who held office.¹⁹¹

The response to the Caesarism editorials peaked in August and September as newspapers responded to the battle between the *Herald* and supporters of the third term, but by October, as the country reeled from financial crisis, the atmosphere created by Caesarism had calmed down. The Panic of 1873, explored in the next chapter, which hit on 18 September 1873, contributed a great deal to this change.¹⁹² But despite the pandemonium caused by the panic, it did not supersede Caesarism. The volume of articles on the scare remained high during September, and continued into October, but started to peter out towards the end of the month. Only a trickle of articles appeared in November. It is a testament to the strength of the scare that the Panic of 1873 did not decimate it.

It is possible that the return of *Harper's Weekly's* premier cartoonist, from ordered rest due to fatigue, played a salient role in the demise of the scare in late October 1873.¹⁹³ Thomas Nast's influence was renowned: Lincoln credited Nast as the Union's 'best recruiting sergeant' during the Civil War due to his moving illustrations which emphasised the moral and patriotic merits of the North's cause.¹⁹⁴ Though he returned too late to rectify the damage done by journalists – including those at his own journal – it is possible that his October cartoons helped to defuse many of the fears the scare had raised. Nast treated the editorials

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Young, 'New Lines of Political Departure-How History Repeats Itself-What is the issue of the Future?', *New York Herald*, 5 July 1873.

¹⁹² Irwin Unger, *The Greenback Era: A Social and Political History of American Finance, 1865-1879* (Princeton, 1964), p. 213.

¹⁹³ Fiona Deans Halloran, *Thomas Nast: The Father of Modern Political Cartoons* (Chapel Hill and London, 2012), pp. 177-184. Nast was ordered abroad in early 1873 to recover from fatigue. He left in April for London and then Cornwall but returned in June. However, Nast kept out of politics until he had recuperated enough to begin work for *Harper's Weekly* again.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

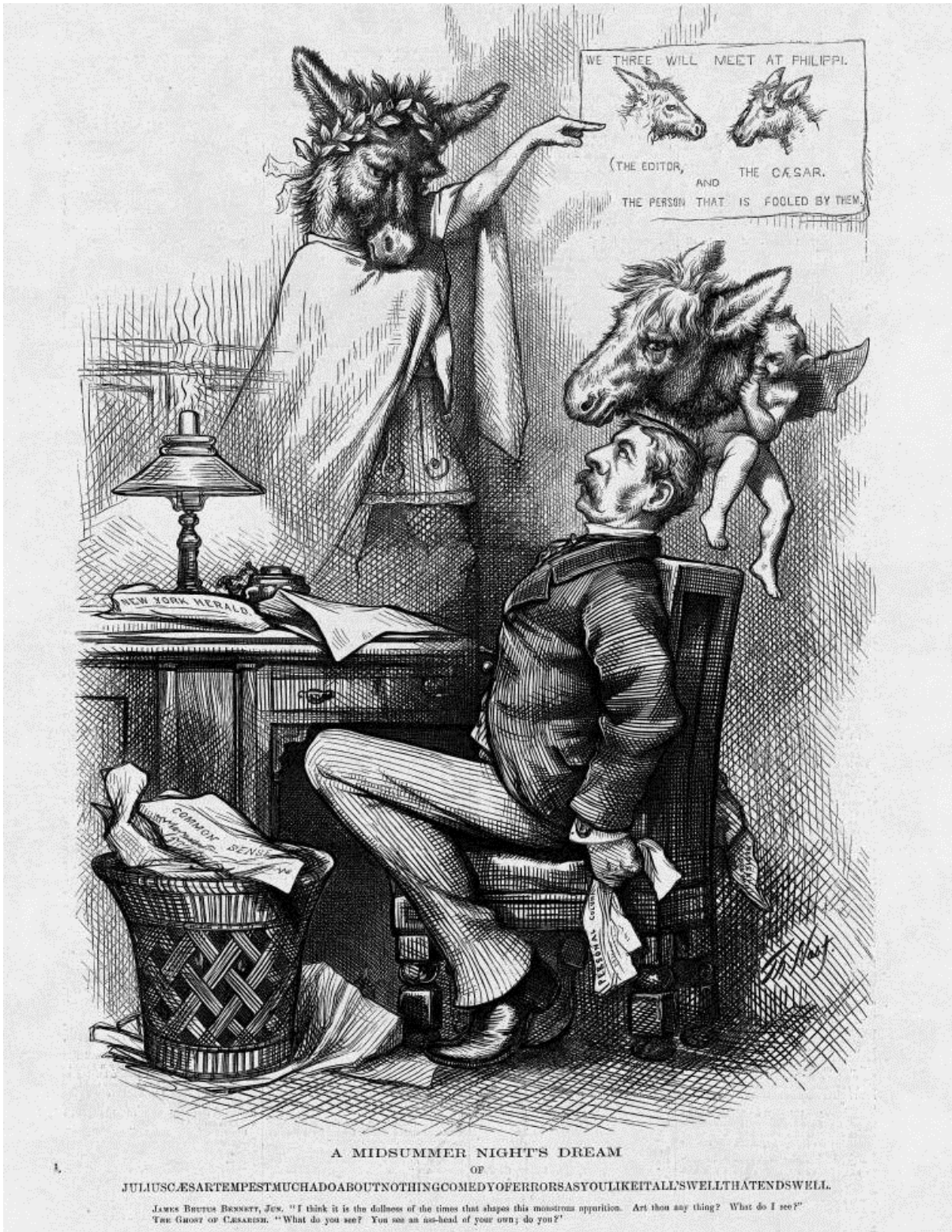
with the only response he deemed suitable: ridicule.¹⁹⁵ His first cartoon entitled ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’, published on 4 October 1873, mocked the owner of the *Herald* by depicting Bennett Junior talking to the Ghost of Caesarism in his office, and dreaming up the idea in the dull news season. Nast drew Bennett throwing away ‘common sense’ in the waste basket and conversing with the ghost, saying ‘I think it is the dullness of the times which shapes this monstrous apparition. Art thou anything? What do I see?’¹⁹⁶ The Ghost of Caesarism replied ‘[w]hat do you see? You see an ass-head of your own; do you?’¹⁹⁷ Nast’s meaning was clear: Caesarism was nothing but the fiction of Bennett’s own imagination.

Figure 3.1 ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’.

¹⁹⁵ After several cartoons which ridiculed the New York *Herald*, Nast finally published one on 8 November 1873 which showed a Roman Bennett aghast at the ‘music’ which Nast was playing. It was titled: “‘Where there is an evil’ (Caesarism scare) ‘There is a remedy’ - (Ridicule).”

¹⁹⁶ Thomas Nast, ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 4 October 1873.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*



Source: Thomas Nast, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', *Harper's Weekly*, 4 October 1873.

Congratulating himself and others who had ridiculed the *Herald* (slightly prematurely as it

appeared in the same issue), Nast's second cartoon showed Bennett's 'hot air' had burst.¹⁹⁸ However, his third cartoon, published on 11 October 1873, mocked both Bennett and those newspapers fooled by the editorials. In this cartoon, Nast tackled the suggestion that Grant could procure himself a third term. Nast used the story of the Anglo-Danish King Cnut and the tide to illustrate that Grant too knew full well the limits of his power.¹⁹⁹ The story originated from a tale in Henry of Huntingdon's *Chronicle of the History of England* which attested to the King's humility.²⁰⁰ It claimed that after courtiers flattered him by suggesting he had the ability to command the sea, Cnut asked for his throne to be placed on the shore, and told the water to not touch him.²⁰¹ However, the tide rose and soaked the King, who used it as proof to show the existence of an almighty force greater than any monarch.²⁰² In Nast's cartoon, Grant as a noble lion, sits on Cnut's throne while pointing towards the ocean and declaring 'I can no more proclaim myself Caesar than I can compel the Atlantic Ocean to recede, and you know it.'²⁰³ Those around him reading the *New York Herald* are portrayed as fools – partly through their depiction as animals but also by their look of embarrassment. The sea here stood in for the nation's robust republican institutions: a widespread suffrage and a balanced government. Nast implied that Grant was more aware than his critics that these powers were beyond the control of any one man.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas Nast, 'Another Inflated Power Burst', *Harper's Weekly*, 4 October 1873.

¹⁹⁹ J. P. Sommerville, 'King Canute (= Cnut) and the waves', Faculty of History University of Wisconsin-Madison, <http://faculty.history.wisc.edu/sommerville/123/Canute%20Waves.htm> [accessed 5 August 2014].

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Thomas Nast, 'Our Modern Canute at Long Branch', *Harper's Weekly*, 11 October 1873.

Figure 3.2 ‘Our Modern Canute at Long Branch’



Source: Thomas Nast, ‘Our Modern Canute at Long Branch’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 11 October 1873.

However, this did not diminish the fears over presidential power in this era. Nast was not alone in ridiculing the scare. The humorist Eli Perkins’ (a man most likely involved in the earlier *Imperialist* scare of 1869) wrote a widely distributed satirical article on Grant’s penchant for summary executions, human sacrifice and cannibalism in the *New York Daily Graphic*, and this too may have extinguished some fears over a third term for Grant.²⁰⁴ But the satire came too late to fully remedy the damage already done. Indeed the comical conclusion to the scare makes it too easy to miss just how seriously many Americans – not just Southern whites and partisan Democrats – took the prospect of a third term. Caesarism as

²⁰⁴ The source of Melville D. Landon’s links to *The Imperialist* was found by Andrew Heath in Charles Sumner’s MSS. See University of Sheffield: Charles Sumner MSS, Series 1, Reel 44, M. D. Landon (New York) to Charles Sumner, 12 April 1869. For the article mentioned, see ‘Eli Perkins on Caesarism’, *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 September 1873.

an idea, after all, would soon resurface in anti-Grant newspapers during the response to Grant's veto of the 1874 inflation bill – the subject of the next chapter – where it was stirred up by congressmen, who were possibly the greatest casualty in the drama as they sought to rein in Grant's power through bills which reduced the size of the military. It is probable that a House Resolution passed in 1876 which recommended against Grant's re-nomination at the 1876 Republican convention may have been derived from fears over the reach of his power which were only heightened by the *Herald's* editorials.²⁰⁵

Conclusion

The Caesarism editorials highlighted and fuelled ongoing fears over presidential power in an era where the boundaries of power in the federal government remained undefined. The Civil War and Reconstruction had required unprecedented mobilisation of presidential power in an attempt to ensure long lasting change within the nation. As a result, many Americans were left feeling insecure about the stability of the republic. Republican anxieties over patronage, the use of the military in peacetime, and the centralisation of power in the federal government were old concerns for citizens, but the period of instability exacerbated anxieties about the longevity of self-government. In giving form to these fears through his Caesarism editorials, though, Young made a small contribution to the downfall of Reconstruction.

The anxieties which the Caesarism scare embodied would only serve to alarm Americans and keep them on high alert over potential infractions by the President. By raising concerns over Grant's independence in distributing patronage and the power that could be derived from this privilege, Young simply built on existing fears over presidential powers already stoked by events in Louisiana. These in turn helped to bring numerous grievances over the use of federal power to the forefront of politics, which gave credence to the possibility that Grant

²⁰⁵ *Congressional Record*, Debates and Proceedings, 44th Congress 1875-1877, 1st Session, p. 228.

would violate Washington's two term precedent. Efforts to defend Grant on a republican basis fell on deaf ears as his desire to use executive power to enforce Reconstruction saw him enact measures even many in his own party saw as questionable such as the Salary Grab in an effort to defend the gains African Americans had made in the South. The President's dedication to Reconstruction ultimately resulted in depictions of him as a corrupt, power-hungry politician, which would undermine his ability to enforce the rights of the former slaves over the final years of his second term when his vigorous use of power would be conflated with the actions of a tyrant. Warnings over presidential power, like the Caesarism editorials, imperilled the future of Reconstruction.

The response to the Caesarism articles also raised questions over the safety of the republic and whether the electorate could be trusted to use the suffrage wisely. Talk of a third term was shaped by the concerns of Liberal Republicans and some businessmen who were suspicious of the abilities of the lower classes to vote in capable, incorruptible men to political office. Caesarism seemed to illustrate the potential of the electorate to elect a demagogue, who would use his popularity to abuse power with a supine electorate looking on, much as William Tweed had done with his Tammany machine on a smaller scale in New York. In particular, statements from Grant's supporters that recommended the retention of a trusted, capable executive further reinforced these anxieties, and lent support to critics of a wide suffrage. It brought into question whether democracy was compatible with republican government: if the public desired a Caesar could it legitimately elect one or did checks and balance place restraints on majority rule? Caesarism alerted the nation to questions of extreme importance for the future shape of the nation.

Caesarism, then, was much more than simply an exploitation of exaggerated fears of presidential power. It raised serious questions about both the nature of presidential power and democracy in the United States. And it showed how the spectre of Andrew Johnson's

presidency still hung over politics. Grant's use of patronage was misunderstood by many who saw his reluctance to reward his party as an attempt to build a loyal power base. Grant's independence from party trammels, as in his first term, raised fears that the President had dictatorial ambitions. Many level-headed Republican supporters also voiced worries over the inability of their representatives to adhere to their election pledges as they denounced the influence of railroads and the support they received from the federal government. In a political milieu shaped by concern over the corruption of republican virtue, many of Grant's supporters too came to fear the possible extension of his power in the form of an unprecedented third term. Caesarism – as a Republican newspaper editor highlighted – became a byword for numerous grievances with the power of the federal government.²⁰⁶ 'Caesarism', as the *Herald* itself stated in response to its critics, 'could not be made a newspaper sensation if it were the phantom they pretend it is.'²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ 'Joseph K. C. Forest', *New York Herald*, 21 August 1873. Forest stated: 'Caesarism, or centralization' indicating Caesarism was not simply about the third term but the growth and centralization of federal power.

²⁰⁷ 'The Remedy Against Caesarism—It Will Be Found in a General Discussion of the Question', *New York Herald*, 11 August 1873.

‘The most important event of the administration’:

The President vetoes the 1874 inflation bill

As the nation continued to reel from the Caesarism scare and the uncertainty over whether President Ulysses S. Grant sought an unprecedented third term, financial catastrophe struck, shifting attention from fears over power to fears over economic security. In September 1873 with the press still consumed with Caesarism, and the *New York Herald* chasing down public figures for their opinions on the issue, the financier of the Union Civil War effort – Jay Cooke and Company – suspended interest payments, effectively admitting bankruptcy.¹ The company’s actions resulted in the Panic of 1873 as thousands of U.S. companies collapsed.² In the pandemonium, many Americans looked to the federal government for relief. Grant, though wary of inflation, agreed to a small reissue of retired dollars, known as greenbacks, which partially eased the cash shortage in the East. However, the financial situation still remained critical in most of the country – especially the West and South, where credit had been scarce since the Civil War – and this prompted Congress to legislate on the issue. The resulting measure provided for an increase of the currency by a third of its existing amount, but, unexpectedly, Grant vetoed the bill on 22 April 1874. The President had acted of his own accord, but in doing so, had renewed the anxieties of executive tyranny that had filled the newspaper pages over the preceding summer.

Historians have often portrayed Grant as either an incompetent chief executive or a puppet of the Republican Party, yet his veto of the 1874 inflation bill suggests he was neither.³ Most Americans did not expect Grant to veto the bill, and his action caught both congressmen and political commentators by surprise when the news arrived. Indeed it marked one of the

¹ Unger, *The Greenback Era*, p. 213.

² Smith, *Grant*, p. 575 and Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction and the Gospel of Prosperity*, p. 273.

³ Smith, *Grant*, p. 575.

greatest shocks since his cabinet picks in 1869, to which it bore a striking similarity. Senators were stunned into silence when they received Grant's veto in the chamber.⁴ Washington correspondents, considered the most knowledgeable on federal government news, had been confident that Grant would sign the bill into law, especially as congressmen deemed use of the veto unjustifiable unless the president believed a bill was unconstitutional.⁵ Grant's predecessor, Andrew Johnson, narrowly missed conviction in the Senate after the House of Representatives impeached him for (albeit indirectly) his veto use, and many congressmen had threatened Grant with impeachment if he vetoed the bill.⁶ Congress did not act on their threat but in the President's action they saw a dangerous precedent: an attempt by the executive to direct legislative policy. As a result, they sought to rectify the issue by devising a new bill which would provide double the amount of greenbacks than the original bill.⁷ Grant, they alleged in language that echoed the scare of the previous year, was acting dictatorially.

Grant's veto of the inflation bill proved extremely divisive. Opponents of Grant's actions, illustrating the effect of the previous year's Caesarism scare on the American public, accused Grant of plotting a third term, and read his actions as merely a device to gain powerful backers for his plans. Collusion with Wall Street, they warned, would enable the President to impose a permanent despotism throughout the nation. Grant's veto was thus a symbol of his corruption and path to perpetual power. These critics presented Grant as a tyrannical ruler.

Building on the critique of executive usurpation, framed in battles with Johnson then developed over the course of Grant's presidency, some Americans perceived the veto as an illegitimate appropriation of a legislative role rightfully reserved to elective congressional representatives, who they argued represented the will of the people. Representations of Grant

⁴ 'Inflation Exploded', *Daily Alta California*, 23 April 1874.

⁵ Smith, *Grant* p. 579, and *Dubuque Herald* (Dubuque, Iowa), 24 April 1874. A nearly identical article was also printed in the *Chicago Tribune*, 22 April 1874, and *Michigan Tribune*, 30 April 1874.

⁶ *New York Times*, 22 April 1874.

⁷ *New York Tribune*, 19 May 1874.

by both his opponents and supporters highlighted how issues of political economy often became intertwined with political culture. It mattered less whether inflation would improve the nation's dire financial straits, and more, seemingly, on whether Grant was right to use power in such a manner. In this respect, the debate over the use of the veto became a question over the kind of democracy Americans desired in the United States.

When Grant ascended to the presidential office in March 1869 he did so upon the promise of adherence to the will of the people. Though a slippery notion, Grant understood this to mean acting in the best interests of the United States, even if this risked putting him at odds with other claimants to democratic legitimacy: principally Congress. While the veto caused outrage in some sections of the country, the majority of responses to Grant's veto commended his actions. These commendations illustrated that the reaction to Grant's veto did not simply reflect an East versus West issue as many newspapers and historians have portrayed the incident. Applause could be heard in Chicago and Detroit, while condemnation extended to 'hard money' cities like Philadelphia. The issue of finance ran deeper than a simple sectional divide. Though geography was important – most of the denunciations after all came from credit hungry Western and Southern areas which stood to benefit the most from currency expansion – it mattered less than scholars have suggested.⁸ Newspapers from all regions of the country praised what they saw as an honourable antipartisan stance in vetoing a bill urged on him by many members of the Republican Party. Heralding the model republican, they compared Grant's actions to his Civil War service. As President, they claimed, Grant bestowed on the people a victory as momentous to the United States as he effected at Appomattox Court House when he received the surrender of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. In their 'exuberant' gratitude some papers alleged that various cities had 'fired

⁸ Historians who have seen it as a sectional battle include Unger, *The Greenback Era*, pp. 213-248; McFeely, *Grant*, pp. 392-397; and Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction and the Gospel of Prosperity*, pp. 250-283.

a hundred guns over the event'.⁹ It was evident that many citizens believed Grant had fulfilled his duty to the public by vetoing the controversial bill.

In justifying the President's use of the veto they reminded the public that the veto had roots in a political tradition dating back to the Revolution. Supporters insisted that Grant had saved the republic from financial ruin, and that the imperative of defending the national interest from partisan plots justified him overriding the wishes of Congress. They claimed that in vetoing a bill believed to be harmful to the still struggling American economy, Grant had acted for the public good. The President, they argued, had served his country rather than his party, and epitomised the republican ideal of the disinterested public servant. The editor of influential journal *Harper's Weekly*, George William Curtis, even labelled Grant's veto 'the most important event of his administration.'¹⁰ But more surprisingly, Grant also received a great deal of support from former enemies for his action. Newspaper editors all over the United States described the veto as the defining moment of Grant's presidency. In an era typically portrayed as dominated by scandals, corruption, and interest group horse-trading, Grant's action was upheld by his defenders as embodying a different form of politics: an antipartyism that harked back to the rhetoric of the early republic rather than the Gilded Age.

Grant's supporters also portrayed him as an honourable man protecting the nation from a humiliating and degrading fate. Honour, historians have argued, formed a cultural system which revolved around the public reputation of an individual, family or group; the opposite of honour constituted 'public humiliation' or 'shame'.¹¹ Based on a public system of acknowledged reputation, a person's honour had to be accepted by the whole of society rather

⁹ *Telegraph & Messenger*, (Macon, Georgia), 28 April 1874. See also 'Veto', *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 23 April 1874. The latter article claims such an event occurred in Rochester, New York.

¹⁰ 'The Veto', *Harper's Weekly*, 5 May 1874.

¹¹ On the issue of humiliation, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York and Oxford, 1986), p. viii. On shame, see Matthew J. Grow, "*Liberty to the Downtrodden*": *Thomas L. Kane, Romantic Reformer* (New Haven and London, 2009), p. 208.

than simply relying upon the perception of their own 'self-worth'.¹² However, Amy S. Greenberg has identified that this culture diverged in the antebellum era into two manifestations: martial manhood and restrained manhood.¹³ Martial manhood was characterised by 'strength, aggression, and even violence,' and was symbolised most vividly by the penchant for duelling; in the Civil War era, it was strongest in the South.¹⁴ On the other hand, restrained manhood required 'being morally upright, reliable, and brave', and enjoyed its broadest support in middle-class Northern culture.¹⁵ Restrained men valued domesticity and often supported reform movements, especially temperance.¹⁶ When Grant was praised for his honour, it was the latter of the two forms which his supporters believed he signified. Where a former incumbent of the White House who stirred fears of tyranny, Andrew Jackson, was firmly situated by both champions and opponents in the tradition of martial honour, Grant embodied (at least his backers insisted) the qualities of manly self-restraint. Rather than presenting a drunken and tyrannical threat to a chaste republic, as his critics so frequently charged, he had the self-control necessary to protect Columbia from those who preyed on her virtue: imagery, as I will show, that commentators explicitly evoked in defending the President's veto.

Through an examination of the reaction to this veto through newspaper articles, editorials, cartoons, and personal papers, this chapter demonstrates that debates over the presidential veto, like battles over other aspects of executive power in the era, took place in a political

¹² Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, pp. 14-15.

¹³ Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (New York, 2005), pp. 11-14. Historians, influenced by Bertram Wyatt-Brown's influential study, have generally restricted the culture of honour to the South. Wyatt-Brown believed that as Northerners grew more individualistic they lost their need for a culture of honour that they saw as valorising the buccaneering rogue who would fight to protect his own and a woman's honour. See Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, p. 20. However, more recently historians, such as Greenberg and Matthew J. Grow, have shown that honour culture, in both its forms, penetrated both the North and the South in the antebellum era. Grow has also shown that it existed in the postbellum era too, through his study of the 'romantic reformer' Thomas L. Kane. See Grow, "Liberty to the Downtrodden".

¹⁴ Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-14.

culture still defined by republicanism. Though responses to the veto were often shaped by partisan (and sometimes sectional) imperatives, they were often couched in political rather than political economic terms. The reaction, indeed, suggests that fears about tyranny, celebrations of antipartyism, and the valorisation of honour – each usually seen as features of pre-Civil War politics – remained potent tools of mobilisation in Reconstruction politics. Opponents of the veto used the same republican language to illustrate that Grant, in the name of saving the nation, was building the foundations of an enduring despotism. It illustrated that a duality existed in the political culture of this era: while the President's republicanism, especially his antipartisan stance, allowed supporters to portray him as a model executive in the Washington mould, that very independence could lend weight to fears that he was a tyrant.

But as well as looking at the debate itself I also consider the impact of the veto in shaping the White House's authority to implement its wider agenda. Previously, critics had challenged Grant's ability to direct foreign affairs, his right to run for multiple terms, and most importantly his patronage appointments; now Americans disputed the legitimacy of his use of the veto power. In each case, the substance of what Grant was doing seemed to matter less to some, at least, than the fact that he had the power to do it. This of course varied. Conservative Southern whites opposed presidential power when Grant used it to prosecute the Ku Klux Klan but had supported Johnson in his battles with Congress. Charles Sumner's bid for a one term amendment came in part out of his hostility to Grant's foreign policy. Yet the hostile response to Grant's veto of a measure that had little to do with the civil rights of African Americans suggests that the weakness of executive power after 1872 needs to be explained by more than declining political support in the North for a biracial democracy.

Therefore, the chapter argues, while issues of racism and free labour ideology undoubtedly influenced the retreat from Reconstruction, the prominence of wider anxieties over executive

power in the period indicate we must explore this area too, in order to fully understand why the White House struggled to protect the fragile gains former slaves had made in the post-Civil War South.¹⁷

The inflation bill

The circumstances leading to the Panic of 1873 have been described in great detail by Mark W. Summers who has explored how the behaviour of railroad companies and their associated bankers enabled the financial crisis.¹⁸ Unprofitable railroad lines and false promises on the profitability of lines led to overseas investments at inflated interest rates which could not be met.¹⁹ As European economies faltered, these overseas investments dried up, which produced financial shortfalls for American railroads.²⁰ American bankers had speculated on lines and sold bonds without the proper amount of backing capital, which meant when lines proved unprofitable, the companies went into deficit.²¹ This resulted in the failure of many railroads and their banking houses, which produced the Panic.

The rights and wrongs of inflation as a response to the crisis greatly divided the country. Easterners, especially middle and upper-class lenders, supported a hard money policy which advocated returning to the gold standard by redeeming existing greenbacks for coin, known as specie. The cash-poor West and South, in contrast, campaigned for an increase of the greenbacks in circulation in order to alleviate the financial strain on debtors. Congressmen tended to divide along partisan lines and often supported or opposed inflation according to the needs of their constituents. Exceptions to the rule were rare, but they did exist, Senator Carl Schurz of Missouri, for example, served a constituency which desired an increase of

¹⁷ For literature on the retreat from Reconstruction, see Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 524-553; Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction*; Les Benedicts, *Preserving the Constitution*, pp. 168-185; and Richardson, *Death of Reconstruction*.

¹⁸ Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction and the Gospel of Prosperity*, pp. 268-281.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

greenbacks, but he opposed the increase.²² Senator John Sherman, who represented the mid-western state of Ohio, supported specie resumption, whilst House member Benjamin F. Butler, who represented a Massachusetts constituency, backed inflation, in line with the wishes of cotton factory owners in his district.²³ An Ohio journal summed up congressmen's positions best when it stated that 'the commendations or censures are not governed by political lines, but come wholly from a financial stand-point.'²⁴ Such a standpoint tends to support the view that material interests shaped Gilded Age politics, but economic position was not always decisive, and in defining their positions to the public congressmen drew on republican terminology to define their actions and that of the President, rather than attacking Grant in political economic terms.²⁵

The passage of the inflation bill had been complicated: Congress's first attempt to solve the economic situation of the country originated with Senator John Sherman who proposed a Specie Resumption bill with the resumption date of 1 January 1874. However, a coalition of Westerners and Easterners defeated the bill, with the former disliking the resumption of

²² *The State Journal* (Jefferson City, Missouri), 17 April 1874. See also Schurz's speeches on the inflation bill: *Congressional Record*, Debates and Proceedings, 43rd Congress 1873-1875, 1st Session, pp. 2514-2516, 2827, 2828, 2831, 2834. For those who voted in line with their constituents' interests, see the speeches of Sherman pp. 2514, 2517-2518, 2819-20, 2825-2826, 2829, 2830; see also some of Butler's speeches, pp. 2999-3001, 3020. Out of the 29 senators who voted for the inflation bill, 23 were Republicans and only 6 Democrats. These were almost entirely Western and Southern Senators with the exception of Senator Cameron of Pennsylvania. The Democratic Senators were all Southerners, while 13 Republicans were Westerners and 9 were Southerners. See *Congressional Record*, 43rd Congress, 1st Session, p. 2835. In comparison, the assortment of senators who voted against the bill were far more diverse. Out of the 17 Republicans who opposed the bill, there were 9 Eastern Senators, 5 Western Senators, and 3 Southern Senators. The Democrats, however, comprised of 1 Easterner, 2 Westerners, and 4 Southerners. In total 19 senators were absent from the vote. The absent Republican Senators comprised of 2 Westerners, 5 Southerners and 6 Easterners.

²³ Smith, *The Enemy Within*, p. 46.

²⁴ 'A Veto—No More Greenbacks' in the *Gallipolis Journal* (Gallipolis, Ohio), 30 April 1874.

²⁵ It is interesting to note the statistics compiled by newspapers at the time of Democratic positions on the inflation bill. An Illinois newspaper requested information on the position of every newspaper in the West. It gathered results from the following states: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri. The results showed that neither party was united on the issue but overall the West supported Grant's veto. See 'Voice of the West', *Chicago Tribune*, 13 May 1874. The President also received numerous messages once the veto was announced thanking him for his action. These messages stressed the same republican themes evident in newspaper reactions to the veto. The messages came from all over the country illustrating that Westerners too were sometimes as opposed to inflation as Easterners. See John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 25: 1874 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 2003), pp. 75-81.

specie and the latter disliking the preference of national banks over state banks.²⁶ The compromise bill, proposed by a group of Western congressmen, allowed for the issuing of 62 million dollars of greenbacks as well as 38 million dollars of specie.²⁷ The bill originated with four Republican Senators: Matthew H. Carpenter (Wisconsin), Thomas W. Ferry (Michigan), John A. Logan (Illinois), and Oliver P. Morton (Indiana).²⁸ These men piloted the bill through the Senate whilst Republican Benjamin F. Butler (Massachusetts) championed it in the House. On 6 April 1874, the bill passed in the Senate by 29 to 24 votes, while it passed by 140 to 102 votes in the House (with 48 abstaining) on 14 April 1874.²⁹

The men who engineered the passage of the bill were ambitious politicians, some of whom, such as Morton and Logan, were also personally in debt.³⁰ Morton, as Governor of Indiana during the Civil War, had run the state single-handedly rather than allow the Democratic legislature to deprive him control of the state's forces; however, as a Radical Republican he also consistently supported African-American suffrage.³¹ Logan, on the other hand, earned the status of 'one of the last great state patronage bosses' of Illinois, as he relied upon patronage to sustain his political career, and thus opposed Civil Service reform on this basis.³² Both men desired the presidency, and Logan – as a former Union General – had attempted to procure the 1868 Republican presidential nomination.³³ In the aftermath of the veto, both men were suggested for the 1876 Republican presidential nomination by their supporters.³⁴ However, Butler, by far, had the worst reputation having faced accusations of helping the Confederate war effort by engaging in the cotton trade – and thus abetting the

²⁶ Hesselstine, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p. 313.

²⁷ McFeely, *Grant*, p. 395.

²⁸ Charles S. Reinhart, 'Stand Back!', *Harper's Weekly*, 9 May 1874, and Hesselstine, *Ulysses S. Grant*, pp. 333-336.

²⁹ *Congressional Record*, 43rd Congress, 1st Session, pp. 2835, 3078.

³⁰ See James Pickett Jones, *John A. Logan: Stalwart Republican from Illinois* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 2001), pp. 6, 77.

³¹ William Dudley Foulke, *Life of Oliver P. Morton* Volume One (Indianapolis and Kansas City, 1899), p. 253.

³² Jones, *John A. Logan*, pp. x-xi.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

enemy – during his wartime administration of New Orleans.³⁵ Described by critics as ‘the epitome of depravity’, Butler gained a reputation during the war for corruption and disreputable behaviour which he never lost.³⁶ All these men had personal interests in the passage of bill and were unwilling to compromise on the inflation issue.

Despite receiving a warning from Grant that he would not sign into law any proposal which did not include a clause for specie resumption, Congress sent the currency bill, without a redemption clause, to the White House on 14 April 1874.³⁷ Yet the receipt of Grant’s veto on 22 April 1874, and its welcome reception in sections of the press, did nothing to quell senators’ desire for inflation. Sherman reintroduced the currency bill on 13 May 1874 which now mandated a small reissue of greenbacks and a clause for specie resumption.³⁸ However, on 14 May 1874 the bill passed the Senate by a vote of 25 to 19, but with provision for doubling the amount of greenbacks contained in the vetoed measure.³⁹ Though the bill did permit specie resumption, the terms provided allowed for the currency to stay inflated at a considerable level for several years.⁴⁰ Through passing what became known as the ‘wild inflation bill’ it was evident that the Senate desired to assert its independence.⁴¹ On a previous occasion when the president – in this case Abraham Lincoln – had sought to direct legislative proceedings he had faced accusations of tyranny from senators.⁴² No doubt senators believed Grant’s intervention constituted executive usurpation of congressional

³⁵ Smith, *The Enemy Within*, p. 46.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁷ ‘The Struggle in the House’, *New York Times*, 10 April 1874.

³⁸ *Congressional Record*, 43rd Congress, 1st Session, pp. 3834-3836.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3896-3897.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 3895-97.

⁴¹ ‘Objections to the “Compromise”’, *New York Tribune*, 19 May 1874.

⁴² *Congressional Globe*, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, p. 3374. The accusation of monarchical government was levelled by Senator Benjamin Wade (one of the authors of the Wade-Davis bill) who suggested ‘we ought to have a committee to wait on the President whenever we send him a bill, to know what his royal pleasure is in regard to it; and whether it contains anything he would like to modify.’ See *Congressional Globe*, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, p. 3375.

powers and sought to challenge his power in an attempt to assert their authority. Fortunately, for the President, the bill proceeded no further.

The veto power has proved controversial in the nation's history, yet no rules exist to govern its use beyond formalities.⁴³ However, the founders present at the drafting of the Constitution envisioned the veto in very broad terms.⁴⁴ Conceived as a 'legislative power', the veto sought, in the main, to prevent 'legislative usurpation'.⁴⁵ However, it was also envisioned as a means for the 'protection of the rights of the people, prevention of laws 'unwise in their principle' as well as laws 'in correct [*sic*] in their form' and to 'prevent popular or factious injustice'.⁴⁶ Yet despite this extensive interpretation of the power which gave the President a wide variety of reasons for vetoing legislation, the early presidents used the veto very conservatively.⁴⁷ This encouraged a narrow interpretation of the power by legislators, and it was not until Jackson became president that Congress begun challenging the legality of the veto power.⁴⁸ Regardless of the supposedly broad basis of the veto, Jackson's use of the power to oppose congressional policies like internal improvements and the re-chartering of the Second Bank led to uproar in Congress.⁴⁹ Lincoln's use of the power also provoked congressional outrage which illustrated that during the Civil War and Reconstruction era Congress often interpreted the president's ability to use the power narrowly, especially on issues of national importance.⁵⁰ By Reconstruction, then, executive and legislative branches of government had still not fully resolved the proper use of the veto right. Indeed in 1873

⁴³ Robert J. Spitzer, *The Presidential Veto: A Touchstone of the American Presidency* (Albany, 1988), p. xix.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Richard J. Ellis, *The Political Development of the American Presidency* (New York, 2012), pp. 151-154.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, see also Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson: The Course of American Democracy, 1833-1845* (Baltimore, 1998), pp. 138-139, 387.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Neely Jr., *Lincoln and the Triumph of the Nation*, pp. 80-84, 108-109.

Grant himself had requested a line-item veto, but was rebuffed by a reluctant Congress.⁵¹

When Grant informed his cabinet of his decision to veto the inflation bill, Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano alerted the President ‘that the use of the veto power [was] not popular except when exercised on the ground of the unconstitutionality of a bill’.⁵² The perceived scope of the veto power had narrowed greatly since its creation in this sense but as no constitutional limits existed, the president was still free to veto legislation as he saw fit.

Grant himself insisted the veto constituted a matter of national and personal honour. In his veto message, the President described the bill as signalling ‘a departure from true principles of finance, national interest, [and] national obligations to creditors.’⁵³ He reminded Congress that the provisions of the bill went against previous ‘Congressional promises, [and] party pledges (on the part of both political parties),’ as well as the ‘personal views and promises made by me in every annual message sent to Congress and in each inaugural address’ since becoming President.⁵⁴ Portraying himself, not without reason, as a man of honour, Grant claimed he could not bring himself to break those trusts. The President cited an Act – the Public Credit Act of 1869 – that passed into law on 18 March 1869 which stated that the United States had committed herself ‘to make provision at the earliest practicable period for the redemption of the United States notes in coin.’⁵⁵ He recalled several pledges by Congress to return the United States to a specie-based currency as soon as business prospects allowed.⁵⁶ The language in Grant’s message extolled the importance of duty, fulfilling promises, and repaying debts at their full value. Grant did not wish to cause debtors to pay artificially high prices but nor did he believe it fair to pay creditors, who stood by the Union

⁵¹ Ulysses S. Grant, Fifth Annual Message, 1 December 1873, *UCSB Presidency Project* <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29514> [accessed 9 August 2013].

⁵² Smith, *Grant*, p. 579.

⁵³ Ulysses S. Grant Veto Message 22 April 1874, *UCSB American Presidency Project* <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=70417> [accessed 9 August 2013].

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

in its hour of need, with devalued paper money.⁵⁷ Grant believed the nation had a duty to its creditors as in the nation's time of need these lenders had provided the funds to finance the Union war effort and to pay them in devalued currency would be dishonourable.

The relationship between credit and honour, upon which Grant defended his actions, has a long history in the United States. The two concepts have been connected ever since colonisation.⁵⁸ To retain his reputation or honour, many Americans believed, a man must maintain 'his 'credit''.⁵⁹ By the end of the eighteenth century, obligations to repay debts rested upon a man's honour rather than any 'religious underpinnings' which had previously governed repayments.⁶⁰ As one historian has affirmed, 'credit and reputation were inseparable'; a man's standing in the community – his honour – 'had been among the nonfinancial definitions of 'credit' for two hundred years.'⁶¹ This understanding of credit still held sway during Reconstruction, and animated discussions regarding repayment of the war debt.⁶² Honour was implicit in republicanism with its notions of duty and sacrifice to the country. As a good republican, then, Grant linked the nation's credit with his own honour and vetoed the inflation bill in part on this basis.

Historians have not understood the reasons for Grant's veto: most cover the incident briefly, while those who have explored the affair such as McFeely claim that Grant did not understand financial affairs and vetoed the bill to maintain his friendship with wealthy Easterners.⁶³ He argued that Grant feared signing the bill would cost him his new social status

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Mark E. Kann, *A Republic of Men: The American Founders, Gendered Language, and Patriarchal Politics* (New York and London, 1998), p. 113.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Bruce H. Mann, *Republic of Debtors: Bankruptcy in the Age of American Independence* (Cambridge Mass., 2002), p. 260.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-12.

⁶² Alan Conway, *The Reconstruction of Georgia* (St. Paul, MN, 1966), pp. 48-49.

⁶³ McFeely, *Grant*, pp. 396-397. McFeely uses arguments found in Unger, *The Greenback Era*, to buttress his assertions. However, Unger is not anymore lucid in explaining the reasons why Grant vetoed the bill, other than to state that it lay with the 'politically inexpedient promptings of his own conscience.' See Unger, *The*

and leave him as ‘dispossessed’ as those he wanted to help.⁶⁴ Even a historian writing twenty years later could not reconcile Grant’s former poverty with his veto: Jean Edward Smith argued that Grant’s ‘heart’ sympathised with those in poverty but ‘as president he felt his responsibility was to the nation’s future.’⁶⁵ The most recent historian to comment on the issue, H. W. Brands, explains that Grant believed the veto would serve the long term interests of the United States, a point the President felt politicians had failed to consider.⁶⁶ Brands, however, does not seek to locate where Grant’s beliefs originated.⁶⁷ For many historians, the veto remains just another of the paradoxes of Grant the man and Grant the President.⁶⁸

Yet there is evidence to suggest that Grant’s veto came from his own experience of poverty and his education in republicanism. In 1858, four years after Grant left the army, he heard that James Longstreet – an army friend to whom he owed five dollars – had come to St Louis, Missouri, where Grant resided.⁶⁹ Having left the army still in debt to Longstreet, Grant hastened to repay him.⁷⁰ Grant pushed a five dollar coin into Longstreet’s hand to repay ‘a debt of honor over 15 years old’, insisting that he could not live with any money in his possession which was not his own.⁷¹ As a man of honour, Grant felt unable to keep money owed to another beyond the term of the debt, even if that man had more means than him.⁷² Though Grant had suffered in the Panic of 1857, he believed that an inflationary currency would not alleviate the poverty he had experienced. Two days before Christmas in 1857 he

Greenback Era, pp. 242-243. Historians who have covered the incident briefly include Smith, *Grant*, pp. 575-583; Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union*, pp. 529-534; and Waugh, *U.S. Grant*, pp. 130-131.

⁶⁴ McFeely, *Grant*, p. 397.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Grant*, p. 577.

⁶⁶ Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union*, pp. 529-533.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Most historians writing on Grant have commented on the paradoxical nature of Grant’s life and how it has confused their understanding of the man. For the most recent discussion of the issue, see Rafuse, ‘Still a Mystery?’, *Journal of Military History*, pp. 849-874.

⁶⁹ ‘Longstreet Reminiscences’, *New York Times*, 24 July 1885.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

sold his gold watch for 22 dollars in order to buy presents for his family.⁷³ An inflated currency would still have provided Grant with the value of his watch in greenbacks, but traders, he reasoned, would have increased the price of their goods to take account of fluctuations in gold. With commodities priced above their real value, Grant assumed he would have received fewer goods for his gold. In all likelihood, it was partly due to – rather than in spite of – his previous poverty and his republican education that Grant refused to issue more greenbacks.

There is evidence to suggest Grant gave the message considerable thought but ultimately did not believe in the arguments for inflation and did not feel he could commit the country to such a course.⁷⁴ When he presented the issue to his cabinet, a majority disagreed with his decision, but, regardless, he decided to send in his veto.⁷⁵ The rules of honour culture meant the President could not allow Congress to depreciate the currency which would lead creditors to receive devalued payments of the original debt. Despite Grant's reminder of their previous pledges to return the country to specie payments, congressmen were outraged at Grant's veto. Grant faced a vast backlash within his party as a result of his action, and for just about the first time, stood accused of executive despotism by loyal Republicans. As the Caesarism scare of the previous year illustrated, genuine fears of executive power abounded throughout the country. Many Americans, especially congressmen, viewed Grant's use of the veto as an unacceptable attempt to direct legislative policy to the detriment of the independence of Congress. His action, in many quarters, was interpreted as the tyranny of the executive.

The Press Reaction

The reaction to the veto throughout the country cut through sectional lines and caused division in nearly every portion of the United States. Predictably Northerners – with notable

⁷³ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume One, p. 339.

⁷⁴ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, pp. 239-242.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

exceptions like Butler – tended to support the veto, especially in states such as New York and Vermont. States with booming economies in the South like California also usually expressed satisfaction with Grant’s veto. In comparison, states in the West and South were much more divided on the subject.⁷⁶ Many of their newspapers claimed that the regions as a whole opposed the veto, which is what we might expect given that inflationary policies would have helped their indebted citizens. Yet evidence exists which suggests that many Western states actually supported Grant’s action. The *Chicago Tribune* researched the issue in the aftermath of the veto and from nine Western states found the following results:

Table 4.1 Western responses to the veto.

	Sustain the veto	Oppose the veto	On the fence.
Illinois	129	117	9
Indiana	47	77	n/a
Michigan	82	25	n/a
Wisconsin	79	26	1
Minnesota	42	7	n/a
Iowa	80	64	n/a
Missouri	26	58	n/a
Kansas	20	26	n/a
Nebraska	9	8	1
Totals	514	408	11

Source: ‘Voice of the West’, *Chicago Tribune*, 13 May 1874.

The results highlight that the states of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota strongly supported the veto, whilst Illinois, Nebraska and Iowa supported the veto by slim majorities.

⁷⁶ ‘The Presidential Veto’, *The Athens Post* (Athens, Tennessee), 1 May 1874.

In contrast, the states nearer to the South – Missouri and Kansas – opposed the veto. The only Western state to strongly oppose the veto was Indiana. Overall, though, a majority of newspapers supported the President’s action. These figures, of course, do not serve as a proxy for public opinion, but they hint at least at the depth of division the issue engendered.

Interestingly, the *Chicago Tribune* also compiled a survey of Democratic newspapers in the West as well.

Table 4.2 Western Democratic responses to the veto.

	Sustain the veto	Oppose the veto
Illinois	25	27
Indiana	18	28
Michigan	10	7
Wisconsin	30	5
Minnesota	10	0
Iowa	23	14
Missouri	8	29
Kansas	2	1
Nebraska	2	1
Totals	128	112

Source: ‘Voice of the West’, *Chicago Tribune*, 13 May 1874.

These showed that a large majority of Democrats in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa supported Grant, while those in Michigan, Kansas, and Nebraska also supported the veto but by slight majorities.⁷⁷ Those opposed to the veto included Democrats in Illinois, Indiana and Missouri, which illustrated how even political parties in the West did not divide neatly into

⁷⁷ ‘Voice of the West’, *Chicago Tribune*, 13 May 1874.

support and opposition.⁷⁸ The veto divided parties as well as sections into inflationists and anti-inflationists as neither Republicans nor Democrats were united on the currency issue.⁷⁹ The only party which wholeheartedly supported one side – in this case the veto – remained the Liberal Republican Party, whose supporters now found themselves in the odd position of supporting executive power in defence of a principle.⁸⁰

The Fallout: Presidential Tyranny Revived and Sectional Animosity

Despite the *Chicago Tribune's* assessment of overall support from a majority of Western states the veto engendered great opposition from Western and Southern congressmen, who debated its constitutionality. As a result, the President gained new enemies. Opponents of Grant's veto renewed arguments over the legality of Grant's use of executive power. These men debated whether the president had the authority to veto a bill of national importance, just as they had contested former President Andrew Johnson's right to direct Reconstruction. They disputed whether the executive had a role in the legislative process or whether it had usurped the legislature by vetoing the bill. Grant's critics believed Congress represented the nation and the President did not have the ability to check Congress's power. As such, they cautioned the nation that Grant had behaved tyrannically as he courted Wall Street in search of his third term. For many Americans, the warning calls of Caesarism from the previous year appeared validated in light of the President's actions.

One of the foremost reasons why these congressmen were enraged over the President's actions was due to their belief that, on national issues at least, Grant had no right to interfere

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* See also 'The Western Democracy on the Money Question', *The Quincy Herald* (Quincy, Illinois), 14 May 1874; and 'The Presidential Veto', *The Athens Post* (Athens, Tennessee), 1 May 1874.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* See also 'Political effects of the Veto', *Chicago Tribune*, 30 April 1874.

⁸⁰ 'The Inflation Bill', *The Louisiana Democrat* (Alexandria, Louisiana), 6 May 1874. See also 'Political Effects of the Veto', *Chicago Tribune*, 30 April 1874.

with the decisions of the country's national representatives. Congress, they believed, superseded the president as the voice of the people. As a result, Grant, in vetoing the inflation bill had vetoed the will of the people. Though these men undoubtedly had their re-election prospects in sight, they also felt that the President had usurped power and denied the nation a much needed infusion of currency. Indiana Senator Morton summarised the situation for many Americans when he exclaimed how Grant was 'mistaken if he thinks the mouth of the Mississippi can be dammed with straw'.⁸¹ They outlined the extent of their outrage by likening Grant to his predecessor Johnson and threatening Grant with impeachment. Even before the President vetoed the bill, in fact, Butler had warned that Grant 'would deserve impeachment' if he issued a veto, and when the President did indeed issue a veto the suggestion found sympathy in many quarters.⁸² Like the hated Johnson, Grant seemed to be showing alarming independence from Congress.

Yet in contrast to Johnson who could never be considered a Radical, or even a moderate Republican, Grant, although an antipartisan, had mostly supported congressional legislation on important matters. As one Southern newspaper noted, Grant was 'not much of a veto President'.⁸³ Furthermore these Stalwart congressmen – Morton, Logan, Carpenter, Ferry and Butler – that Grant had now alienated with his veto had all previously supported the President. Logan, despite entertaining his own presidential ambitions, had nominated Grant for President at the 1868 Republican convention in Chicago, and campaigned for him in several states during the 1872 presidential election.⁸⁴ Similarly, despite originally opposing Grant's nomination in 1868 due to a personal grievance, Butler soon became an ardent

⁸¹ 'Washington', *The New York Times*, 23 April 1874.

⁸² *New York Times*, 22 April 1874. See *Nashville Union and American*, 5 May 1874, and 'Grant's Ten-Pin Alley', *Memphis Daily Appeal*, 10 June 1874. In an interview with a journalist, Senator Carpenter claimed 'everything but impeachment is threatened by those whose plans have been upset by his unexpected action.' See *Chicago Tribune*, 22 April 1874.

⁸³ 'President Grant's Veto', *Southern Watchman* (Athens, Georgia), 29 April 1874.

⁸⁴ Ely, Burnham, and Bartlett, *Proceedings of the National Republican Convention*, pp. 31, 90. For the 1872 campaigning see Jones, *John A. Logan*, p. 64.

supporter of the President.⁸⁵ He led the second attempt in Congress to repeal the Tenure of Office Act, which the House passed, though it faltered in the Senate.⁸⁶ Both Butler and Morton became especially friendly with Grant after his initial efforts to annex Santo Domingo were thwarted.⁸⁷ It was thanks to the efforts of Morton, after all, that a resolution, which attempted to salvage the annexation treaty, passed in the Senate, authorizing a commission to explore Santo Domingo despite Sumner's attempts to sabotage Grant's project.⁸⁸ Yet it was these former supporters who now turned against Grant and rallied around the familiar cry of despotism.

Grant's veto reopened the ongoing battle between Congress and the White House over which branch had the authority to direct policy on national issues. Congress assumed the debate had been settled during Johnson's presidency when it overrode his vetoes on Reconstruction legislation, yet Grant's action seemed to indicate he was willing to contest its claim to legislative supremacy. Advocates of Congress concluded that as their branch represented the whole country, they had the authority to direct policy on issues of national importance. An anti-veto Senator vocalised this opinion when he alleged that 'a President has no right to disapprove except on the ground that the particular measure is unconstitutional'.⁸⁹ In the fallout from the veto, many newspapers reported the desire of pro-inflation Senators 'to institute a rebellion in Congress against [Grant] similar to that of Andrew Johnson.'⁹⁰ Newspapers commented that the veto 'promises to divide the Republican party.'⁹¹ Even as late as November 1874, the *New York Tribune* – an anti-Grant, Liberal Republican newspaper

⁸⁵ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, pp. 209-210.

⁸⁶ Smith, *Grant*, p. 479.

⁸⁷ Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 496, and Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p. 194

⁸⁸ Smith, *Grant*, p. 505.

⁸⁹ *Dubuque Herald* (Dubuque, Iowa), 24 April 1874. For similar articles, see also *Chicago Tribune*, 22 April 1874, and *Michigan Tribune*, 30 April 1874.

⁹⁰ 'INFLATION BILL VETOED.', *Holmes County Republican* (Millersburg, Ohio), 30 April 1874. The paper referred to the fight between Johnson and Congress over the leadership of Reconstruction. In total, Johnson had fifteen of his twenty-one regular vetoes overridden. He also used his pocket veto eight times. Johnson had more vetoes overridden than any other President in the country's history.

⁹¹ *Troy Herald* (Troy, Missouri), 29 April 1874.

which had nevertheless called Grant's veto 'the most creditable act of his administration' – warned the President 'to look well to his steps, or he will be impeached.'⁹² Grant's action had reignited a battle some thought Thomas Nast's cartoons had laid to rest a year earlier.

In the aftermath of the veto, a storm raged over who had authority to speak for the people, which was reminiscent of the debate over Grant's first cabinet selections; Congress had believed then, too, that the members of the legislative branch should be consulted and awarded a place in the White House due to their national voice. An anti-veto Ohio newspaper alleged that Congress had acted 'in obedience to the demands of the people' and implied the President's action violated those wishes.⁹³ One of the engineers of the bill, Senator Carpenter, predicted that the veto 'will result in disaster' before asserting that '[i]t throws the whole question back upon congress' rather than the President.⁹⁴ Another Ohio newspaper, the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, hinted at the influences Grant represented when it praised Butler, claiming the latter 'has not been a tool of the moneyed lords of Wall and State streets, but has voted and spoken for the great mass of manufacturing operatives and other mechanical industries which largely exist in his district'.⁹⁵ A Kansas newspaper, meanwhile, reported that farms and businessmen were appalled at the veto and would now only 'vote for 'one who has no policy aside from the wishes of Congress and the people.'⁹⁶ Clearly many Westerners and Southerners, who desired an inflated currency for their indebted constituents, felt the President had ceased to represent them by vetoing the bill.

Outrage over Grant's use of the veto power did lead to significant sectional animosity between the West and South against the East. The Western proponents of the bill – namely Morton, Logan, Carpenter and Ferry – proposed to repudiate Grant's action, and if necessary

⁹² 'Too Much Advice'. *New York Tribune*, 14 November 1874.

⁹³ 'A Veto—No More Greenbacks.', *Gallipolis Journal* (Gallipolis, Ohio), 30 April 1874.

⁹⁴ 'Senator Carpenter', *Dubuque Herald* (Dubuque, Iowa), 24 April 1874.

⁹⁵ *Cincinnati Enquirer* quoted in *Michigan Tribune*, 14 May 1874.

⁹⁶ *The Weekly Kansas Chief* (Troy, Kansas), 7 May 1874.

create a new party committed to inflation. Newspapers in their Western localities, reprinting an article which originally appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, reported that ‘[t]hese gentlemen tell us of a new party to be organized within forty-eight hours, the foundation for which will be opposition to Grant and New England supremacy.’⁹⁷ Groups of congressmen were seen talking about the veto in tight groups in hotel lobbies, where one group of Western and Southern Senators remained in Morton’s quarters past midnight.⁹⁸ The press suggested conspiratorial plots were being hatched.⁹⁹ The *New York Herald* – which despite the Caesarism scare backed the veto – quoted inflationists as saying that ‘[a]ll other means failing, they will begin the work of a revolution in the elections for the next Congress’.¹⁰⁰ Those elections, Grant’s critics believed would ensure the next incumbent of the White House was ‘a President who will not defy the will of the people’.¹⁰¹ The *Herald* expanded on the inflation Senators’ predictions, exclaiming ‘Caesar is killed in the Senate and a triumvirate is coming. The Republican party for the East, a new party for the West and South, and the Democratic party against both of them.’¹⁰² The President’s independence had yet again provoked elements of his party into rebellion, but the *Herald*’s owner – Bennett Junior – suggested the consequences would be Grant’s dethronement and the fragmentation of the U.S. into sectional and partisan blocs.¹⁰³

As at other points in his presidency, here, Grant’s military background proved a double-edged sword. By reminding readers of Grant’s martial spirit, his opponents suggested how the President could, and in their opinion had, transformed the presidency into a dictatorship.

As a military leader, they asserted, Grant demanded obedience and his critics claimed he had

⁹⁷ *Dubuque Herald* (Dubuque, Iowa), 24 April 1874. For similar articles, see also *Chicago Tribune*, 22 April 1874, and *Michigan Tribune*, 30 April 1874.

⁹⁸ ‘Inflation Vetoed’, *Daily Alta California*, 23 April 1874.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ ‘The Inflationists Infuriated’, *New York Herald*, 25 April 1874

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ It was a suggestion also supported by Horace White of the Liberal Republican *Chicago Tribune*. See ‘Political Effects of the Veto’, *Chicago Tribune*, 30 April 1874.

carried that habit of command into civil office. They described Senator Roscoe Conkling, a Grant loyalist, ‘as the new leader of the administration party in the Senate’, and noted ‘his usual somewhat dictatorial tone’ in responding to the veto.¹⁰⁴ Similarly those who claimed they had always supported a veto were portrayed as ‘prompted by the spirit of loyalty which the military character of the present Administration has instilled in all its subordinates.’¹⁰⁵ Their Caesar had all the necessary prerequisites to abolish the republic.

By invoking military language, critics of the veto sought to impress on the American public that Grant’s actions were akin to that of an armed tyrant. Their intent was to show that the President’s policies represented the wishes of a minority, especially those ‘men who presented him with the cottage’ – a reference to the Eastern businessmen who had bought him a house at Long Branch in Pennsylvania.¹⁰⁶ An unrepentant Confederate Tennessee newspaper played on longstanding republican fears of a centralised and distant government by invoking the image of a tyrannical president who disregarded the wishes of a representative majority. The paper raged that ‘[t]here must be shocking errors and falsehoods somewhere, when it is commendable in a Republican President to crush with his executive foot a measure conceived and matured by Republican Senators and members of the House of Representatives.’¹⁰⁷ It suggested that Grant’s action amounted to corruption and would lead to a ‘disturbance in Washington’.¹⁰⁸ ‘[T]he Radical party’, it alleged, ‘has plunged headlong into the mire of un-American despotism that will prove not less disastrous to its friends than to its opponents.’¹⁰⁹ ‘If Grant, like Caesar,’ it continued, ‘is ambitious and a tyrant at heart, his tyranny will be more national than sectional, as time must prove.’¹¹⁰ Feeding exaggerated

¹⁰⁴ ‘Special Dispatch to the Chicago Tribune from Washington’, *Chicago Tribune*, 22 April 1874.

¹⁰⁵ *Dubuque Herald* (Dubuque, Iowa), 24 April 1874. A nearly identical article also appears in *Chicago Tribune*, 22 April 1874, and *Michigan Tribune*, 30 April 1874.

¹⁰⁶ ‘No Inflation’, *The Wichita City Eagle* (Wichita, Kansas), 30 April 1874.

¹⁰⁷ *Nashville Union and American* (Nashville, Tennessee), 5 May 1874.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

fears of executive despotism, it insisted that the President had become so powerful that even the majority in Congress who supported the bill refused ‘to attack him openly’, thus ‘confess[ing] their weakness and fear.’¹¹¹

Indeed Western and Southern newspapers spoke derogatively of the influences which had come to bear on the President, presenting here a double-edged attack: on the one hand Caesar had risen to dictate policy to Congress, whilst on the other they claimed that the corrupt President had been unduly influenced by Wall Street. Taking higher ground, they claimed he had failed to represent the public good and begun asserting just what – or rather who – had led Grant astray. The President here was presented not as an incorruptible antiparty man, as his supporters liked to have it, but rather the anointed representative of shadowy interests. One news article reprinted in Western newspapers stated ‘INSINUATIONS OF A VERY UGLY NATURE are freely made by the inflationists in their blind wrath, as to the influence to which the President has yielded.’¹¹² Others, such as a Texan paper, alleged that the ‘veto was made in the interest of the money kings and monopolists of the East and North,’ as ‘no well informed business man will deny.’¹¹³ The language used by proponents of the bill indicated their belief that Grant represented a minority group which had bribed him into vetoing the bill; the President did not represent the wishes of the people.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Dubuque Herald* (Dubuque, Iowa), 24 April 1874. A nearly identical article also appears in *Chicago Tribune*, 22 April 1874, and *Michigan Tribune*, 30 April 1874.

¹¹³ *The Waco Daily Examiner* (Waco, Texas), 26 April 1874. See also the *Indianapolis Journal* and *Peoria Democrat* (Illinois) in ‘Spirit of the Press on the Veto’, *Chicago Tribune*, 25 April 1874. See also ‘Inflation Vetoed.’, *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Georgia Journal and Messenger*, 28 April 1874. Interestingly, this paper did support Grant’s veto. However, though it did not particularly favour inflation, it fervently opposed specie resumption and believed the merits of the bill lay in its absence of a clause on this issue. They, too, referred to the interests of ‘the money kings’ who they believed benefitted from the veto, but they stressed the necessity for them ‘to restrain their impetuous appetites’ until the people could recover the wealth they had lost during the war.

¹¹⁴ ‘Add To His Salary’, *Pomeroy’s Democrat* (Chicago, Illinois), 16 May 1874. Pomeroy was not the only newspaper editor to allege that Grant had been bribed by one side or the other to either veto or sign the bill. Several newspapers claimed he had been unduly influenced by money. The *Knoxville Weekly Chronicle*, 29 April 1874, reported that numerous Democrat newspapers had alleged that the inflationists had bribed Grant to sign the bill.

Rumours swirled of conspiracies and plots against the Western states as hostilities flared. Mid-western critics of Grant, for instance, charged that New Yorkers knew about Grant's veto before Illinois received notice of it.¹¹⁵ Such claims hinted at concerns about the enduring instability that had followed the Civil War and laid bare real fears that the precarious unity would soon give way to 'national strife'.¹¹⁶ Western newspapers spoke of treason: a conspiracy led by the East and supported by the White House to undermine the fortunes of the West, and sectional conflict. Several newspapers reprinted an article claiming that 'TERRIBLE THREATS AND PROPHECIES' were being 'magniloquently uttered as to the uprising of the great West and Northwest against New England and the wealthy East.'¹¹⁷ The piece concluded that 'the sectional struggle between the East and the West, long anticipated, has finally opened in earnest.'¹¹⁸ Grant here emerged as the greatest traitor: a new incarnation of Vice President John C. Breckinridge (1857-1861) who had fought against the United States government in the Civil War and served as the Confederate Secretary of State in 1865. 'He is again discovered to be 'a Breckinridge, anyhow'', several Western papers wrote of Grant.¹¹⁹ The Western man had betrayed his section, the article insinuated, and become an Eastern apostate.

Perhaps most saliently, Grant, through his independence and antipartisanship, had succeeded in alienating not only the Democrats but much of his own Republican Party, through the use of different facets of executive power. The Democrats had first raised anxieties over Grant's potential to convert the republic into a dictatorship during the 1868 presidential election. Yet it was a claim which gained a ring of authenticity when the President independently chose his cabinet and excluded many of the most prominent party members from the White House. His

¹¹⁵ *New York Times*, 22 April 1874.

¹¹⁶ Downs, 'The Mexicanization of American Politics', *American Historical Review*, p. 391.

¹¹⁷ *Dubuque Herald* (Dubuque, Iowa), 24 April 1874. Nearly identical articles also appear in *Chicago Tribune*, 22 April 1874, and *Michigan Tribune*, 30 April 1874.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* See also the same article in a Southern newspaper: 'Grant's Bombshell', *Nashville Union and American*, 25 April 1874.

refusal to consult congressmen on patronage appointments alienated many Radical and moderate Republicans who, suspecting patronage had enabled his attempt to annex Santo Domingo, split from the Republican Party. These men formed a new party which then competed against Grant during the 1872 presidential election. However, after Grant's use of the veto power on legislation of national importance, anxieties over his use of power estranged his most loyal supporters – the Stalwarts – who similarly became agitated over the President's independence in his use of executive power. Grant's desire to remain above party had encouraged suspicions over his use of executive power which helped to lose him supporters. His republicanism had become his undoing.

Allegations of the unconstitutional use of power and executive usurpation, in addition to talk of creating a third party, illustrated once more the persistence of a republican political culture in Reconstruction.¹²⁰ Warnings of conspiracies in Western and Southern newspapers demonstrated that fears of tyranny and sectional conflict were not simply rhetorical devices to mobilise the electorate, though they fulfilled that purpose too. Genuine fears of executive power existed throughout the country and rose in times of crisis. The economic situation greatly concerned many Americans who interpreted Grant's veto as a desertion of his duty to the public good in favour of newly befriended but powerful allies. The President's military background remained particularly troubling to opponents of his veto, who saw in his action a disregard for the Constitution and Congress, and alleged that it reflected the unravelling of the republic by Grant's capable hand. It suggests that the paranoid politics which undermined Johnson's presidency continued into Grant's presidency, with warnings of presidential tyranny and disputes with Congress over the boundaries of power eroding the valuable political capital he had to enforce Reconstruction.

Defending the Veto: The Model Republican

¹²⁰ Voss-Hubbard, *Beyond Party*, pp. 4, 10.

In stark contrast to his opponents, who saw executive usurpation in the President's actions, his supporters, returning to the script they had used since 1868, presented Grant as the epitome of pure republicanism. Yet their message had been honed for the circumstances. In addition to exalting the President's antipartisanship, patriotism, and sacrifice, they added the preservation of the nation's honour. Grant's veto, they claimed, upheld the sacrifices of thousands of men who had died for their country on the battlefields of the Civil War by preventing efforts to pay the war debt in devalued currency. In this respect, they regarded payment with devalued greenbacks as devaluing the sacrifice of the war dead. Grant, then, saved not only the honour and credit of the nation but upheld the value of the lives of those men who died to reunite the nation. As a result his victory, they claimed in rather hyperbolic terms, was as great as any of his Civil War battles.

Commendations of Grant's actions were geographically far-reaching. The President received praise from all over the country for his veto; he took 'receipt of congratulatory letters and telegrams from all parts of the country east and west'.¹²¹ Though such vindication might be anticipated in the hard money East, Grant also received endorsements from Western areas and some Southern newspapers too.¹²² In particular, Grant won praise from Southern newspapers in Tennessee, Georgia, and even Louisiana. Much support also came from farmers: a group usually assumed to have been the strongest supporters of inflation.¹²³

Perhaps most saliently even former enemies commended Grant's actions, with the Liberal

¹²¹ *Arizona Weekly Miner* (Prescott, Arizona), 1 May 1874.

¹²² For Eastern areas, see 'No Inflation.', *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, 24 April 1874, and 'Vetoed!', *Vermont Phoenix* (Brattleboro, Vermont). See also coverage from the *New York Herald*, *New York World*, and *New York Tribune*. For Western support see 'Veto', *Holmes County Republican* (Millersburg, Ohio), 30 April 1874, and also several extracts on Western division on the issue in 'Spirit of the Western Press.', *Chicago Tribune*, 7 May 1874. For Southern support see 'The Veto Message', *Knoxville Weekly Chronicle*, 29 April 1874 (this paper also includes extracts from Liberal Republican and Democratic newspapers in Cincinnati and St Louis which support the veto). See also 'President Grant's Veto', *Southern Watchman* (Athens, Georgia), 29 April 1874; *Louisiana Democrat*, 29 April 1874; and 'The Presidential Veto', *The Athens Post* (Athens, Tennessee), 1 May 1874.

¹²³ See *Highland Weekly News* (Hillsborough, Highland County, Ohio), 21 May 1874; 'Vetoed! Vetoed!', *California Farmer and the Journal of Useful Sciences*, 30 April 1874; 'The Currency', *Vermont Farmer* (St. Johnsbury, Vermont), 1 May 1874; and 'Views of a Farmer', *Chicago Tribune*, 13 May 1874.

Republicans especially backing a man they had endeavoured to unseat two years before. Even those who were on the Liberal Republican Executive Committee, despite their long-standing opposition to Grant's policies, cried '[h]urrah for Grant'.¹²⁴ They were now 'full of glee' not only due to 'the veto' but also because the President's 'language' had a 'fatal effect' on the Republican inflationists in Congress.¹²⁵ Many Democrats too delighted in Grant's veto, illustrating that the issue cut across party lines.¹²⁶ Even Grant's predecessor, Johnson, grudgingly bestowed a compliment on Grant when he admitted that 'somehow or other, accidentally, perhaps, he had gotten hold of a right good idea, and he stumbled upon what seemed to him a very sensible plan when he withheld his signature from that inflation bill. But then accidents would happen.'¹²⁷ Grant's veto garnered a diverse coalition of support but what held it together was not so much a common understanding of political economy but an attempt to explain the President's actions in republican terminology.

The defence of Grant's action centred around three main points: the role of the President in the legislative process, the virtues of his military background, and his honourable conduct in preserving the nation's credit. Newspapers across the country expressed their gratitude in exaltations of Grant's duty to the public good, his civic virtue, courage, honour, and antipartisanship in politics. With corruption a preoccupation in an age of rings, Grant's supporters implied that their President remained untrammelled by corrupt impulses, and instead acted out of higher ideals than the wishes of his party. Republican tropes, rather than financial explanations, dominated their responses to the veto, demonstrating how credit and debt had a cultural as well as an economic history in Reconstruction.

¹²⁴ 'Report From Cincinnati', *New York Herald*, 25 April 1874.

¹²⁵ Library of Congress: Carl Schurz MSS, Reel 10, William M. Grosvenor to Carl Schurz 25 April 1874.

¹²⁶ See 'The Veto Message', *Knoxville Weekly Chronicle*, 29 April 1874. This newspaper article featured compliments from Democratic newspapers. See also 'The Western Democracy of the Money Question', *The Quincy Herald* (Quincy, Illinois), 14 May 1874.

¹²⁷ See 'Generosity', *Holmes County Republican*, 14 May 1874, and Bergeron (ed.), *The Papers of Andrew Johnson* Volume 16, p. 537.

Grant's supporters sought to deflate the arguments of those who opposed the veto by highlighting the importance of the president's role in the legislative process. These newspapers stressed the constitutional role of the presidential veto, emphasising that it offered a vital opportunity to reconsider the wisdom of legislation of national importance, in their efforts to defend the President against allegations he had usurped congressional power.¹²⁸ An Eastern newspaper explained how the veto represented 'a conservative power', and signified its necessity in government by stressing how amongst all 'the checks and balances of the constitutional provisions, it is among the most important'.¹²⁹ The paper further elaborated that '[t]he executive, responsible to his constitutional oath and to the people, has the power to check mad legislation—and there are times when the country is in great danger from the combinations and corruptions of Congress.'¹³⁰ The paper not only endeavoured to justify Grant's veto but to situate the role of veto power within the constitutionally-approved legislative process. The president, they argued, had a duty, under his constitutional oath, to prevent the passage of bills which threatened the sanctity of the republic. Within this framework, partisan interests became irrelevant as the President had an obligation to sacrifice his own interests to that of the nation. The paper concluded succinctly that, in this respect, '[t]he veto of President Grant is an excellent illustration of the nature and value of the veto power.'¹³¹

The benefits of the veto power, other defenders claimed, could be found in the restoration of the Republican Party's platform to its original pledges. One Western paper rebuked supporters of inflation by scolding them for forgetting their pledges to constituents.¹³² 'The

¹²⁸ 'The Currency Bill Vetoed!—No More Inflation!', *Highland Weekly News* (Hillsborough, Highland County, Ohio), 30 April 1874. See also 'Western and Southern Views of the Veto', *National Republican*, 2 May 1874.

¹²⁹ *Hartford Times* (Hartford, Connecticut) quoted in 'The Veto. Comments From All Quarters', *Hartford Daily Courant* (Hartford, Connecticut), 24 April 1874.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Terre Haute Gazette* (Indiana), in 'The Veto. Further Comments by the Press', *Chicago Tribune*, 28 April 1874.

President’, it reminded them, had simply tried ‘to keep covenant with the people who put their trust in that platform, and him in the Executive chair.’¹³³ Another paper claimed that the veto power provided an opportunity to stem the plans of ‘reckless plotters and speculators’.¹³⁴ While ‘the flood of financial heresies rose to such a height as to sweep from their moorings both Houses of Congress,—the popular House by a large majority,—the President stood firm’.¹³⁵ Such coverage stressed how the president’s veto was vital to protect the nation when their representatives ‘swerved from’ their duties to the nation.¹³⁶ As the *New York Tribune* affirmed, the veto represented ‘a piece’ of vital ‘prevention’ for the nation’s interests.¹³⁷ The president’s veto, they claimed, constituted a necessary obstacle in the legislative process.

Perhaps the most important defence of the fundamental role of the veto power in the passage of legislation emanated from a *Harper’s Weekly* artist. A. Fredericks produced the first cartoon – ‘The Nation’s Tribute’ (Figure 4.3) – to congratulate Grant on his veto. It celebrated the duty Grant had performed by quoting New York Governor Dix who, on hearing of the veto, had exclaimed how ‘[t]his veto is not for the North, nor the East, but for the entire nation’.¹³⁸ The use of this particular caption was a reminder that the veto power played a crucial role in crafting the laws of the United States. Similar to many cartoons from this era, Fredericks’ drawing drew on classical symbolism, which educated Americans would recognise immediately.¹³⁹ His drawing of Columbia – who represented the nation – holding a garland above the head of a bust of Grant referenced Republican Rome. Garlands, or corollæ as they were known in ancient Rome, could be awarded for a number of reasons including

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Buffalo Express* in ‘The Veto. Further Comments by the Press’, *Chicago Tribune*, 28 April 1874.

¹³⁵ *Detroit Post* in ‘The Veto. Further Comments by the Press’, *Chicago Tribune*, 28 April 1874.

¹³⁶ *Boston Journal* in ‘The Veto. Comments of the New York and Boston Press’, *Chicago Tribune*, 25 April 1874.

¹³⁷ *New York Tribune* in ‘The Veto. Comments of the New York and Boston Press’, *Chicago Tribune*, 25 April 1874.

¹³⁸ ‘The Nation’s Tribute’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 9 May 1874.

¹³⁹ Margaret Malamud, *Ancient Rome and Modern America* (Chichester, 2009), pp. 99-101.

‘military valour’ and ‘to crown the victors’ in sacred contests.¹⁴⁰ In this respect Fredericks’ depiction sought to link Grant to the military heroes of the Roman republic by heralding Grant as the nation’s saviour. The President, Fredericks implied, represented the nation too.

¹⁴⁰ John Bostock, and H. T. Riley, *The Natural History of Pliny* Volume IV (London ,1856), pp. 304-305.

Figure 4.3 'The Nation's Tribute'.



Source: A. Fredericks, 'The Nation's tribute', *Harper's Weekly*, 9 May 1874.

It was an argument also pursued in the editorial response from *Harper's Weekly* which stressed the vital role of the executive in the legislative process.¹⁴¹ The veto power, it pressed, formed an integral check on congressional power which, similar to the other branches, had the ability to endanger the country with unwise legislation.¹⁴² In this respect, executive power provided a necessary corrective for Congress's failure to legislate for the interests of the whole nation. *Harper's* argued that 'experience shows that the most vitally important laws may be heedlessly passed' as a result of 'passion, ignorance, [and] party spirit' which made the application of the veto power crucial.¹⁴³ While opponents of the veto argued that in exercising the power Grant had acted tyrannically, *Harper's* countered that Grant's veto had been used 'not to thwart the will of the people, but to defeat what he does not believe to be their will.'¹⁴⁴ The founders had provided the presidency with the veto, *Harper's* asserted, 'because when people are intelligent enough to govern themselves wisely they know that they not only sometimes need to be defended from themselves, but that their representatives may not truly represent them.'¹⁴⁵ Congressional representatives, *Harper's* implied, had let their personal interests on the issue guide their votes, and had allowed a piece of legislation that stood in opposition to the national interest to pass. As a result, the people had to rely upon the President for 'the sober second thought.'¹⁴⁶ The tyranny lay with Congress.

This idea of congressional tyranny was taken up with vigour by *Harper's Weekly's* leading artist, Thomas Nast, who depicted Grant's veto as preventing tyrannical congressmen from

¹⁴¹ 'The Veto', *Harper's Weekly*, 9 May 1874.

¹⁴² 'The Veto and the National Faith', *Harper's Weekly*, 2 May 1874. *Harper's Weekly* received word of the veto just before the issue went to print, and as such the article is written as a defence of the necessity of the veto with additions confirming that the President had pursued this route.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

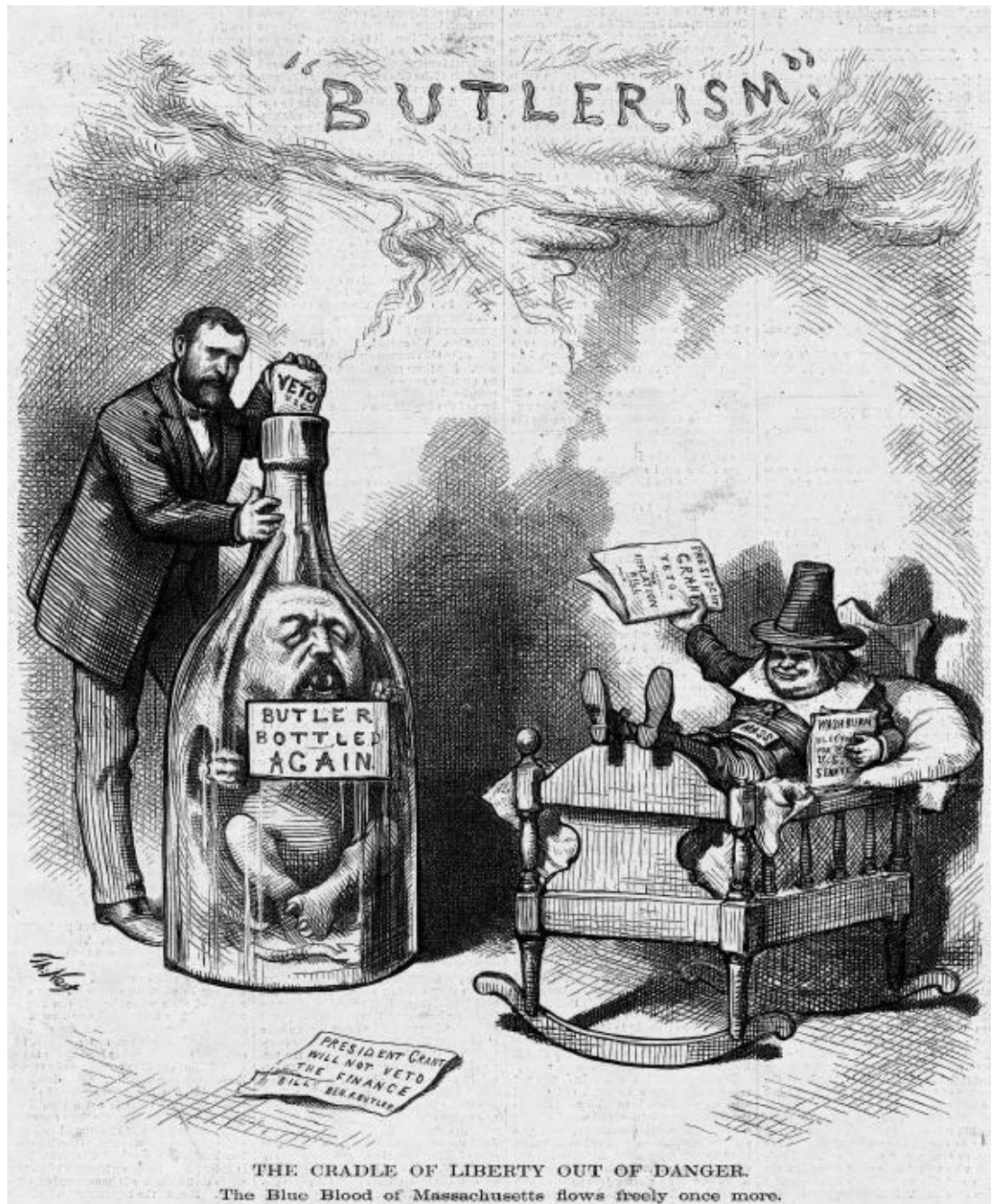
¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

endangering the nation. Having previously portrayed Butler as an evil genie let out of his bottle, Nast now characterised the veto as restoring the Senator to his rightful place.¹⁴⁷

Figure 4.4 ‘The Cradle of Liberty out of Danger’.



Source: Thomas Nast, ‘The Cradle of Liberty Out of Danger’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 16 May 1874.

¹⁴⁷ For Nast’s first cartoon see ‘The Cradle of Liberty in Danger’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 11 April 1874. For his second, see ‘The Cradle of Liberty out of Danger’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 16 May 1874.

Grant's veto, Nast contended, had bottled Butler which allowed the Puritan child in the Cradle of Liberty to grow up unhindered. Nast implied that the veto power had corked both corruption and the tyranny of selfish party politicians. The nation, Nast demonstrated, could now prosper unhindered by corrupt politicians, as the President remained above dishonesty and selfish pursuits. Nast placed the tyranny that Grant's opponents alleged he had committed with the veto firmly in the proponent's camp.

While Grant's opponents, by invoking military language and imagery, charged that his military background made him particularly susceptible to governing the country tyrannically, his supporters alleged that Grant's military service brought virtuous republican ideals into the government. The republican ideals of duty and sacrifice which were implicit in stories of his military service alerted Americans to the benefits of electing a military man to the presidency. In their celebrations they compared the value of his veto to the repute of his Civil War victories. The veto, they implied, had saved the future of the nation just as his victories at Vicksburg and Appomattox Court House had reunited the nation.¹⁴⁸

The virtues which had led him to victory on the battlefield, they suggested, had endowed him with the necessary qualities to lead the republic to success too. The personal sacrifice necessary to serve with distinction in the military had served Grant well in civil affairs.¹⁴⁹

The President, inspired by his 'sense of duty' to the republic, had sacrificed his selfish political interests by pursuing an action which was adverse to 'the majority of his friends in Congress'.¹⁵⁰ This led to some exaggerated claims. An Eastern independent newspaper, for

¹⁴⁸ For references to Grant's Civil War victories, see 'The Press on the Veto', *The Rutland Daily Globe* (Rutland, Vermont), 24 April 1874; *National Republican*, 24 April 1874; *The Jeffersonian* (Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania), 30 April 1874; *Portland (Me.) Press* (Portland, Maine), quoted in 'The Veto. Comments From All Quarters', *Hartford Daily Courant* (Hartford, Connecticut), 24 April 1874; *New York Herald* quoted in 'The Veto. Comments From All Quarters', *Hartford Daily Courant* (Hartford, Connecticut), 24 April 1874; and *Fond du Lac Commonwealth* (Wisconsin) in 'Spirit of the Press on the Veto', *Chicago Tribune*, 25 April 1874.

¹⁴⁹ Baker, 'From Belief into Culture', p. 542.

¹⁵⁰ 'The Currency Bill Vetoed!—No More Inflation!', *Highland Weekly News* (Hillsborough, Highland County, Ohio), 30 April 1874.

instance, argued that Grant had ‘gained a greater victory than ever marked his brilliant military career.’¹⁵¹ ‘Nobly’, they continued, ‘has he redeemed the sacred pledge which the republican [*sic*] party made in its national platform and vindicated the wisdom of the people in reelecting him to the highest office in their gift.’¹⁵² Few newspapers ventured as far in claiming that the veto superseded Grant’s Civil War victories. But many Americans, both privately and publicly, concurred with a statement from the Republican *Albany Evening Journal*, which claimed that Grant’s veto came ‘scarcely second to his illustrious work on the battle field’.¹⁵³ Military service, his supporters argued, enabled him to put the interests of the nation first. As a result, Grant had saved the nation yet again.

References to Grant’s Civil War victories also indicated the gravity of the threat that the President had removed through his veto. One Eastern Republican newspaper’s claim that ‘[i]n time an intelligent and appreciative people will recognize that the peaceful victory of April 22, 1874, is as vital to the future glory of the nation as that of April 9, 1865’ highlighted such sentiments.¹⁵⁴ But the newspaper proceeded further, claiming that ‘history will record of U.S. Grant that, by his veto as the chief magistrate, he secured the fullest fruits of his victories as a soldier. To have shrunk from the former would be to throw away the latter.’¹⁵⁵

The entwining of Civil War battles and economic policy indicated the extent to which

¹⁵¹ *New London Telegram* quoted in ‘The Veto. Comments From All Quarters’, *Hartford Daily Courant* (Hartford, Connecticut), 24 April 1874. Many newspapers compared Grant’s veto to his Civil War victories, but few went as far as to claim that the veto superseded his Civil War reputation.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Albany Evening Journal* quoted in ‘The Veto. Comments From All Quarters’, *Hartford Daily Courant* (Hartford, Connecticut), 24 April 1874. For private commendations see Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas (eds.), *The Diary of George Templeton Strong: Post-War Years 1865-1875* (New York, 1952), p. 523; Library of Congress, Carl Schurz MSS, Reel 10, Letter of William M. Grosvenor to Carl Schurz 25 April 1874; and Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library, Mississippi State University: Ulysses S. Grant MSS, Volume 25, letters of commendation to Ulysses S. Grant in April and May 1874. For the comments of some Liberal Republicans, see ‘The “Liberals”’, *New York Times*, 30 April 1874. For Andrew Johnson’s comments, see ‘Generosity’, *Holmes County Republican*, 14 May 1874, and Bergeron (ed.), *The Papers of Andrew Johnson* Volume 16, p. 537.

¹⁵⁴ *Portland (Me.) Press* (Portland, Maine), quoted in ‘The Veto. Comments From All Quarters’, *Hartford Daily Courant* (Hartford, Connecticut), 24 April 1874.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

economic policy was enmeshed and influenced by the wider context of the wartime patriotism.

The selfless sacrifice of the President for the interests of the nation was counter-posed to the reaction of Republican congressmen. It was clear from the outrage of these men, Grant's supporters suggested, that the President had acted from his ideal of antipartisanship. Just as Grant had outraged some of the defectors to the Liberal Republican camp by allocating patronage in an antipartisan fashion, Grant now alienated the Stalwart wing of the party through his independence in governance. Supportive newspapers emphasised that the President's military background had endowed him with virtuous republican qualities which led him to put the safety of the nation above his own career.

Antipartisanship, which had informed Grant's attitude to the presidency, featured extensively in sympathetic coverage of the veto. '[T]hough plied by Butlerites and prominent officials in Washington', a New York journal wrote, and 'though beset by brokers and politicians day and night till to all appearances he must yield to the strong personal influence brought to bear upon him', Grant had broken free and 'showed again the old firmness of the hero of the Wilderness'.¹⁵⁶ Another newspaper, the *Boston Traveller*, argued that '[t]he unexpected veto of the currency bill by President Grant affords new evidence that he is a man that keeps his own counsel and acts on his own judgement.'¹⁵⁷ 'By this act', an independent Eastern newspaper claimed, 'he has shown he is the tool of no man or clique and has not forgotten how to fight for the right.'¹⁵⁸ Grant's military characteristics, though assailed by his opponents as resulting in the militarism of the presidential office, actually enabled the

¹⁵⁶ 'The Inflation Bill Vetoed', *Jefferson County Journal* (Jefferson County, Adams, New York), 29 April 1874.

¹⁵⁷ *Boston Traveller* (Butler, Boston) quoted in 'The Veto. Comments From All Quarters', *Hartford Daily Courant* (Hartford, Connecticut), 24 April 1874.

¹⁵⁸ *Middletown Constitution* (Middletown, Connecticut) quoted in 'The Veto. Comments From All Quarters', *Hartford Daily Courant* (Hartford, Connecticut), 24 April 1874.

President to act in a principled manner in the civilian world of politics. Caesar, his defenders charged, existed only in the imagination of the inflationists.

Whilst Grant's supporters championed his antipartisanship, opposition newspapers rued his independence and the inability of his party to control him. These newspapers bitterly complained about the President's obstinacy and his refusal to approve a bill crafted by his own party. A Georgian newspaper lamented the President's antiparty stance, commenting that 'Gen. Grant never regarded himself beholden to the Republican party at all.'¹⁵⁹ Another Southern newspaper, an independent in Tennessee, described the prevailing opinion of the President: '[i]t has been generally understood for several years that President Grant has a will and way of his own.'¹⁶⁰ The paper argued moreover that the veto reinforced the 'vindication of his character as the 'stubbornest man in America' save one'; though it did not elaborate on who had managed to supersede Grant in this respect.¹⁶¹ Saliently, these denunciations of the President from Southern inflationist newspapers actually gave credence to the antiparty image of Grant sustained in the anti-inflation press. It is easy to consider the platitudes received from Northern newspapers as simply rhetorical justifications for a President vetoing an unfavourable measure, but the readiness of his opponents to recognise his antipartisan outlook suggests there was substance behind the rhetoric. Grant's own words on the matter thus appear genuine. He commented 'I must say if personal influence could have any weight with me I should have signed the bill.'¹⁶²

In celebrating Grant's service to the public good, newspapers from all over the country praised the President's strength, courage and commitment to the nation. By vetoing a bill matured by his own party, the President, they claimed, had validated his standing as an

¹⁵⁹ 'Third-Term Politics', *Thomasville Times* (Thomasville, Georgia), 13 June 1874.

¹⁶⁰ 'A Stubborn, Self-Willed Man', *Knoxville Weekly Chronicle*, 29 April 1874.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *The Providence Evening Press* (Providence, Rhode Island), 24 April 1874.

honourable gentleman. Though unfavourable with the Stalwart faction of his party, his action, his supporters claimed, was in the interest of the nation. An Ohio newspaper demonstrated this when it congratulated Grant for having ‘the firmness and moral courage to do what he believed to be right’, thus upholding ‘the true honor and welfare’ of the republic.¹⁶³ The language of national honour, indeed, proved especially important. An independent Connecticut newspaper illustrated this when it stated ‘President Grant deserves and will receive the gratitude of every man in the land, whose judgement has not been perverted by the delusions of an inflated currency, and whose regard for the nations’ faith is still sound.’¹⁶⁴

Honour, as a defence, proved a powerful tool with which to appeal to the republican sensibilities of the American public. It suggested the morality of the President’s stance and demonstrated that he could be relied upon to act in the best interests of the nation.¹⁶⁵ By vetoing the inflation bill, the President indicated that he had the ability to act in a restrained manner by reining in the passions of his party.¹⁶⁶ In this respect, the veto relied upon the character of the President, and signified that, as a man of honour, he could be trusted to pay his debts. Both the honour of the President, and his honesty, regularly featured in defences of the veto from supportive newspapers suggesting that his action possessed a gallantry his opponents failed to understand. ‘All honor to the President’, an Eastern newspaper exclaimed, ‘and his noble stand in favor of national honesty.’¹⁶⁷ A Western journal stated that the President had saved the country from ‘depart[ing] from the true principles of finance, [and] the national obligation to creditors.’¹⁶⁸ The bill, it claimed, ‘was the first step on a downhill course, at the bottom of which lies bankruptcy, national dishonour and possible

¹⁶³ ‘The Currency Bill Vetoed!– No More Inflation!’, *The Highland Weekly News* (Hillsborough, Highland County, Ohio), 30 April 1874.

¹⁶⁴ *Naugatuck Valley Sentinel* quoted in ‘The Veto. Comments From All Quarters’, *Hartford Daily Courant* (Hartford, Connecticut), 24 April 1874.

¹⁶⁵ Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, pp. 11-14.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ ‘No Inflation’, *Burlington Weekly Free Press* (Burlington, Vermont), 24 April 1874.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Inflation Bill Vetoed’, *Holmes County Republican* (Millersburg, Ohio), 30 April 1874.

revolution.¹⁶⁹ The paper here referred to the cultural relationship between debt and honour. The payments of debts and the awarding of credit in the nineteenth century rested upon the honour of an individual.¹⁷⁰ Similarly, paying debts at the level they were contracted was considered a matter of honour. In this respect, by keeping the promise of the nation to pay its debts at a non-inflated level, Grant had preserved the honour of the nation.

Liberal Republicans, who just two years earlier had denigrated Grant's reputation, expressed their gratitude by heralding the President as a creditable man. The *New York Tribune* announced that 'Grant has once more deserved well of the country, and merits the thanks of Congress no less than years ago when he defended the country against a more dangerous enemy.'¹⁷¹ Similarly, the *Cincinnati Commercial* celebrated how 'President Grant has hitherto done few things so well calculated to give him honorable distinction as his veto'.¹⁷² 'The world', it claimed, 'has now assurance of our National honor' and 'honesty stands a chance of just appreciation.'¹⁷³ Less enthusiastic but no less satisfied was the *Chicago Tribune*, which stated that for 'the credit of the country the President's acting has been beneficial', especially as the veto showed 'that the people of the United States do not intend openly or covertly to repudiate their debt.'¹⁷⁴ Rather more pleased was the *New York Evening Post*, which wrote that 'to the President himself, we owe our escape from this shame and dishonour which Congress would have inflicted on us.' Congress's attempt to shy away from its 'national obligations to creditors', the newspaper stated, would have brought the nation into disrepute.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Mann, *Republic of Debtors*, pp. 7-12.

¹⁷¹ 'The Veto Message', *Knoxville Weekly Chronicle*, 29 April 1874.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ 'Political Effects of the Veto', *Chicago Tribune*, 30 April 1874.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Hostile Democratic newspapers also occasionally honoured the President, who, they believed had saved the nation from ruin. Editors, such as Charles A. Dana of the Democratic *New York Sun*, who had spent a considerable amount of time during Grant's first administration trying to uncover Republican corruption, labelled Grant's veto 'the smartest thing that he has ever done since he was elected President.'¹⁷⁶ The publishers of the Western *Madison Democrat* stated that they were happy to 'commend the veto because we believe it is dictated by every consideration of national honor and sound common sense.'¹⁷⁷ The *New York World* claimed 'he deserves well of all who love the honor of the United States.'¹⁷⁸ Yet again showcasing its ability as an independent to represent both sides of a partisan debate, the *New York Herald* explained how Grant's 'veto will save our brethren of the west and south from the demagogues who would lead them into ruin and call it statesmanship'.¹⁷⁹ It continued to claim 'the time will come when they remember it to the honor of the President as an achievement more glorious than Vicksburg and Appomattox. Then he saved the sovereignty of the Union; now he has saved its honor.'¹⁸⁰ The tendency once more to unite Grant's veto with his Civil War victories indicated that many considered repaying the war debt in specie a matter of honour which reflected the nation's republican heritage.

Perhaps the most striking defence of Grant's restrained honour took a pictorial form. The *Harper's Weekly* artist, Charles S. Reinhart, provoked outrage with his significant but controversial cartoon 'Stand Back!'¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ 'The Veto', *Hartford Courant Daily*, 24 April 1874.

¹⁷⁷ *Madison Democrat* (Wisconsin), in 'Spirit of the Press on the Veto', *Chicago Tribune*, 25 April 1874.

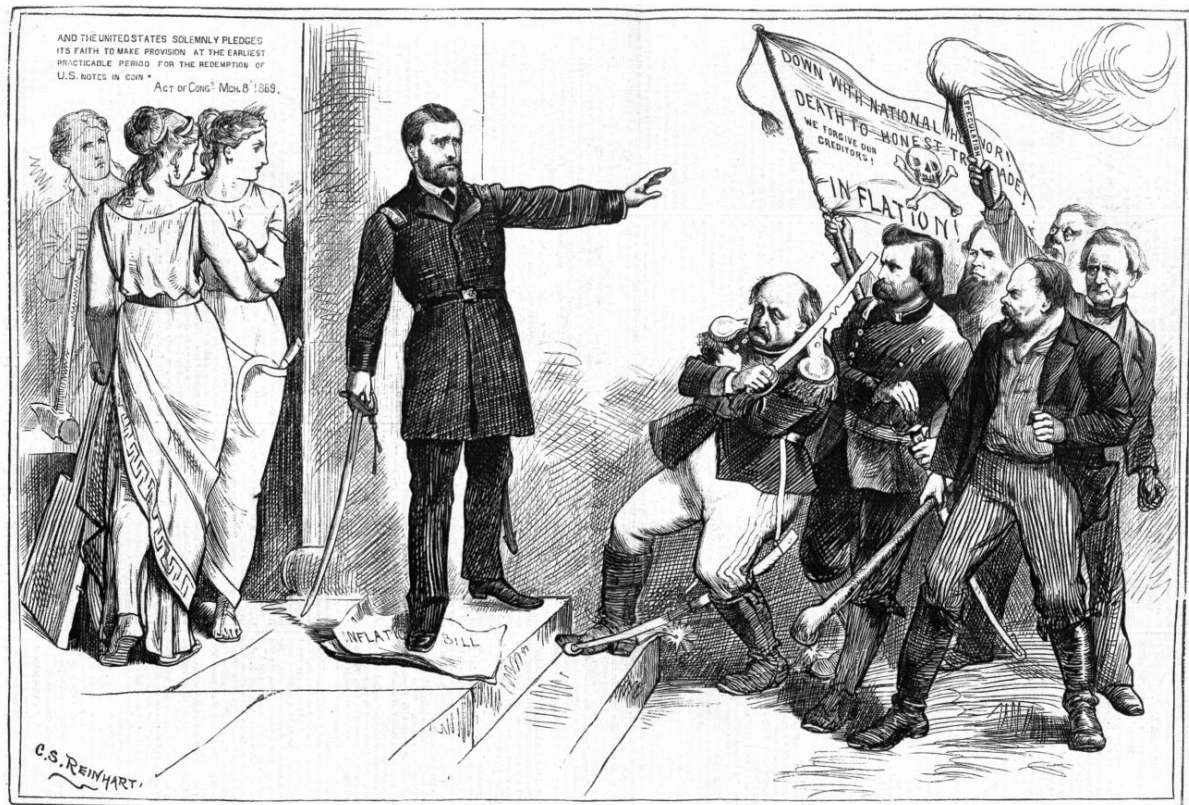
¹⁷⁸ 'The Veto Message', *Knoxville Weekly Chronicle*, 29 April 1874.

¹⁷⁹ *New York Herald* quoted in 'The Veto. Comments From All Quarters', *Hartford Daily Courant* (Hartford, Connecticut), 24 April 1874.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Charles S. Reinhart, 'Stand Back!', *Harper's Weekly*, 9 May 1874. The cartoon's controversy derived from the way it derogatively portrayed the proponents of the bill. The *Michigan Tribune* launched an attack on *Harper's Weekly* over the cartoon. See *Michigan Tribune*, 14 May 1874. However, it failed to realise that Reinhart had drawn the cartoon, rather than *Harper's* leading artist Thomas Nast. For another Western reaction to the cartoon, see *The Indiana State Sentinel*, 12 May 1874. *Harper's Weekly* also responded to the *Michigan*

Figure 4.5 'Stand Back!'



Source: Charles S. Reinhart, 'Stand Back!', *Harper's Weekly*, 9 May 1874.

Reinhart's powerful cartoon encompassed many of the themes which the written commentary on the veto celebrated. Grant is portrayed as the honourable defender of the republic, while his opponents, who accused him of corruption, are symbolised as base partisan politicians. The artist emphasised honour, self-restraint, and self-sacrifice in order to illustrate the duty which Grant had performed for the nation. He used military uniforms to signify Grant's self-sacrifice and duty to the nation, while depicting the inflationists as dishonourable and barbarous. The depiction of the Senators as villains caused particular outrage from Western states but their portrayal none-too-subtly insinuated that those supporting inflation were the

Tribune article defending their artist's right to depict the Senators as he pleased per his opinion. See 'Caricature in Controversy', *Harper's Weekly*, 30 May 1874.

tyrants whose lack of political virtue threatened liberty and endangered the future of the republic. Reinhart's claim found sympathy in many quarters.

The artist used military and republican imagery to depict both honour and dishonour thus conveying Grant's role as the protector of the nation. The central figure in the cartoon is President Grant – in military dress as denoted by the four stars on his shoulder which signified his rank during the Civil War – who stood between the group of rogue congressmen and the three women that represent Columbia, who symbolised liberty and virtue. Grant stood with one foot on the inflation bill, preventing the men from menacing and dishonouring Columbia. It is a strong image, as it suggests the riotous, unrestrained men threatened to violate the feminised republic, with only Grant's chivalrous stance protecting the women from the avaricious and lustful politicians. Columbia's vulnerability to men in pursuit of power was often used by artists to attack political corruption. Of particular significance was Thomas Nast's depiction of a virtuous woman being mauled to death in his 1871 cartoon 'The Tammany Tiger Loose', which attacked the frauds of Boss William Tweed's Tammany Hall machine. But whereas corruption killed Columbia before a baying crowd in Nast's image of New York as a Roman amphitheatre, in Reinhart's portrayal, Columbia was saved by Grant's gallantry. Tellingly, though, Grant did not hold back these men with his sword, which lay by his side, but with his outstretched hand, which commanded them to stop.¹⁸² Saliently Grant was portrayed with the comportment and dignified bearing of a gentleman, which as Matthew J. Grow has attested in his study of Northern honour culture was more about 'behaviour and attitude' than any monopoly of force.¹⁸³ Grant exudes authority in the

¹⁸² This cartoon bore a striking resemblance in this respect to A. R. Waud's cartoon 'The Freedmen's Bureau', which depicted a Freedmen's Bureau official standing at the centre of the illustration with his outstretched arm preventing armed white Southerners from harming the African Americans positioned behind him. As he brandished no weapon himself, he illustrated the manly self-restraint through which Freedmen's Bureau officers sought to defuse conflict between the two groups. See A. R. Waud, 'The Freedmen's Bureau', *Harper's Weekly*, 25 July 1868.

¹⁸³ Grow, "Liberty to the Downtrodden", p. 209.

image as a military man, but it is not a raw display of power. Such tropes answered charges of tyranny against a figure whose army roots, some alleged, offered a path to despotism.

Grant's positioning between the Columbian embodiments of republican virtue and the lascivious congressmen depicted him as a chivalrous gentleman. Chivalry constituted an important component of honour culture, as men's status as the ostensible protectors of women rationalised gender inequality.¹⁸⁴ Grow describes chivalry as being characterised by 'magnanimity, self-restraint, and the cultivation of the 'finer feelings of human nature.'¹⁸⁵ None of Grant's opponents were illustrated with any of these qualities as each man had publicly shown a corrupt, selfish, and unforgiving nature. The depiction of these men in various guises of over-indulgence signified their unrepublican qualities and thus their unsuitability to govern the nation.

Foremost in the cartoon is Indiana Senator Morton drawn in a criminal's prison uniform, which referenced his undemocratic actions as the Governor of Indiana during the Civil War.¹⁸⁶ At the back holding a torch inscribed with the word 'speculation' and his hand rolled in a fist is the Pennsylvanian Senator Cameron whose corruption and dishonesty in politics was well known.¹⁸⁷ Wisconsin Senator Ferry held the flag with the words: 'Down With National Honor'; 'Death to Honest Trade'; 'We Forgive Our Creditors!' and 'Inflation!' While Illinois Senator Logan, a former Union General, lacked any sign of his former rank on his shoulder, in stark contrast to the portrayal of the President. But even he did not suffer as harsh a fate at Reinhart's hands as Butler, who, stood nearest Grant, was drawn in Confederate regalia to signal his treasonous past in Civil War Louisiana where he had traded

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Foulke, *Life of Oliver P. Morton* Volume One, p. 253.

¹⁸⁷ Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge Mass., and London, 1977), p. 244. See also Smith, *The Enemy Within*, pp. 90-91.

cotton with the enemy.¹⁸⁸ The portrayal of these men highlighted the widely held belief that the threat to the republic came not from an aspiring Caesar, but a corrupted Congress.

Reinhart successfully turned the argument that Grant had exceeded his constitutional powers around to suggest that the opponents of the veto constituted the real threat to the republic.

The artist combined corruption with morality to suggest that these men could neither be trusted with a women's honour nor the country's. He showed that with a calm and gentlemanly demeanour, the President's chivalry had saved the nation's honour from harm.

Reinhart could rely on the President's previous laurels to illustrate that Grant, unlike his opponents, had an impeccable record in performing his duty to the nation. The President had portrayed a willingness to defend the nation against all threats during his Civil War service, despite his dislike of military service, and Reinhart, like many others, equated Grant's veto to his military career. In using Grant's military service, the artist made a powerful point, suggesting that Grant's veto was no different to the fight against an enemy on a battlefield, and as such represented a legitimate method to restore liberty and peace.

The portrayal of Grant as the honourable restrained gentlemen who, through his sense of morality and duty to the nation, had led the country to victory can also be found in private commendations of the veto. Lawyer George Templeton Strong wrote in his diary '*Vivat Grant! He has vetoed the inflation bill! This veto will rank in his record with Vicksburg and Appomattox.*'¹⁸⁹ Senator James Garfield wrote to a friend that '[f]or twenty years no President has had an opportunity to do the country so much service by a veto message as Grant has, and he has met the issue manfully'.¹⁹⁰ The President also received over a hundred

¹⁸⁸ His primary sword is also jagged which signalled that Butler did not fight honourably. He also has wires proceeding from his shoes with spikes attached at the end. Both the hidden sword and the spikes are a portrayal of the dishonourableness which many Southerners showed during the Civil War. Southerners resorted to what was seen as dishonourable guerrilla tactics during the war in order to gain an advantage. On honour, see Grow, "*Liberty to the Downtrodden*", p. 221. On Butler's treasonous past, see Smith, *The Enemy Within*, pp. 46-49.

¹⁸⁹ Nevins and Thomas (eds.), *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, p. 523.

¹⁹⁰ Hesselstine, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p. 336.

letters thanking him for his veto which attest to the sincerity of the public celebrations. A resident of Illinois provided a good illustration of this when he wrote to Grant claiming:

As a working man, I take the liberty of thanking your Excellency for your veto message ... If your Excellency will hold on, the course you have taken as well as being honorable & just will very likely lead to a further residence of four years in the Executive Mansion of the nation. [*sic*]¹⁹¹

Such sentiments were not uncommon. But few commentators explained their gratitude more succinctly than Smith D. Atkins of Freeport, Illinois. Neither a politician, nor a financier, he had been asked in 1868 to speak at a political meeting, probably a Democratic gathering, to gain support for Pendleton's Plan – a Democratic scheme defeated at the 1868 presidential election – which entailed paying back the war bonds with devalued greenbacks.¹⁹² Atkins, however, opposed the plan and explained his position with plain but impassioned words, which he recalled for the President.

Adkins explained the connection between the honour of debt and the Civil War. After describing why people bought war bonds – their belief that the government would defeat the rebellion and respect public credit – he explained why repaying the debt honestly remained of the utmost importance. He stated: 'it is a sacred debt, both greenbacks and bonds—it represents a part of the price this nation paid for Liberty—and this nation must be honest, must keep its plighted faith, and pay every greenback and every Bond, dollar for dollar, in gold coin.'¹⁹³ His message received a rapturous applause signalling the support the notion garnered from the Democratic audience. This was no ordinary debt which the response to the veto demonstrated. Adkins continued to claim that some 'of that great debt has been already

¹⁹¹ Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library, Mississippi State University: Ulysses S. Grant MSS, Volume 25, James Thomson (Mendota, Illinois) to U.S. Grant, 23 April 1874.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, Smith D. Atkins (Freeport, Illinois) to U.S. Grant, 24 April 1874.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

paid in crimson currency, the best blood of the nation. Fathers and mothers did not complain—for Liberty and national Union and honor they turned a nation into mourning and covered the land with graves.¹⁹⁴ To save the nation, Union citizens had sacrificed a great deal justified only by a victory funded by war bonds; to then pay a devalued amount would devalue the loss of life. The debt and the dead were inseparable.

For many, the issue of inflation was not an issue of finance, but rather a matter of honouring the dead. The price paid by the nation for victory in the war was high but it represented the level of sacrifice that Americans had made to secure success. Thus if the nation devalued the debt it accrued in winning the war, it effectively devalued the sacrifice of life too. The United States did not simply have a financial debt: it had a debt of lost lives. In this respect, dishonouring the debt would also dishonour the sacrifice made by hundreds of thousands of Americans for the prosperity of the nation. As Adkins proclaimed, ‘Greenbacks and Bonds are sacred side by side with the Union Graves.’¹⁹⁵ The debt was a reflection upon the nation’s honour and its republican heritage and to sacrifice it would sacrifice the country too. These beliefs led Democrats like Adkins to claim that though ‘I am told that it is *hard times*, that you are complaining of your taxes—I do not believe it—taxes have been and may continue high’, nevertheless, he believed:

[T]he people, the common, working, labouring people, farmers and mechanics, they who paid most of the crimson currency and bore most of the sorrows of war, rather than have this nation dishonoured by repudiating a single pledge the nation made in that contest, would cheerfully submit to having their taxes doubled

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

instead of reduced. And, Mr. President, the audience received that sentiment with the heartiest applause. I believe that as the people then felt, so they feel now.¹⁹⁶

The commendations that emanated from some Western Democrats suggest that the relationship Adkins' drew between the war debt and the debt of life incurred in that conflict still held sway with many Americans. The celebration that greeted the veto, while often no doubt borne out of self-interested economic motives, showed that emotional connection in action.

It was evident from the basis upon which supporters of the veto sought to defend the President that the opposition to inflation rested upon more than mere economics. Their defence indicated that the economics of inflation were entwined with the political culture of Reconstruction America. In commending Grant's action they sought to validate his executive power by arguing that the veto power played a crucial, and just, role in the legislative process which had saved the country from ruin in this instance. They also highlighted the benefits derived from his military background for the United States, arguing that he brought the vital qualities of antipartisanship, patriotism and self-sacrifice to the presidency which ensured the nation adhered to principle rather than party politics. But most importantly, the President had retained the honour of the nation by refusing to allow legislation which sought to devalue the debt into law. Not only did Grant illustrate his restrained manhood in vetoing the bill but he demonstrated that he stood as an honourable gentleman in society who could be trusted as much on the battlefield as in the halls of power.¹⁹⁷

Conclusion

The response to the veto from both Grant's supporters and his opponents provided substantial evidence that in 1870s America the ideas of political economy and political culture had

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, pp. 11-14.

become enmeshed. Ideas of finance were informed by republicanism as well as economics. Both sides fought for the high ground of a republican common good while trying to accuse the other side of slavishly representing self-interested economic actors. Grant's opponents accused the President of acting tyrannically in vetoing a measure cultivated by a Republican Congress whilst his supporters claimed the President had shown his restrained manhood – his honourable capabilities as executive – by stymieing a bill which sought to dishonour the nation and devalue its sacrifices. By doing so, they reinforced the salience of ideas of tyranny, antipartyism and honour in politics during Reconstruction by illustrating the power of republicanism to define and influence political decision-making in this era.

The response of Grant's opponents to the veto demonstrated that genuine concerns over executive power existed in this era as even an issue loosely related to Reconstruction provoked accusations of executive usurpation and tyrannical conduct on the part of the President. The outrage over Grant's use of the veto power indicated that the concerns which arose over his use of presidential power to enforce Reconstruction policies were not simply a cover for other grievances with Reconstruction such as racism, support for free labour ideologies, and white Northern discontent with the ongoing Southern issues. This is further illustrated by the division the veto caused in both parties which showed that anxieties over executive power crossed both party and sectional lines. The fears of power existed in a broad cross-section of the population. The reaction to the veto illustrated that suspicions of power penetrated the era and influenced political observers' interpretations of events which in turn impacted upon the President's ability to use executive power. Issues over power had the ability to influence and hinder Reconstruction.

This was demonstrated by some members of the Liberal Republican press who, despite their personal support for the veto, highlighted these concerns over power when, in the aftermath of the veto, they suggested that the decision might procure a third term for Grant. The value

of the President's act, Henry Watterson of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* suggested, had divided the Republican Party so much, and had led to such popular support for Grant that he would be re-elected and 'never be got out of the White House except upon a stretcher.'¹⁹⁸ Horace White, of the *Chicago Tribune*, concurred stating that '[t]he only issue which could make a Third Term for Grant possible would be that of currency-inflation.'¹⁹⁹ Grant, the editor of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* claimed, had 'played with parties before he became President' and had 'played with the politicians since'; in power, Grant had demonstrated 'a singular method in his operations, both political and military' which indicated his ability to become a Caesar or Napoleon.²⁰⁰ Now, with the parties in disarray and no potential challenger – Grant having 'killed Morton as dead as a door-nail' and 'set Logan back a thousand years' with his veto – the President had a clear shot at re-election as he was 'the central figure.'²⁰¹ Despite alienating both the Democratic Party and the majority of the Republican Party, Grant, political commentators argued, remained a strong executive who could wield enough power to be re-elected. 'Everything seems to favor Grant', the editor lamented.²⁰²

Possibly in response to the fears that emanated from Liberal Republican newspapers, a rumoured response from Grant regarding his potential third term circulated widely throughout the press which indicated his disapproval of both the third term and inflation. Though the quotation most likely did not originate with Grant, it nonetheless caused much excitement in press circles. It referred to a meeting between the wife of a member of Congress and the President, where a discussion of a large portrait of Grant led to a conversation over whether it would adorn his future place of residence. 'But,' the

¹⁹⁸ 'Editorial Correspondence of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*' in 'Caesarism', *Chicago Tribune*, 14 May 1874.

¹⁹⁹ 'What Are We Coming To?', *Chicago Tribune*, 30 May 1874.

²⁰⁰ 'Editorial Correspondence of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*' in 'Caesarism', *Chicago Tribune*, 14 May 1874.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*

congressman's wife countered, 'you will be elected for a third term, and this house will hold the picture four years longer.'²⁰³ The President responded, 'No. I shall veto that. It would be inflating my term of office, and I will always veto inflation.'²⁰⁴

Though historians have often contended corruption scandals lost the President a significant amount of political capital and distracted attention from Reconstruction, the veto of the inflation bill indicated the powerful grasp which the battles over executive power could exert over the implementation of Reconstruction. In particular, the reduction of the size of the army – always considered a threat to republican America – resulted in more difficulties enforcing the voting rights of African Americans. Moreover, the loss of the House of Representatives in the ensuing midterms would have profound consequences for the enforcement of African-American civil rights. The division evident amongst the Republicans in the inflation bill fallout was prominent during the 1874 elections and caused many of their supporters to stay at home; many Republicans felt – for numerous reasons but most prominently economic ones – that the party had ceased to represent them.²⁰⁵ Upset at congressmen's inability to legislate on an economic settlement and appalled at the failure of Southern governments to pay state debts and railroad bonds at the value in which they were engaged, many simply did not vote.²⁰⁶ Few historians have explored the interplay and impact of non-Reconstruction issues of national importance on Reconstruction legislation, preferring to focus solely on

²⁰³ 'The Third Term', *Chicago Tribune*, 6 May 1874. See also *Arizona Citizen* (Tuscon, Pima County), 30 May 1874.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* This quotation circulated widely in the press. In addition its appearance in the *Chicago Tribune* and *Arizona Citizen*, it could also be found in the following journals: 'General Grant Says He Wouldn't Run Again', *The Saline County Journal* (Salina, Kansas), 14 May 1874; 'Dashes Here and There', *The Rutland Daily Globe* (Rutland, Vermont) 4 May 1874; 'Grant Declines a Third Term', *Wilmington Journal*, 15 May 1874; *Orleans County Monitor* (Barton, Vermont), 25 May 1874; *Vermont Farmer* (Newport, Orleans County, Vermont), 15 May 1874; *Vermont Phoenix* (Brattleboro, Vermont), 15 May 1874; 'General Grant on the Question of "Inflation" of the Presidential Term', *Evening Star* (Washington D.C.), 1 May 1874.

²⁰⁵ On the 1874 elections, see Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 523-524, 534, 549-550, 552-553, Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, p. 357; Wang, *The Trial of Democracy*, pp. 110-115; Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity*, pp. 290-297; and Unger, *The Greenback Era*, pp. 249-250.

²⁰⁶ Wang, *The Trial of Democracy*, p. 112, and Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity*, pp. 292-293.

Reconstruction without the wider context in which it was embedded.²⁰⁷ In doing so, historians miss an opportunity to understand how the federal government failed to place Reconstruction on a firm footing, often blaming the failure of Reconstruction on the long-term corruption exposed in the 1870s. In doing so, historians have not recognised that even the exposés of corruption were often an offshoot of a greater struggle over executive power. The battle that raged between Congress and the President so fiercely in the inflation bill threatened to irrevocably injure the President's ability to enforce Reconstruction.

²⁰⁷ One historian to explore this is Michael O'Malley who looked at the interplay of race and money issues, arguing that the issues intersected and were debated in the same terminology. Republican inflationists tended to be more sympathetic to legislating for racial equality, he suggests, while hard money interests saw race, like currency, as having a fixed value. Grant – as a supporter of African-American civil rights but an anti-inflationist – presents a notable exception to O'Malley's observation. See Michael O'Malley, 'Specie and Species: Race and the Money Question in Nineteenth Century America', *American Historical Review* 99.2 (1994), pp. 369-395. Another is Mark W. Summers in Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity* who has explored how race and economics intertwined to undermine Reconstruction.

The Third Term Movement:

'the unwritten law of the republic' and the necessity of a 'strong man'

Figure 5.1 'The Third-Term Panic'



Source: Thomas Nast, 'The Third-Term Panic', *Harper's Weekly*, 7 November 1874.

Thomas Nast succinctly summarised the effect of Caesarism and – among other incidents – Grant's controversial veto of the inflation bill on the congressional elections of 1874 when he drew 'The Third-Term Panic' that November.¹ Nast's cartoon made an enduring contribution to the iconography of U.S. politics by depicting the Republicans and Democrats as elephants and mules respectively. The depiction of the Democratic donkey masquerading as a lion to scare voters with its warning of a third term suggested, in Nast's view, one of the main reasons for the Republicans' loss of the House of Representatives. Nast implied that Grant's

¹ Thomas Nast, 'The Third Term Panic', *Harper's Weekly*, 7 November 1874.

strength and Republican fears of presidential power, which had been fed by Democratic scare tactics, cost the party vital support in 1874. Yet it was not long before Grant's vigorous use of executive power – this time in the case of employing the military to implement Reconstruction policies – caused controversy again among party loyalists. Grant's interference in Louisiana in January 1875 would provoke a mix of fury and fear not only among Democrats, but also many Republicans. Grant, his critics suggested, had acted dictatorially in using the military to remove members of the Legislature. That a subversion of democracy – in the form of a coup d'état – had taken place to ensure the Democrats gained the disputed seats seemed to matter little. Many Republicans now set out to rein in presidential power where it was needed most: the South.

Given that the fears Democrats had about Grant's despotic ambitions had by 1874 migrated to plenty of supporters of the Republican Party, it is ironic that the current historiography on the President depicts him as a weak executive, who through a mix of naivety and incompetence undermined his own administration.² This view of Grant's presidency ignores the complexities of the Reconstruction era. By alleging that scandals and corruption perpetuated by the President's friends greatly enfeebled the executive branch, historians ignore the reasons why and how this corruption was uncovered. The impetus for the investigations that unearthed corruption in Grant's presidency lay in what he understood to be his republican use of power to defend citizenship rights. His tenacious defence of African-American civil rights through the use of military power, his enemies warned, threatened to provide the President with a third term. However, the 'strong man' image of Grant proved counter-productive to efforts by Republican politicians to nominate him for a third term in

² The majority of post-revisionist histories of Grant's presidency view Grant's inexperience in politics as an impediment to an efficient administration. These historians have criticised his choice of cabinet members and claimed these choices ultimately undermined his administration. See Smith, *Grant*. Even the latest book on Reconstruction – Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion* – suggests Grant made his choices 'promiscuously', see pp. 154-158.

1876. Grant's strength as a president actually proved his weakness if his purported ambitions to break George Washington's precedent had any merit.

This chapter charts how white Republicans – even former Radicals – deplored Grant's use of the military to overturn fraudulent activity in the Louisiana state legislature.³ The fear of the executive's Reconstruction military powers and the possible tyranny such powers could inflict upon the United States led Northern Republicans to oppose 'the strong man' as much as Northern Democrats. Yet a successful post-presidential world tour in which the strong man became a statesman, and the actions of the Democratic Party, in control of Congress between 1879 and 1880, led to the revival of support for Grant's presidential style. Ironically, the President's willingness to use executive power – especially his military powers – as peacetime weapons to enforce the civil rights of all citizens led many Republicans in 1880 to rejuvenate the oft-debated third term. Ultimately, though, the republican belief in 'the unwritten law of the republic' – the two-term presidency – overpowered the desire for 'the strong man' of politics. The survival of the republic triumphed over the civil rights of the most vulnerable in society. By showing how fears of dictatorship hampered Grant's room to manoeuvre, the chapter adds to our understanding of the retreat from civil rights in the 1870s. Historians have tended to explain the downfall of Reconstruction by emphasising, to varying degrees, the intransigence of Southern whites, the racism of the Northern white electorate, and the economic tensions that came out of the Panic of 1873 and the fragmentation of 'free labour' ideology. Most scholars writing on the subject, however, use each of these factors to explain why, in contrast to the 1866-1871 period, the federal government no longer committed its forces to defending African-American voters from violent campaigns of intimidation. Grant's 1875 intervention in Louisiana therefore marks an end of an era. But to

³ Joseph G. Dawson III, *Army Generals and Reconstruction: Louisiana, 1862-1877* (Baton Rouge and London, 1982), pp. 203-206.

understand why subsequent struggles on the part of white supremacists to ‘redeem’ the Deep South from Republican rule proved successful we also need to look to political culture. Many voters – including plenty with strong commitments to civil rights – did not respond passively to the downfall of Reconstruction due to innate racism or fear that class conflict was spreading to the North. They were genuinely concerned that the aggregation of presidential power required to reconstruct the South presented a greater danger to the republic than the cost to citizenship rights through standing by.⁴

‘An insolent soldiery’: The Demise of the Third Term Movement in 1876

Let us enter upon the second century of our existence as a republic, in the spirit that animated the men of Concord and Lexington in 1775, and there will be no more forcible and fraudulent [*sic*] attempts to put the states under bayonet rule, or to invade the fair temple of Liberty with an insolent soldiery proposing to treat the people as ‘banditti,’ or to ride a president into power on the strength of a third-term military force bill.⁵

The celebration of the United States’ centennial in July 1876 elevated the significance of the upcoming presidential election for many Americans. If newspapers are anything to go by, the danger of tyranny remained almost as prominent in citizens’ minds in 1876 as it had been in 1776. Both Republicans and Democrats feared the usurpations of power by President Grant in the South, especially in Louisiana, signalled the end of the republic. Although the above

⁴ For the best examination of the different reasons for the downfall of Reconstruction, see Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 512-601. For those historians who have privileged the intransigence of Southern whites in their explanations of the retreat from Reconstruction, see Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869-1879* (Chapel Hill and London, 1984), and Richard Zuczek, *State of Rebellion: Reconstruction in South Carolina* (Columbia, 1996). Historians who blame the racism of white Northerners include C. Vann Woodward, *America Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue* (Boston, 1971), pp. 163-183, and Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction*, pp. 190-279.. For those who believe that problems arising from economic tensions played the most important role in the end of Reconstruction, see Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*, pp. 122-155, and Nancy Cohen, *The Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865-1914* (Chapel Hill and London, 2002). For a work where political culture is used to somewhat explain the downfall of Reconstruction, see Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*.

⁵ ‘The Lesson of Our Centennial’, *Columbian Register* (New Haven, Connecticut), 17 April 1875.

extract came from a Connecticut Democratic newspaper, strong denunciations of the White House's Southern policy came from former Republican supporters as well. Both parties saw unrepudiated threats in Grant's interventions on behalf of African Americans in the South. Though hyperbolic fears could be found more easily in Democratic and Liberal Republican newspapers, the Republicans – fearing the electoral consequences of staying silent – reprimanded Grant just as severely. Republicans questioned Grant's commitment to a republican form of government whilst the Democrats (and Liberal Republicans) warned of the fall of the republic and the dawn of empire. The presence of troops in peacetime and the approaching centennial therefore provoked heightened concerns over the future of the republic.

The seating of the new Louisiana legislators in January 1875 proved a turning point in Reconstruction policy. The situation in post-emancipation Louisiana had always been strained, with frequent outbursts of violence and lawlessness.⁶ The Democratic attempt to win control of the state government in 1872 had resulted in such a high level of fraud that the real victor could only be surmised.⁷ This controversy had resulted in the President adjudicating the results after the Colfax Massacre in April 1873.⁸ Yet the situation the federal government encountered in January 1875 remained unprecedented and required novel actions to restore order.⁹ The Democrats had come close to victory, after an election characterised by White League paramilitary outrages and rampant fraud, despite a black voting majority.¹⁰ When the legislature assembled on 4 January 1875, five seats in the House remained unallocated by the

⁶ Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*. Tunnell examines the long history of Louisiana Reconstruction exploring the politics and in particular the violence which permeated Louisianan society and ultimately undermined attempts to provide equal suffrage in the state.

⁷ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 26, p. 5. See also Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Unreconstructed, 1863-1877* (Baton Rouge, 1974), pp. 245-249.

⁸ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 26, pp. 6-7.

⁹ There had been previously disputed elections in Louisiana but the Returning Board usually adjudicated on these before the legislature met. The blatant disregard for political etiquette in the state legislature was unprecedented. See Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, and for the role of the military in Louisiana politics see Dawson III, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*.

¹⁰ Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War*, pp. 138, 161-180, 184.

Returning Board – a body established to adjudicate on contested election results in the state.¹¹ The Republicans had 52 members, while the Democrats obtained 50 seats, leaving the result in the balance.¹² As the clerk called the roll of elected members, the Democrats took control of the chamber, nominating and electing their preferred speaker – Louis Wiltz – and ousting the clerk.¹³ Promptly, Wiltz was sworn in, and proceeded to elect a permanent speaker and ‘dozens of sergeants-at-arms.’¹⁴ With the coup d’état complete, the contested seats were declared Democratic thus providing them with a majority in the House.¹⁵ Then, in an effort to pass favourable measures, the sergeants forcibly blocked the exits to maintain the quorum; though successful in retaining a sufficient number of Republicans, they were unable to prevent some members from escaping.¹⁶ Informed of events in the legislature, the Republican Governor appealed to the troops stationed outside.¹⁷ Colonel de Trobriand and his force, armed with ‘bayoneted rifles’, entered the legislature and removed the Democrats who had not been sanctioned by the Returning Board.¹⁸ The federal troops succeeded in defeating the Democratic coup d’état.

Yet the reversal of the coup d’état brought more condemnation upon the Republican Party than the coup itself. Despite the unconstitutional actions of the Democrats, the behaviour of Colonel de Trobriand, his superior General Phillip Sheridan, and the President were more severely rebuked. Many Republicans viewed this forceful action by the President in state jurisdiction as unrepudican, and a threat to the foundations of the republic. Numerous Republican commentators considered the underhand antics of the Democratic House members as legitimate and the President’s role in correcting this behaviour – through the

¹¹ Dawson III, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*, p. 201.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.

¹³ Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed, 1863-1877*, p. 305.

¹⁴ Dawson III, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*, p. 204.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

federal military – as unconstitutional. Military intervention in civil affairs – a species of Caesarism – undermined sound government: the President, not the Democrats, threatened democracy. This perception of the incident would have severe consequences for Reconstruction and the civil rights of African Americans.

In response to a query regarding his involvement in recent events in Louisiana, Grant sent a message to the Senate justifying the constitutional basis of all actions in Louisiana since his presidency begun. In contextualising his actions, Grant sought to remind the Senate of the continuing violence in the state. Initially troops were sent to Louisiana prior to the election, due to an outbreak of violence, under both ‘the act of 1795’ – which allowed the President to use federal troops to subdue disturbances in the states – and ‘section 4, article 4 of the Constitution, to aid in suppressing domestic violence.’¹⁹ To prevent violence at the election polls, troops were also sent to protect voters under ‘section 8’ of the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871.²⁰ Troops remained stationed in the state ‘to prevent domestic violence and aid in the enforcement of the State laws’, but they did not have orders from the President to interfere in the legislature.²¹ Though Grant had ordered General Sheridan to the state to guard against hesitancy in the execution of future commands – a problem with less decisive officers – he did not anticipate their use in the legislature.²² The President was careful to stress the violent nature of past incidents in Louisiana which had required the presence of federal troops in the state, but he also emphasised the unprecedented nature of the latest incident, which had led to an exceptional solution.

After outlining why federal troops were stationed in Louisiana, Grant proceeded to justify their actions. Grant suggested that given their orders to maintain the peace, they ‘may well

¹⁹ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 26, p. 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13, 16. See also Dawson III, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*, pp. 200-203.

have supposed that it was their duty to act when called upon by the governor for that purpose.²³ Despite the ambiguity surrounding their involvement, the President explained that the nature of ‘circumstances connected with the late legislative imbroglio in Louisiana’ did ‘seem to exempt the military from any intentional wrong in that matter.’²⁴ Furthermore, he defended the Governor’s request for the troops’ assistance by suggesting that ‘most extraordinary circumstances’ had guided his actions and resulted in his ‘duty ... to call upon the constabulary, or, if necessary, the military force of the State’.²⁵ However, he recalled that previous events involving such forces resulted in ‘a bloody conflict’, which necessitated ‘the presence of the United States troops’.²⁶ Validating their use, Grant explained how ‘[b]oth parties appear to have relied upon them as conservators of the public peace.’²⁷ Events therefore justified the use of the army to ‘suppress the disturbance’.²⁸ The President was careful to portray the legitimate basis of action taken by federal troops in Louisiana. Federal power was unfortunate but necessary given the volatile situation.

Thus though Grant conceded that the democratic basis upon which the Governor acted was ‘perhaps a debatable question’, he stressed that the lack of order and the prevalence of violence in Louisiana had led to extraordinary circumstances.²⁹ Grant also pointed out the support which the Governor received from ‘the majority of the members returned as elected to the house, to use such means as were in his power to defeat these lawless and revolutionary proceedings’.³⁰ The President also sought to remind Congress of its own failure to take charge of conditions in Louisiana through its inaction on issues highlighted as requiring

²³ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 26, p. 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

urgent attention by the President.³¹ Federal troops intervened, Grant claimed, because Congress had not performed its duty in resolving hostilities in the state.³² Grant, as a result, took control lest Louisiana should descend further into anarchy.³³ Grant was clear that the legitimacy of federal force rested upon the need to quell the anarchic behaviour of those causing the disturbances in the absence of any other enforcement mechanism.

Despite this explanation, the intervention was opposed by both Democrats and many Republicans, who saw it as the latest in a long line of executive usurpations. For the Democrats, especially the coincidence of military intervention with the upcoming centennial, it allowed them to plot Grant's actions into a longer story of the republic's descent into a monarchy. One paper used the anniversary to highlight the correlation between Grant's actions and those of the British, playing upon fears over the fragility of the nation to forewarn that '[t]he acts of violence and aggression, sought to be enforced against the people of the South by the Grant administration, are essentially antagonistic in principle to the government founded by our fathers'.³⁴ The journal, in pointing to the many similarities it saw between the two governments, declared that Grant's actions 'leave the peoples of the states at the end of the first hundred years of fruitless experiment, with no other end actually gained than that of a change in imperial masters.'³⁵ Grant's tyranny was denounced throughout the Democratic press in warnings that reminded Americans of the necessity to oppose the President's despotism and his imminent empire.³⁶

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ 'The Lesson of Our Centennial', *Columbian Register* (Connecticut), 17 April 1875.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ See for example 'Insecurity of Freedom and of Right in Texas', *Weekly Democratic Statesman* (Austin, Texas), 28 January 1875; 'Sunset Cox and Gen. Steele', *Weekly Democratic Statesman* (Austin, Texas), 4 February 1875; 'The People's Protest', *New York Herald*, 16 January 1875; 'The Bearing of Louisiana', *Memphis Daily Appeal*, 29 January 1875; *The Stark County Democrat*, 11 February 1875; *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle* (Clarksville, Tennessee), 23 January 1875; *The Home Journal* (Winchester, Tennessee), 4 February 1875; and 'Grant Still After a Third Term', *The Weekly Clarion* (Jackson, Mississippi), 18 February 1875.

Expanding upon fears of executive power, especially military powers, many Democrats warned their supporters that Grant's actions in Louisiana represented an attempt to gain a third term by force.³⁷ In contrast to the Republican press, Democratic newspapers generally connected Grant's actions in the South with the President's potential third term. They warned not only of despotism, but of the coming empire. The *Boston Post* – the leading Democratic newspaper in New England – exclaimed that '[i]f the Federal soldiery may thus put down and set up a State Legislature by force, the example may embolden by its success to a similar experiment in the National Legislature also.'³⁸ The *New York Sun*, too, proclaimed how '[t]he precedent is full of peril' before it elaborated on the consequences of Grant's actions.³⁹

If the prime author of this outrage is allowed to go unpunished, will he not repeat it two years hence, in his own individual case, on a scale as broad as the Union? Suppose he carries out his intention and runs for a third term? What matters it [*sic*] that he does not get a majority of the electoral votes? Can he not be counted in by fraud and inaugurated by the edge of the sword?⁴⁰

Though Democratic rhetoric often sought to stoke fears of executive tyranny for partisan ends – the *Sun*'s editor, Charles A. Dana, attempted to rouse support for the President's 'impeachment' – it nevertheless commented on a phenomenon which caused genuine fear especially in states, such as Louisiana, where fraud and stolen elections frequently occurred.⁴¹ Gregory P. Downs has explored this situation with relation to the 1876 presidential election providing evidence to show how the 'line between violence and politics' had become blurred during Reconstruction especially in the repeated instances of the inauguration of '[t]wo

³⁷ *Ibid.*, see also "'In Peace Prepare For War'", *The Morristown Gazette*, 27 January 1875; *The Weekly Register*, 7 January 1875; 'Grant's Men Appalled at the Storm of Public Opinion', *The Daily Argus* (Rock Island, Illinois), 11 January 1875; 'Progress of the Revolution in Louisiana', *The Weekly Democratic Statesman* (Austin, Texas), 14 January 1875; and 'New States', *The Opelousas Courier*, 30 January 1875.

³⁸ 'The Great Crime', *Albany Argus*, 8 January 1875.

³⁹ 'The Louisiana Crime', *The New York Sun*, 6 January 1875.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

governors', and the apparent readiness to turn to force to sustain rival claims to office.⁴²

Many Democratic newspapers also recalled the words of Frank Blair Junior in 1868, who had warned that Grant would never leave office, as evidence that sound reasons existed to question Grant's use of executive military powers.⁴³ Though these newspapers had partisan ends in sight, their readers often genuinely feared the use of federal troops in state affairs.

Leading Democratic newspapers connected Grant's protection of civil rights in the South with a military dictatorship. The *New York Herald*, this time firmly in the Democratic camp on the debate, warned its readers that '[t]he President commands the government and the party just as he commanded the army. There is no will but that of the silent, inscrutable master in the White House.'⁴⁴ The *Weekly Democratic Statesman* claimed 'at last we have the Federal despot not only controlling Legislatures by force of arms but absolutely controlling the action and organization of the courts. In what is the despotic authority of Grant restricted?'⁴⁵ The Texas newspaper also raised the spectre of a monarchy when it stated 'surely Grant will lead the divine effulgence of his imperial presence and in his own person assuage the griefs of a great Northern commonwealth.'⁴⁶ The newspaper described the state of affairs – especially in Louisiana – as 'government based on fear and force'.⁴⁷ Democratic newspapers, by playing upon republican fears of executive power, denied the President the authority to enforce civil rights by describing his actions as despotic. Their accusations were commonplace in Democratic circles where they had circulated for years, but the President's actions in Louisiana had demonstrated how far Grant would go to protect African-American civil rights.

⁴² Downs, 'The Mexicanization of American Politics', *American Historical Review*, pp. 387, 395-196.

⁴³ 'What is President Grant Aiming At?', *New York Herald*, 21 January 1875. See also 'Grant's War Upon the South', *The Anderson Intelligencer*, 21 January 1875. This was also seen in Grant's intervention in Arkansas. See 'Grant and Arkansas', *Memphis Daily Appeal*, 12 February 1875.

⁴⁴ 'Is it Peace or War?', *New York Herald*, 22 January 1875.

⁴⁵ *Weekly Democratic Statesman* (Austin, Texas), 28 January 1875.

⁴⁶ 'Insecurity of Freedom and of Right in Texas', *Weekly Democratic Statesman* (Austin, Texas), 28 January 1875.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

The Democrats demonstrated the extent to which they felt threatened by Grant's action through their use of language. Many Democratic editors – not content with their connection of the executive office and the military – assured readers of Grant's absolute control over the federal government through metaphors tied to slavery. By referring to Grant as 'master', they conflated his supposed tyranny with the absolute power of slaveholders.⁴⁸ In doing so, perhaps, they were attempting to reignite exaggerated Southern antebellum suspicions over Northern ambitions to force white Southerners into slavery, while continuing to hold the Reconstruction era conservative line that black suffrage was a mask for subjugating whites.⁴⁹ Such language abounded in Democratic coverage of the intervention.⁵⁰ The *New York Herald*, reversing its position on the inflation bill, stated that within the Republican Party there existed only '[o]ne or two independent men [who] venture to assert that they are the peers and not the slaves of the President.'⁵¹ The *Plain Dealer* in Cleveland explained that Democrats in Louisiana were working 'to lift the state out of the bondage to which Radical carpet-bagism has subjected it.'⁵² The Pennsylvanian *Washington Review and Examiner* also printed an article on Grant which they entitled 'Cracking the Lash', again comparing the President's action with that of a slaveholder, whilst the *Weekly Democratic Statesman* in Texas asked its readers '[a]re we not slaves?'⁵³ Much as in 1776, the use of slavery analogies proved a potent means to critique absolute power, and mobilise supporters to fight tyranny. Conflating 'strong government' with tyranny, they claimed Grant's use of executive power

⁴⁸ 'Is it Peace or War?', *New York Herald*, 22 January 1875. See also Michael F. Conlin, 'The Dangerous Isms and the Fanatical Ists: Antebellum Conservatives in the South and the North Confront the Modernity Conspiracy', *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4.2 (2014), pp.211-212.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Democratic newspapers who used this argument included *Memphis Daily Appeal*, 6 January 1875; 'The Louisiana Outrage', *The Daily Argus* (Rock Island, Illinois), 6 January 1875; 'Louisiana', *The Weekly Democratic Statesman*, 7 January 1875; 'Another Imbroglio', *The Weekly Register* (Point Pleasant, West Virginia), 7 January 1875; 'Louisiana', *Wilmington Journal* (Wilmington, North Carolina), 8 January 1875; "'All of Us" Belknap', *The Dallas Weekly Herald* (Dallas, Texas), 9 January 1875; 'The Louisiana Outrage', *Orangeburg Times*, 14 January 1875; and 'Grant and Sheridan vs. Holden and Kirk', *The Enquirer Southerner* (Tarboro, North Carolina), 15 January 1875.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² 'Grant—Third Term—Military Despotism?', *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, Ohio), 6 January 1875.

⁵³ *Washington Review and Examiner*, 14 April 1875, and the *Weekly Democratic Statesman* (Austin, Texas), 28 January 1875.

meant ‘no fuss; no argument; no parliamentary quibblings’; Caesar, they suggested, had ascended and must be deposed.⁵⁴

Democrats also warned the electorate of the continuation of corruption and the abuse of patronage if Grant were re-nominated and elected. The *Indianapolis Sentinel* even claimed that Grant would try to control the Republican convention of 1876 ‘through the powerful enginery of the offices within his gift’.⁵⁵ The *Cairo Bulletin* alleged that Grant was unlikely to give up a third term as it would ‘disaffect a powerful element; to depose office holders, high and low, would be to alienate an equally powerful element’.⁵⁶ These newspapers spoke of ‘notorious thieves’ in positions of power supported by the imposition of Grant’s ‘martial law’ and legislatures ‘regulated by United States troops’.⁵⁷ The *Cincinnati Enquirer* simply stated that Grant would achieve a third term ‘by stuffed ballot boxes and forged returns’.⁵⁸ Patronage and corruption – the abuse of executive power both parties had warned of since Grant picked his cabinet – would ensure a third term for the President.

Whilst some Democrats viewed Grant’s corruption and unconstitutional actions as the root cause of his undemocratic actions, the independent *New York Herald* considered Grant’s antipartisanship and republicanism as the real source of the country’s problem. Grant’s lack of loyalty to party made him not only undemocratic but unrepublican: an argument honed by opponents of Grant’s veto of the inflation bill in April 1874. The newspaper denounced Grant as ‘[o]bstinate, able, independent, self-willed, amenable to no influences except those which appeal to his pride and his vanity, believing that he is more necessary to the party than the party ever had been to him, and regarding the Presidency as a personal possession’; the implication here was that parties were more capable of defending the republic than an

⁵⁴ ‘Grant—Third Term—Military Despotism?’, *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, Ohio), 6 January 1875.

⁵⁵ ‘Some More Of Senator M’Donald’s View’, *The Patriot* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), 2 April 1875.

⁵⁶ *Cairo Bulletin*, 21 January 1875.

⁵⁷ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 11 January 1875.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

antipartisan president.⁵⁹ The antipartisanship of the President – initially considered a positive quality in politics, even by the *Herald* who had wanted him as the Democratic presidential candidate in 1868 – was now deemed an undemocratic force which would endanger the republic. Always a popular argument with opponents of Grant who believed his antipartyism was a cover for the beginning of despotism in the United States, the argument gained credence after Grant's use of the veto power in 1874 and his military powers in 1875 as his actions illustrated his willingness to act without reference to his party, or Congress. Increasingly, newspapers of all parties interpreted republicanism as loyalty to party and the independent President as a threat to the existence of the republic. The warnings of the tyrannical potential of executive power expressed by the Liberal Republicans in 1872 and John Russell Young in 1873 seemed to be ringing true. A republican president could become an unrepublican despot.

Denouncing Grant's use of executive power as the 'arbitrary ... will of the President', the Democrats insinuated that Grant had ceased to act for the public good.⁶⁰ Grant, they charged, represented 'an uncontrolled dictator' and argued that '[i]mpeachment should follow this usurpation'.⁶¹ The *New York World* denounced Grant as 'the traitor who sits in the President's chair' for his defence of the freedmen's rights.⁶² In Pennsylvania, the *Philadelphia Commonwealth* warned that 'Grant intends to be Dictator, if riot, anarchy, or any other means will accomplish his purpose. This is the first effort. White men, prepare for what is to come.'⁶³ Grant's support of the newly enfranchised African Americans was increasingly seen as undemocratic as it not only denied Southern white conservatives places of power but it threatened the very existence of the republic by using the military for civil

⁵⁹ 'Is it Peace or War?', *New York Herald*, 22 January 1875.

⁶⁰ 'Another Scheme of Despotism', *The Patriot* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), 26 January 1875

⁶¹ 'Louisiana Despotism!', *Washington Review and Examiner* (Washington, Pennsylvania) 13 January 1875.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ 'Grant's First Effort.', *Washington Review and Examiner*, 14 April 1875.

purposes. The *New York Herald* critiqued the ‘war spirit which comes muttering to us from Washington as they would deal with a crime against the integrity of the Republic.’⁶⁴ Invoking the Caesarism scare of 1873, they scolded those who ‘sneered at our prophecies of Caesarism, yet came to accept them when they could no longer be denied.’⁶⁵ The President, they claimed, endangered the republic as he showed a willingness to use the military to implement laws and constitutional amendments regardless of his opponents’ concerns.

Yet despite the hyperbole and warnings over the threat of Grant’s power which emanated from the Democratic press, the Liberal Republican press bore much of the responsibility for undermining the political capital of the President through their comparisons of the President’s actions. In particular, the articles from three Liberal Republican newspapers – the *New York Evening Press*, the *New York Tribune*, and the *Springfield Republican* – were reprinted throughout the Democratic press which highlighted the power and depth of the allegations. Liberal Republican newspapers likened Grant’s actions to Napoleon, Charles Stuart and Cromwell. ‘What is the difference between the condition of the citizens of Louisiana under Kellogg,’ the *Evening Post* asked, ‘and the people of France under Louis Napoleon?’⁶⁶ Monarchical comparisons featured regularly in their articles as they connected Grant’s removal of legislators from the Louisiana state legislature to those of the King of England and Cromwell.⁶⁷ The *Springfield Republican* stated that on ‘April 20, 1653, Oliver Cromwell drove the representatives of the English people out of their chamber at the point of the bayonet. January 4 1875, Ulysses S. Grant repeats the experiment—upon a smaller scale, to be sure—by sending a file of soldiers into the State House of an American commonwealth on

⁶⁴ ‘Is it Peace or War?’, *New York Herald*, 22 January 1875.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ ‘The Great Crime’, *Albany Argus*, 8 January 1875. [This article contains several extracts from various newspapers – especially Liberal Republican papers – on the Louisiana incident].

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

a like illegal, revolutionary, treasonable errand. We shall see what comes of it.’⁶⁸ The Liberal Republicans used European – especially monarchical – analogies in the same way the Democrats used slavery metaphors: to warn the electorate of the necessity to oppose tyranny and the formidable power of the federal government.

Building on the fears they had espoused in 1872 over Grant’s patronage and military powers, the Liberal Republican newspapers did not consider the President’s actions to have any legitimacy, preferring to see them as tyrannical. Yet republican fears over the role of the federal military in state affairs, and by extension of the power of the federal government, proved a formidable obstacle to the implementation of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments which these former Radical Republicans had helped inaugurate. Liberal Republicans had been hostile to the president’s use of the military in civil affairs since the passage of the 1871 Force Act, which not only authorised the use of the military in curtailing Klan violence, but also allowed the federal government to extend the remit of the constitutional amendments to individuals as well as states.⁶⁹ Though, inevitably, some Democrats used these fears as effective electioneering rhetoric – especially men like Dana of the *New York Sun* who had worked ferociously to uncover corruption in Grant’s administration for many years – but for others they signalled real concerns about threats to the balance of powers in a fragile and war-torn Union. In Grant’s protection of civil rights they saw a dangerous move towards the unconstitutional infringement of ‘self-government’ in the States.⁷⁰ At the end of a century of republican government, both Democrats and Liberals Republicans saw the beginning of despotism in the United States.

Liberal Republican newspapers couched their warnings of tyranny in constitutional language. They explained what the Constitution allowed and what it did not, which allowed them to

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*, pp. 114-115.

⁷⁰ ‘Comments of the Press’, *New York Tribune*, 7 January 1875.

appeal to the republican sensitivities of voters. It was in this area that the Liberal Republicans – with Democratic support – made their most persuasive critiques of the Republican President to voters. The *New York Evening Post* condemned Grant’s actions as ‘absolutely unjustifiable’ before it explained that ‘the Constitution of the United States does not provide for the employment of the army in civil affairs of a State in any other way than by a formal demand from the executive officer of the State made upon the President of the United States.’⁷¹ The newspaper asserted that the Governor of Louisiana ‘made no specific request to the government for military aid’.⁷² The article further claimed that ‘[t]he fact stands forth, clear and unmistakeable that the acting Governor of Louisiana yesterday used the army of the United States to interfere with the organization of the Legislature of that State, without justification in fact or warrant of law.’⁷³ The paper concluded its attack on presidential power by asserting that ‘depriving the citizens of any State of this Union of the right of self-government will be fatal to the existence of any political party.’⁷⁴ The Liberal Republican paper had acquiesced to the Democratic mantra of states’ rights, which denied the President the authority to enforce laws that Congress had written. It was an argument presented throughout the Liberal Republican press denouncing Grant’s use ‘of Federal bayonets’ to keep the Republicans in power in Louisiana.⁷⁵ The use of federal power to enforce federal law was seen as the usurpation of states’ rights, democracy and ‘self-government’.⁷⁶

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, and ‘The Great Crime’, *Albany Argus*, 8 January 1875.

⁷² ‘The Great Crime’, *Albany Argus*, 8 January 1875.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, and ‘Comments of the Press’, *New York Tribune*, 9 January 1875. See also ‘The Bayonet in Our Politics’, *New York Tribune*, 6 January 1875, and *New York Tribune*, 7 January 1875, p. 6, for Kellogg maintaining power ‘only by United States bayonets.’

⁷⁶ ‘The Great Crime’, *Albany Argus*, 8 January 1875, and ‘Comments of the Press’, *New York Tribune*, 7 January 1875.

The Liberal Republicans presented a powerful force in many Northern states where they held meetings denouncing the President's actions in Louisiana.⁷⁷ In particular, the meeting in Boston at Faneuil Hall garnered much attention from the press. Prominent Liberal Republicans, and some Democrats, scolded Grant's actions; they claimed that if Grant could interfere in Louisiana then he could also interfere in their own state.⁷⁸ Attendees claimed that for parallels they needed to look at 'the arbitrary tyranny of the Stuarts of England' or, turning to a parallel liberally used elsewhere, 'the iron despotism of Oliver Cromwell'.⁷⁹ Only in such actions – which counted the unseating of members of parliament on a ruler's command – could equivalents be found for the 'outrage committed in Louisiana'.⁸⁰ At the end of the meeting, the attendees passed a resolution stating their desire 'that the sword may be the supporter and not the destroyer of civil liberty'.⁸¹

Although the Liberal Republicans conceded that 'the five [Democratic] members had been seated by a surprise and voted in haste' they still questioned '[w]hat right had the United States soldiers to pass upon the election, qualifications and the returns of a State?'⁸² They did not see constitutional prerogatives in Grant's actions but rather lamented the unwarranted interference of the federal government in state government. Even the former Republican turned Democrat John Quincy Adams II – whose grandfather and great-grandfather had each been accused of monarchical ambitions – urged 'that the hand of the federal government should be kept off the liberties of the State', and that through the actions in Louisiana the country had 'passed the first milestone on [its] way to empire.'⁸³ These men 'held the President and his general to a strict responsibility for trampling upon the very principles upon

⁷⁷ 'The Louisiana Situation', *Augusta Chronicle*, 16 January 1875 and 'The Illinois Legislature Condemns Grant', *Augusta Chronicle*, 29 January 1875. See also 'The Outrage Denounced.', *New York Tribune*, 12 January 1875.

⁷⁸ 'The People's Protest', *New York Herald*, 16 January 1875.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

which are [*sic*] free institutions are founded’ and accused Grant of ‘a flagrant usurpation of power.’⁸⁴ Referring to the Constitution to condemn the President, opponents cited the same Act of Congress from 1795 that Grant had used in building the legal basis for intervention, which decreed that the President could only send the federal military to a state on the request of the Executive (or Legislature if convened) and only in response to an insurrection.⁸⁵ Here, the struggle revolved around whether Louisiana was still insurrectionary; for Grant it was, but his critics rejected this reasoning.

During John Quincy Adams II’s speech, Wendell Phillips was spotted among the crowd listening avidly.⁸⁶ The crowd began to interrupt the speakers with calls for Phillips – the former abolitionist and women’s suffrage advocate – who had not been invited to speak at the event.⁸⁷ Eventually the President of the meeting acceded to the demands and Phillips took the platform.⁸⁸ Phillips began his speech by appealing to the crowd on the subject of justice, asking whether or not every citizen had the right to appeal to the federal government for protection, whether that protection could be granted in a strict constructionist interpretation or not.⁸⁹ He stated:

When the negro in the Southern States hauled from his house and about to be shot; when a white Republican caught in some county in Alabama and about to be assassinated—[heckler]—looks around on the State government about him and sees no protection,—none whatever, for white or black,—has he not a full right,

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, see also ‘Law and Order’, *New York Tribune*, 6 January 1875.

⁸⁶ ‘The People’s Protest’, *New York Herald*, 16 January 1875, and Martyn, *Wendell Phillips*, p. 400.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, and Phillips, *Wendell Phillips, in Faneuil Hall, on Louisiana Difficulties*, p. 1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Phillips, *Wendell Phillips, in Faneuil Hall, on Louisiana Difficulties*, p. 4.

an emphatic right, to say to the National Government at Washington, 'Find or make a way to protect me, for I am a citizen of the United States?'⁹⁰

Phillips gained applause for this statement despite the interruptions from hecklers which were a constant presence throughout his speech. He had outlined basic rights for United States' citizens, hoping to appeal to the republican sensibilities of the audience. He described the situation in Louisiana and the inability of Congress to fulfil its duties to the state, which, he argued, had compelled Grant to act. Continuing, he stated how the federal government in 1872 had supported Kellogg, the Republican, in the disputed November elections as, according to Phillips, '[t]he President of the United States had no alternative. ... Congress would do nothing; neither the Senate nor the House would act; your Congress was dumb; it would not take a step in any direction. [heckle] There stood the President of the United States, what was he to do?'⁹¹ Phillips declared that only the strong man had stood up to defend the republic:

I have just brought it to your attention that the citizen of the United States has a right to look up to him and say: 'By your oath of office, protect me.' ... Now Congress would do nothing. There was the State of Louisiana going to pieces; Grant recognized Kellogg as governor, as he must recognize someone. ... If he usurped power, or made a mistake, remember, gentlemen, for two long years Congress has never rebuked him, nor corrected his errors. They have tried again and again to come to some conclusion on the Louisiana question, but they could not, and there stood the Executive; he must act; there was no choice; he had got to act; the law must be executed.⁹²

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*

Phillips used Lincoln's expansive interpretation of the war powers to justify Grant's actions but he also cast the President as a model republican. When the war broke out in 1861 Lincoln had assumed powers – which he claimed through his presidential oath to defend the Constitution to conduct the war. Lincoln had not summoned Congress – which was in recess – to a special session and instead acted alone. Events in Louisiana had also illustrated the inability of Congress to act decisively in moments of crisis, and Phillips explained that once more it fell to the President to fulfil his promise to the nation to uphold the laws of the country in the face of congressional incapacity.

Phillips, who had fought Grant's nomination in 1868 by accusing him of being an unrepublican drunkard, now defended the President as the man most likely to stand up for black civil rights.⁹³ By 1872, indeed, Phillips had admitted his pleasant surprise at the President's actions in defence of former slaves' civil rights and supported him over Horace Greeley, the Liberal Republican nominee, in the election.⁹⁴ Rather than trying to act tyrannically, Phillips now claimed in Boston, that Grant was merely performing his required role.

He did what he was compelled to do. Driven to that position—shut up to it—give him your sympathy. When the assembled wisdom of the nation confessed that it could see no satisfactory step to take, then have fair consideration for the man who was obliged by his oath of office to walk forward and meet his responsibilities. At least, when he has again and again, and again, besought

⁹³ Phillips, 'General Grant', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1 February 1868, 'A Temperance Lecture', *Nashville Union and Dispatch* (Nashville, Tennessee), 16 April 1868, 'Grant and His Defamers', *New York World*, in *The Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), 5 October 1868. And Wendell Phillips' Speech at the Brooklyn (New York) Academy of Music in "Surrender of Congress", *Anderson Intelligencer* (Anderson Court House, South Carolina), 22 January 1868. See also 'Speech of Wendell Phillips', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 13 June 1868

⁹⁴ Martyn, *Wendell Phillips*, pp. 400-401.

Congress to relieve him of the burden, don't charge him with intent to usurp power.⁹⁵

Phillips then pointed out that Grant's personal interests as a politician lay in the exact course of action the Liberal Republicans were demanding. He proclaimed:

President Grant's message affirms that 'lawlessness, turbulence, and bloodshed' cover the whole history of reconstructed Louisiana. If he is a selfish politician, it would be more profitable for him to paint it all peace, and so gain the support of the now triumphant white race. If he loves fame, to claim that he has really pacified the South would be the cap sheaf of his glory. He has no temptation to exaggerate *on the side* of Louisiana disorder.⁹⁶

The President, Phillips affirmed, cared nothing for the fruits of victory but rather sought to fulfil his duty, as a republican, to protect all the citizens of the United States. By intervening in Louisiana, the President simply sought to protect the nation from chaos and uphold law and order. Phillips appealed to the audience on a republican basis, perhaps realising the necessity of defending the President, and equal rights, on the prerogative of the White House to exercise republicanism in politics.

Yet the reaction of Grant's supporters was not as warm as the one he received from former opponent Phillips. Republicans around the country were greatly divided over Grant's actions. Some Republicans – especially Radicals and black voters – applauded his defence of the newly enfranchised African Americans. The *New York Times* reported for instance that two out of three letters it received from readers supported the President's policy.⁹⁷ Many

⁹⁵ Phillips, *Wendell Phillips, in Faneuil Hall, on Louisiana Difficulties*, p. 4.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13

⁹⁷ 'The Vice-President and the Republican Party', *New York Evening Post*, 27 January 1875.

previously supportive newspapers, however, condemned his actions.⁹⁸ These Republican newspapers included both Radical Republicans, such as the hitherto loyal *Harper's Weekly*, and moderates, such as the *New York Times*. The reaction of former staunch supporters of Grant provides the best indication of the opposition to his Southern Reconstruction policy. Even George William Curtis, a strong supporter of black suffrage, saw a dangerous trend towards military despotism in the intrusion of the military in civil affairs.⁹⁹ The opposition from these formerly strident supporters was worrying. The President, they contended, had engaged in dictatorial acts which menaced the republic. Rather than contextualize the incident in the violence of Reconstruction politics, they saw it as symptomatic of a wider danger for their states. It was the end of 'self-government' and the centralisation of power in the White House, they warned.¹⁰⁰ Their perception of events led them to resume (or in some cases begin) agitating against a third term for Grant.

In many respects, the *New York Times* summarised the fears of plenty of Americans when it described how it struggled to understand the rationale behind Grant's actions. The paper argued:

For ourselves, we must say that the use which was made of the United States troops seems to have been an extreme exercise of power, and one which the President, who is primarily responsible for it, must find it very difficult to show adequate authority. The United States guarantee to each State a republican form of government, and, on requisition, protection against domestic violence. In this case there was no recent requisition, and there was no actual violence. The Governor called in troops in anticipation of his own helplessness, and engaged

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ 'The Union and the States', *Harper's Weekly*, 24 April 1875, and 'Republican Duty', *Harper's Weekly*, 15 May 1875

¹⁰⁰ 'The Union and the States', *Harper's Weekly*, 24 April 1875.

their commander in acts which have never yet been performed by a United States Army officer. The troops did not aid the States forces. They replaced them. We do not believe the country will regard such a procedure with approval.¹⁰¹

The *New York Times* – amongst other newspapers – created an entirely different picture of the situation in Louisiana by removing all references to electoral violence and unconstitutional actions in Louisiana on the part of members of the legislature. This allowed the Republican press as well as its Democratic counterparts to skew events in the state in a manner that made Grant look like the usurper. The portrait of an unconstitutional president they produced, in turn, limited the legitimate scope of presidential power. Phillips here was fighting a losing battle in trying to defend what the White House was obliged to do. Whether consciously, or unconsciously, these newspapers removed the constitutional basis of Grant's power denying him crucial political capital to deal with state emergencies and enforce civil rights for all American citizens. Furthermore, their refusal to acknowledge the constitutional basis of Grant's actions would have severe consequences for the ability of future presidents to intervene in the South to protect citizens' civil rights. The opposition of such influential publications as the *New York Times* and *Harper's Weekly* was extremely damaging to the future of civil rights in the South.

As a moderate Republican newspaper, the opposition of the *New York Times* could have been anticipated, but that of the Radical Republican *Harper's Weekly* was unprecedented: the journal had been a ferocious supporter of the President. In other scares over executive power, whether over his allocation of patronage, his use of foreign powers or with regard to the military, the journal had vigorously defended the President. It also claimed during the Caesarism scare of 1873 that it saw no objection to a third term for Grant. As a result its turnaround, documented in their editorials, hurt the President's political capital immensely.

¹⁰¹ 'Louisiana', *New York Times*, 6 January 1875.

Although the journal did not deny that the situation in Louisiana remained intolerable – it was under no illusion that white Democrats wished to hold African Americans in a position of subjugation – it denied Grant had the power to intervene to remedy the situation with United States troops.¹⁰² In doing so, they rejected the constitutional role of the federal government to guarantee the civil rights of all citizens.

The journal effectively validated the unconstitutional actions of the Democrats by repudiating the President's role in enforcing republican rule on state governments. *Harper's Weekly* set a dangerous precedent when they charged 'that the result of a constant and familiar forcible supervision of the [state] government by the [federal] is the destruction of that self-reliance and spirit of independence which are indispensable to successful popular republican government.'¹⁰³ Their dismissal of the activities engaged in by the Louisiana legislature signalled a disregard for undemocratic activity conducted by state governments. *Harper's Weekly* remained more concerned with the process to rectify undemocratic activities. This, they claimed, did not reside with the federal military or the president. Completely ignoring the bloody history of legal and extra-legal attempts to resolve power struggles within Louisiana, the journal claimed that '[o]ur problem is not how to protect a negro or a white man in his rights, but how free institutions, which are the guarantee of all rights, are best to be maintained.'¹⁰⁴ Highlighting republican concerns over the use of the army, the journal wrote that 'military force is to be employed only in strict subservience to the letter and spirit of the Constitution'.¹⁰⁵ *Harper's Weekly's* claims were a damning indictment of the use of the military to enforce the Reconstruction Amendments; its editorials implied that the president had no right to interfere in the Southern states to enforce the laws of the United States regardless of undemocratic activity on the part of the states.

¹⁰² 'The Union and the States', *Harper's Weekly*, 24 April 1875.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ 'Republican Duty', *Harper's Weekly*, 15 May 1875.

Where Phillips saw Grant's actions as republicanism in action, *Harper's Weekly* – and other Republican newspapers – saw the seeds of despotism. Curtis's journal claimed the President used 'merely selfish control' in government and was devoid of 'the highest patriotism', 'the purest character and the best ability.'¹⁰⁶ The *Philadelphia Times* denounced Grant 'as insane' and 'selfish'.¹⁰⁷ The *Hartford Daily Courant*, a Republican newspaper that celebrated Grant's action in vetoing the inflation bill, reported 'dissatisfaction' with the President and stressed the necessity to correct unwise behaviour within the party.¹⁰⁸ The inability of many former supporters to muster any kind words for the President illustrated the large increase in opposition to a strong executive. This loss of Republican support for the enforcement of the Reconstruction Acts would have profound long term consequences for the nation.

Though the Senate supported Grant's actions in Louisiana, the President stood accused of despotism in power by some members of Congress. Led by Democratic Senator Allen G. Thurman of Ohio, the Senate sent the President a resolution requesting information on the situation in Louisiana, which asked upon 'what authority such military interference and intervention' had occurred.¹⁰⁹ Debate on the resolution continued for four days before a resolution of approbation passed. Most Republican members did defend the President, with a Vermont Senator claiming the debate marked:

the first time ... in human history when any man has raised his voice to condemn what he calls despotism on the part of the Government, where, when you look to find what that despotism is, you find ... the Government exerting all the power that it is able to exert to protect human life and human liberty.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ 'Editorial Notes', *Columbian Register*, 10 April 1875.

¹⁰⁸ 'The Future', *Hartford Daily Courant*, 7 April 1875.

¹⁰⁹ *Congressional Record*, 43rd Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 238, 344.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

The Vermont Republican was responding to Democratic allegations of despotism levelled at the President. In particular, a Democrat from Delaware suggested that Grant, in his action, had become ‘Caesar’, was trying ‘to wrap the purple about him’, and that ‘the American people [must] tear the robes from him.’¹¹¹ The debate proceeded mostly along partisan lines, and even after the resolution passed, the Liberal Republican Senator Carl Schurz still sought to denounce the President’s actions.¹¹² Schurz accused the President of violating constitutional government and using ‘arbitrary power’ to preserve peace, pronouncing that ‘where the forms of constitutional government can be violated with impunity, there the spirit of constitutional government will soon be dead.’¹¹³ Schurz asserted that by usurping power to ensure peace and protect the rights of former slaves, there would soon be no republican government in existence for them to enjoy.¹¹⁴ Although the Senate eventually approved the President’s course, the allegations of usurpation by an influential Republican proved damaging especially as it echoed the stance of many Republicans around the country who disapproved the President’s course. The condemnations sent in from state legislatures across the nation refuted the idea that the ‘temporary despotism’ tolerated under Lincoln during the Civil War – and now extolled in republican garb by Phillips – would be allowed despite the ‘guerrilla warfare’ initiated by white Democrats in the South. The military had no role in civil government.¹¹⁵

Nowhere was this sentiment clearer than in the actions of the newly elected Democratic House members. These members replicated the course of the Liberal Republicans in the early 1870s by commencing investigations into the conduct of Grant’s administrations in an effort to uncover corruption. However, historians who focus on the corruption discovered during

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 365-372.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 368, 369.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 368-370.

¹¹⁵ Schlesinger Jr., *The Imperial Presidency*, p. 65, and George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens, 2007), p. 143.

Grant's presidency often do not situate it within its long-term context. The Liberal Republicans launched numerous investigations during Grant's first administration in pursuit of corruption in order to restrict him to a single term. Corruption, in this sense, became an accusation that could diminish the President's power. These congressmen even interrogated the Secretary of the Navy – George S. Robeson – on the basis of allegations made by the Democratic *New York Sun*'s editor Dana.¹¹⁶ One Senator denounced these activities claiming they had turned the Senate 'into a political caucus'.¹¹⁷ Fearing the election of a Republican President in 1876, the Democrats too sought to unearth administrative malfeasance. A House committee tasked with investigating the administration discovered fraudulent dealings by Secretary of War William W. Belknap in March 1876.¹¹⁸ However, Democratic secretiveness meant that the President remained unaware of the crime before he was approached by Belknap who persuaded Grant to accept his resignation before impeachment proceedings commenced.¹¹⁹ The desire to injure Grant left the Republicans unaware, until too late, of the evidence against Belknap which allowed the Secretary to approach the President before he could be forewarned of Belknap's criminal dealings.¹²⁰ There is no doubt that corruption in the modern sense of the term was rampant in the 1870s, but as a political weapon, it was mobilised at particular points to challenge the White House. The aftermath of the Louisiana intervention marked a real opportunity to diminish the power of the President.

The Democrats' reluctance to inform Grant of their findings was indicative of the nature of the investigations. The decision of the committee to recommend impeachment only reached Republican ears early on the morning of Belknap's resignation. Congressman Lyman K. Bass informed the Secretary of the Treasury, Benjamin H. Bristow, a good friend of Belknap's,

¹¹⁶ See 'The Secretary of the Navy', *Harper's Weekly*, 13 April 1872, and 'The Vindication of the Secretary of the Navy', *Harper's Weekly*, 27 April 1872.

¹¹⁷ Hesselstine, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p. 266.

¹¹⁸ Smith, *Grant*, pp. 593-596.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

who relayed the information to the Secretary of State, Hamilton Fish, who was still in bed, before heading to the White House to brief the President on Fish's recommendation.¹²¹

However, the President was in a hurry to get to a portrait sitting which led Bristow to notify him of the House's intentions without discussing the evidence against Belknap.¹²² Instead he advised Grant to converse with Bass, who the President sent for, but before he could leave the premises Belknap and his friends approached the President. Presenting their side of the story, they convinced the President to accept Belknap's resignation before he received the full history of the situation.¹²³ The resulting impeachment proceedings against Belknap were therefore ineffectual and served only to embarrass Grant's administration. The failure of the Democrats to inform the President rested with their ultimate aim: to implicate the President in unrepugnant activities which would destabilise his administration and harm the Republicans for the 1876 election.

Frustrated by their inability to fell the President in their attempts to discover corruption in his administrations, the Democratic press begun discussing the possible impeachment of Grant himself.¹²⁴ Disappointed by their inability to impeach Belknap and by Grant's interference in the trial of Orville E. Babcock, his former private secretary, which supposedly prevented his conviction, the Democrats tried a new tactic.¹²⁵ Babcock's trial had resulted from investigations by Bristow, which had Grant's support (the President stated '[l]et no guilty man escape if it can be avoided').¹²⁶ Bristow's inquiries uncovered the Whiskey Ring in May

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 594.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Their attempt was mocked by *Harper's Weekly* artist Thomas Nast in "Why We Laugh."—Pro Tem' published on 3 June 1876. For Democratic Representative Joseph Blackburn's resolution see 'Our Washington Letter', *Belmont Chronicle* (St Clairsville, Belmont) 18 May 1876. For information on impeaching Grant for his interference see 'Belknap', *Pulaski Citizen* (Pulaski, Tennessee), 9 March 1876. For Grant's response see John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Volume 27: January 1-October 31, 1876 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 2005), pp. 103-107, and 'The Usurpation of the Democratic House', *Highland Weekly News* (Hillsborough, Highland County, Ohio), 29 June 1876.

¹²⁵ Smith, *Grant*, pp. 590-593.

¹²⁶ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* Volume 26, pp. 231-232.

1875, a scam which involved the bribery of Treasury officials in exchange for non-payment of liquor taxes.¹²⁷ Unfortunately, Grant's insistence on Babcock's innocence somewhat sullied both his reputation and the administration, though the evidence against Babcock was highly contestable.¹²⁸ Unable to implicate the President, the Democrats accused him of dereliction of duty. A resolution passed by the Democratic House in April 1876 asked the President to confirm how many days he had been absent from the capital. Grant's response scolded the Democrats for their impertinent enquiry and presented a list of absences for nearly every previous President.¹²⁹ Congressional Democrats may have been trying to embarrass the White House by suggesting that Grant lived an idle, aristocratic life free from the cares of public life, but if they were trying to stop him from running for a third term, they need not have bothered: Republican opinion-makers had already determined that it was not a good idea.

The President's actions in Louisiana in January 1875 turned the tide of opinion on his presidency against him and led to a rise in Republican opposition to his use of executive power. The groundwork laid by influential political commentators and Senators, including Sumner and Schurz, had increased concerns over the possible misuse of power by the President, which only grew after the military's intrusion on civilian affairs in Louisiana. Grant's intervention represented the culmination of fears over executive power that had existed since the start of his first term in office. Concerns over patronage and military power – heightened by the growth of both during and after the Civil War as the federal government expanded – could no longer be adequately answered by defenders like Phillips. Fears of 'mexicanization' explored by Downs, which, he asserts came to a head with the disputed 1876 presidential election, were already present in the response to the Louisiana

¹²⁷ Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union*, pp. 556-557.

¹²⁸ Smith, *Grant*, pp. 590-593.

¹²⁹ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Volume 27, pp. 103-107.

intervention.¹³⁰ Fearing for the stability of their republic, even many Republicans committed to civil rights now began to see a strong man in the White House as a liability. For many Americans, Louisiana confirmed that the military man was unsuitable for civil affairs.

The Revival of the Third Term Movement 1880

The President's use of military power to revoke a civil injustice in the Louisiana legislature in January 1875 led to the final demise of the third term movement for the 1876 presidential election. Republican conventions around the country passed resolutions against a third term for the President in light of his 'usurpation' of the democratic process in Louisiana. Grant took the opportunity provided by the Pennsylvania Republican Convention in May 1875 to renounce the suggestion of a third term in the White House. The letter, sent to the President of the Convention Harry White, explained Grant's position. The President stated that he had 'never sought the office' and had run for the presidency as he 'was made to believe that the public good called [him] to make the sacrifice.'¹³¹ He continued:

Now for the 'third term': I do not want it any more than I did the first. I would not write or utter a word to change the will of the people in expressing, and having their choice. The question of the number of terms allowed to any one Executive can only come up fairly in the shape of a proposition to amend the Constitution ... Until such an amendment is adopted the people cannot be restricted in their choice [*sic*] by resolutions further than they are now restricted—as to age,

¹³⁰ Downs, 'The Mexicanization of American Politics', *American Historical Review*, pp. 387-409. Many speeches contained references to Mexico including Carl Schurz's in the Senate on 11 January 1875 (see *Congressional Record*, 43rd Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 365-372). However, Schurz made clear that the country was not yet on the verge of becoming like Mexico but stressed that a repetition of Grant's actions would endanger the nation and increase the possibility of such an occurrence. For articles see 'The Bayonet in Our Politics', *New York Tribune*, 6 January 1875 which makes the statement: 'We are not Spaniards yet'. See also 'The Great Crime', *Albany Argus*, 8 January 1875 which carries an excerpt from the *Springfield Republican* that compares events in Louisiana to 'Mexico and Nicaragua'. When newspapers and political commentators sought to warn of despotism, they more often chose to invoke Napoleon, Cromwell and the kings of England especially as the centennial of the republic approached which made these examples more emotive than fears of 'mexicanization'.

¹³¹ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Volume 26, pp. 132-133.

nativity, &c. ... To recapitulate: I am not, nor have I been, a candidate for a re-nomination. I would not accept a nomination if it were tendered unless it should come under such circumstances as to make it an imperative duty, circumstances not likely to arise.¹³²

The President's letter refusing a third term was as republican in its sentiments as his letter accepting the first. Though he wished to make clear that he would not accept a third term, he was clear that the people's will remained his compass. His subservience to their desires led him to concede that events might arise necessitating his retention, though he asserted that such an occasion seemed unlikely.¹³³ The letter reaffirmed his commitment to the public good emphasising that his actions were directed by concerns for the republic not his own ambitions.¹³⁴ This idea was apparent in a passage that stated '[i]t may happen in the future history of the country that to change an Executive because he has been eight years in office will prove unfortunate if not disastrous.'¹³⁵ Grant did not believe a third term was inimical to the republic, but nor did he desire one.

The Republican Party interpreted Grant's message as his withdrawal from the Republican presidential race in 1876 which allowed Rutherford B. Hayes to receive the nomination. Grant himself supported Hayes wholeheartedly after his nomination, but remained silent during the convention though many suspected, without evidence, that he supported New York Senator Roscoe Conkling.¹³⁶ He also did not campaign for Hayes due to his position as President. However, it is interesting to note that despite this the campaign was waged on the suggestion that Hayes' election would merely constitute an extension of Grant's presidency. Moreover, the impact of the struggle over term limits during the Grant years can be seen in

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-134.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹³⁶ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Volume 27, p. 133; and Michael F. Holt, *By One Vote: The Disputed Presidential Election of 1876* (Lawrence, 2008), p. 70.

the campaign: Hayes announced before the election that he would not stand for a second term.¹³⁷ But ironically, this opened the field for the 1880 presidential election, and the potential revival of the third term movement.¹³⁸

The 1876 election replayed the violent, disputed character of the 1874 canvass in Louisiana on a national scale.¹³⁹ High levels of violence led many ‘Republican election boards’ to nullify ‘enough returns’ to pronounce Hayes the winner in some Southern states.¹⁴⁰ In others, such as Louisiana and South Carolina, fraud led both parties to declare the states for their own candidates.¹⁴¹ This practice resulted in neither candidate winning a clear majority for their election.¹⁴² Eventually a compromise between the two parties gave Hayes the presidency in a ‘corrupt bargain’ which saw the Republican Party gain the executive office in exchange for economic aid to ‘Redeemer’ governments in the South and the end to the federal policing of the Reconstruction Amendments.¹⁴³

The situation in the Southern states changed radically with the withdrawal of the military from the region. Though the Republicans controlled the executive office, the removal of the military allowed for renewed, and unabated, violence by white Southern Democrats who intimidated African Americans away from the polls and led the Democratic Party to regain control of Congress in 1879.¹⁴⁴ Once in a position of power the Democrats attempted to undercut the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.¹⁴⁵ Fortunately, the party only gained a slight majority in the Senate which denied them the control the Republicans had enjoyed over

¹³⁷ Ari Hoogenboom, *Rutherford B. Hayes: Warrior & President* (Lawrence, 1995), pp. 266-268.

¹³⁸ Holt, *By One Vote*, pp. 120-125.

¹³⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 575-576

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, and Holt, *By One Vote*, pp. 181, 186-187.

¹⁴¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 575-576, and Holt, *By One Vote*, pp. 175-184.

¹⁴² Holt, *By One Vote*, pp. 172-176.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-243, and Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York, 2009), pp. 22-24, 96. See also C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (Boston, 1966).

¹⁴⁴ Brooks D. Simpson. *The Reconstruction Presidents* (Lawrence, 2009), p. 218, and Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919* (New York, 1987), pp. 1-6.

¹⁴⁵ Simpson. *The Reconstruction Presidents*, pp. 220-225.

President Andrew Johnson during Congressional Reconstruction.¹⁴⁶ This meant they could not override President Hayes's vetoes of their legislative attempts to undermine Reconstruction.¹⁴⁷ However, these bills confirmed to Republican supporters how unreconstructed the Democrats remained. As a result many Republicans – especially in the South – desired a 'strong man' for the 1880 Republican presidential nomination who could rein in white supremacists.¹⁴⁸ They turned once more to Grant.

As the Democrats attempted to undo the work of Reconstruction, the former President sailed around the world. Soon after relinquishing the presidency, Grant had embarked on a round-the-world trip as a private citizen touring Great Britain, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Grant also visited areas of the United States he had never seen. Embraced by dignitaries across the world as a representative of the American nation, Grant found himself greeted as though he were still president or, at the very least, a highly ranked diplomat at liberty to speak for his nation. The *New York Herald's* John Russell Young – the author of the Caesarism editorials of 1873 – accompanied Grant on his tour and submitted articles detailing his reception to the *Herald* for publication.¹⁴⁹ Young, who had provoked the third term scare just four years before, emphasised the respect foreigners had for the former president, which stood in stark contrast to the abuse meted out to him by the American press. Young also recorded many frank conversations with Grant which, after consultation, he agreed to allow Young to publish in the *Herald* as well.¹⁵⁰ The world trip established a completely different image for Grant than Americans had become accustomed: it showed a man of great intellect

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 220-225.

¹⁴⁸ 'No Demand For Grant', *New York Tribune*, 9 April 1880. See also 'The Grant Boom', *The Jasper Weekly Courier*, 19 December 1879; 'Imperialism Dissected', *Lancaster Daily Intelligencer*, 26 April 1880; *Northern Tribune* (Cheboygan, Michigan), 10 January 1880; *Cincinnati Commercial*, 20 April 1880; *Plain Dealer*, 20 March 1880 and 6 May 1880; 'Onslaught on the Third Term', *The Macon Telegraph and Messenger*, 6 May 1880; 'Another Candidate', *Indianapolis Sentinel*, 19 March 1880; *Vicksburg Daily Commercial*, 6 April 1880; 'Anti-Grant Address', *St Albans Daily Messenger* (St Albans, Vermont), 7 April 1880; and 'How About a Fourth Term?', *New York Tribune*, 3 March 1880.

¹⁴⁹ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 238-239.

and judgement treated as an equal by monarchs and emperors around the world. A Nebraska newspaper summarised the situation when it described the present given to Grant at an event welcoming him home. The gift had the following engraving ‘the whole country feels itself honored by the honor you have received from the great nations of the earth.’¹⁵¹ The tour helped transform Grant into the man above politics he had wanted to be. Rather than a conniving politician, he was now lauded as a statesman.

The former president, Young and other reports declared, was treated with the highest regard by nations across the world. He received invitations from numerous dignitaries and was greeted by crowds wherever he travelled. In Germany, Bismarck treated Grant as a friend: welcoming him with outstretched hands and talking in a very open manner.¹⁵² As Grant departed, Bismarck affirmed that it had been his ‘pleasure’ and ‘honor’ to meet the former president.¹⁵³ Whilst in England, Queen Victoria invited Grant to a reception at Windsor Castle.¹⁵⁴ The King of Sweden ordered all his palaces to be opened for Grant to view in his leisure.¹⁵⁵ The Imperial Highness of Austria provided a reception for Grant and the following day both families dined together.¹⁵⁶ Wherever the former president went he was greeted by that country’s rulers, often dining and conversing with them for several hours, conferring respect and honour unto both Grant and the country he represented.¹⁵⁷

Though most newspapers did not endeavour to define their conception of a statesman, it was clear from their use of the term that it indicated a man who represented the best interests of

¹⁵¹ *Columbus Journal*, 24 December 1879.

¹⁵² Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, p. 155.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹⁵⁷ This, some Democrats claimed, inspired Grant to pursue his own imperial ambitions in the United States. See ‘This is the Situation’, *The Waco Daily Examiner* (Waco, Texas), 2 November 1878; ‘Grant’s Imperial Aspirations’, *Daily Los Herald*, 1 April 1879; and ‘Notes Here and There’, *The Rock Island Argus*, 8 November 1879. More often, though, Democratic newspapers warned of Grant’s autocratic form of government which had been a favourite topic before his world tour. See *The Democratic Press* (Ravenna, Ohio), 21 February 1878; ‘Imperialism—Bayard’, *Public Ledger* (Memphis, Tennessee), 4 December 1879; and ‘The Greenbackers’, *The South Kentuckian*, 8 July 1879.

the nation.¹⁵⁸ Many newspapers now described Grant as ‘the patriot, soldier and statesman’.¹⁵⁹ Describing him as ‘the peerless general and patriotic statesman’, these newspapers sought to re-instil the image of an antipartisan man to the electorate.¹⁶⁰ Others used it in the same vicinity as ‘hero’ as did the *National Republican* which wrote that ‘General Grant is a hero, a statesman, and a loyal citizen’.¹⁶¹ A statesman, in 1870s America, could only apply to an antipartisan figure who floated above the fray of warring factions.

The world tour presented to Americans a much more complete picture of a man they had known without truly knowing. Whilst his services were engaged by the United States, whether as President or in the army, Grant had been guarded with his own personal opinions, never allowing anyone but his truest friends to know his real opinions, but as a civilian Grant was open and gave an enlightening insight into his thoughts on many political matters.

Americans became acquainted with their former president now that he was a civilian. In particular, Grant’s refusal to meet with the Prince Imperial when in Denmark and his conversations on Napoleon were extremely enlightening as to his views on power and governance.¹⁶² Though he conceded that Napoleon I (to whom he had been so often – and malignantly – compared) ‘was a great genius’ he also acknowledged that he was ‘one of the most selfish and cruel men in history ... He abused France for his own ends, and brought incredible disasters upon his country to gratify his selfish ambition. I do not think any genius can excuse a crime like that.’¹⁶³ As a result he also refused to visit his tomb.¹⁶⁴ Grant continued to elaborate on the family stating how he believed Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte

¹⁵⁸ For evidence of the lack of definition for statesmanship, see the *Centre Democrat*, 22 April 1880.

¹⁵⁹ *The Indianapolis Leader*, 29 November 1879. See also *National Republican*, 3 January 1879; ‘Welcome to Logan’, *National Republican*, 21 February 1879; ‘The Hero of Two Hemispheres’, *The Weekly Louisianian*, 15 May 1880; ‘Alabama Republican State Convention.’, *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, 22 May 1880; and ‘Grant’, *The Daily Argus* (Rock Island, Illinois), 18 May 1880.

¹⁶⁰ *The Weekly Louisianian*, 17 May 1879.

¹⁶¹ *National Republican*, 3 January 1879.

¹⁶² Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, p. 249.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xv.

(Napoleon III) ‘was worse than the first, the especial enemy of America and liberty. Think of the misery he brought upon France by a war which, under the circumstances, no one but a madman would have declared.’¹⁶⁵ If anything illustrated Grant’s republicanism, it was his disdain for the Bonapartes.

Grant’s new image led to a change in much of the U.S. press. During his presidency and the 1876 presidential election, newspapers from all parties had freely denounced Grant’s presidency for its alleged scandals, corruption and abuse of power. Yet in the approach to the 1880 Republican presidential convention this language was largely absent. The status accorded Grant outside the United States elevated him within the republic and led to a decrease in personal attacks upon him.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, a minority of newspapers – mainly Democratic and formerly Liberal Republican papers like the *New York Sun* and the *Harrisburg Patriot* respectively – still recounted the old allegations of base corruption and imperial ambition.¹⁶⁷ Yet a majority of newspapers refrained from such attacks, which suggests at least that Grant’s newfound international reputation offered something of a shield.¹⁶⁸

Grant’s statesman-like reputation combined with the Democrats’ actions in power led some Republicans to revive the third term movement.¹⁶⁹ Democratic attempts at ‘legislative coercion’ relied on the addition of riders to appropriation bills.¹⁷⁰ A Georgia newspaper claimed that the Democrats’ actions represented an attempt ‘to renew the obsolete doctrine of State rights and to cripple the Government by withholding needed appropriations in order to

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹⁶⁶ ‘The Boom For Grant’, *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 22 April 1880.

¹⁶⁷ See for example ‘The Idol of the Stalwarts’, *The Patriot* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), 15 April 1879; ‘Warlike Deliverances’, *The Patriot* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), 17 April 1879; *The Patriot* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), 20 March 1880; ‘Who Furnished the Money?’, *The New York Sun*, 29 September 1879; *The New York Sun*, 1 February 1880; and ‘The Republican Candidate’, *The New York Sun*, 4 May 1880.

¹⁶⁸ ‘The Boom For Grant’, *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 22 April 1880.

¹⁶⁹ ‘No Demand For Grant’, *New York Tribune*, 9 April 1880.

¹⁷⁰ Wang, *The Trial of Democracy*, pp. 165-167.

coerce legislation.¹⁷¹ Lacking a sufficient majority to overturn the Reconstruction Amendments, the House Democrats pursued this strategy (borrowed from the Republicans) in an attempt to pass legislation which would undermine the effectiveness of the Reconstruction Amendments.¹⁷² Their riders sought to forbid the placement of federal marshals at polling stations and to rescind the loyalty oaths necessary for jurors in the federal courts.¹⁷³ Upon gaining a slight majority in the Senate in the 1878 congressional elections, Democrats were determined to pass their bills.¹⁷⁴ But they could not override Hayes' vetoes, and furthermore, their tactics united the Republican Party behind the President.¹⁷⁵ Realising their mistake, the Democrats eventually passed the appropriation bills – albeit with a few items omitted – but without any riders except a clause stating that the army should not be ‘used as a police force at the polls’.¹⁷⁶ Though their endeavours to undermine the Reconstruction Acts did not succeed as they hoped, the Democrats had illustrated how precarious the Reconstruction settlement remained, and reminded Republicans of the necessity of a strong executive to protect it. Democratic intransigence thus led to support for Grant's third term.

The attempts of the Democrats to privilege the state government over the federal government illustrated to many Republicans the necessity of a firm Southern policy. Hayes' reconciliation policy had not succeeded in establishing a peaceful South based on equal suffrage; the Democrats refused to accept the Reconstruction Acts and showed their willingness to use underhand tactics to coerce the President to accept the superiority of the state over the federal government.¹⁷⁷ Many Republicans looked to Grant, whose ‘strong man’ image, having extinguished support for a third term in 1876, now seemed appealing as 1880 approached. In particular, Southern Republicans desired an executive with the strength to control the

¹⁷¹ ‘The Third Term’, *Augusta Chronicle*, 8 February 1880.

¹⁷² Wang, *The Trial of Democracy*, pp. 165-167.

¹⁷³ Hoogenboom, *Rutherford B. Hayes*, pp. 392-403.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 400.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 392-403.

South.¹⁷⁸ Increasingly Republicans, especially Northern Republicans, recognised the necessity of the strong use of executive power to safeguard the gains of the Civil War and to ensure a fair ballot in the South. Their loss of power, coupled with Democratic attempts to undercut Reconstruction, led them to no longer depict Grant's interventions in the South as acts of tyranny, but rather as a set of measures pursued to preserve public order and protect civil rights.¹⁷⁹ Whilst in 1875 many Republicans endorsed Schurz's claim which argued that civil rights could not be protected at the expense of the republic, in 1880, Republican state conventions declared their belief that the 'Government must depend for stability upon honest elections; until a man is considered infamous who casts an illegal vote, our Government will not be safe, and whoever deprives a citizen of his right to vote, or of the legal effect of his vote, is a traitor'.¹⁸⁰ For the Republicans, the protection of civil rights had become the bedrock of the republic. Many therefore pursued the re-nomination of Grant, whose actions, they realised, threatened the republic less than those of the Democrats.

Though, undoubtedly, some Republicans saw Grant as a route back to power, others desired a firm hand in the South as they saw the nation itself under threat. Both African Americans and white Republicans faced murder, intimidation and disenfranchisement in the South.¹⁸¹ The third term support for Grant derived, as one paper put it, from the necessity of 'a President who will 'enforce practical obedience to constitutional provisions designed to secure the fruits of the war'; who will satisfy the South that he is 'resolved upon doing so in a kind and just spirit toward them'; and who will dispose of sectional differences with a firm and steady hand.'¹⁸² One of the 'Pennsylvania committeemen' wrote to the *New York Tribune* explaining that his choice for the nominee ran as follows: '[f]irst choice, Grant; second choice, Grant; I

¹⁷⁸ 'No Demand For Grant', *New York Tribune*, 9 April 1880.

¹⁷⁹ Simpson. *The Reconstruction Presidents*, pp. 220-225.

¹⁸⁰ 'The Third Term', *Augusta Chronicle*, 8 February 1880.

¹⁸¹ Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*, pp. 156-160.

¹⁸² 'Mr. Stoughton's Brief', *New York Tribune*, 23 February 1880.

want the South to ‘tremble when I say hurrah for Grant.’¹⁸³ The *Tribune* argued that Grant’s supporters were ‘about equally divided in their sentiments toward the South’.¹⁸⁴ One argument in favour of the former President’s election resided in the belief ‘that the South will be afraid to deprive colored men of their rights’ with Grant as President, whilst ‘the other half believe[d] that the South will welcome Grant as a just and kindly ruler, with an unimpeachable claim upon their allegiance.’¹⁸⁵ The editor of the *North American Review* resided in this latter category of those whose belief in future prosperity lay in Grant’s republicanism and his reputation for fairness.¹⁸⁶ Grant’s strength with these Republicans lay in both his ‘strong man’ image and his republican simplicity: a fusion of the old Democratic critique of Grant and the Republican defence of Grant. Even the formerly Liberal Republican *Springfield Republican* conceded that Grant’s ‘unlikeness to the average politician ... [gave] Grant his best hold among the people.’¹⁸⁷ Ironically, the qualities which led Republicans to oppose Grant for a third term in 1876 now built him support.

Opponents of the third term also highlighted the reasons why many Republicans supported Grant’s re-election. The formerly Liberal Republican, but still anti-Grant, *New York Tribune* printed a letter from Thurlow Weed in April 1880, which claimed that ‘[s]ix months ago General Grant’s nomination was a ‘foregone conclusion.’¹⁸⁸ This resulted from ‘a general belief that the country needed him.’¹⁸⁹ The basis for this desire, Weed argued, lay with the Copperhead element of the Democratic Party in Congress which in the fall of 1879 had ‘become aggressive, defiant and revolutionary in methods and measures’.¹⁹⁰ Weed stated that if this behaviour began again then ‘General Grant’s nomination would be demanded by a

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* See also ‘A Startling Proposition’, *The Weekly Clarion* (Jackson, Mississippi), 26 November 1879.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Mr. Stoughton’s Brief’, *New York Tribune*, 23 February 1880.

¹⁸⁷ ‘The Man Who Isn’t a Politician’, *Springfield Republican*, 23 January 1880.

¹⁸⁸ ‘No Demand For Grant’, *New York Tribune*, 9 April 1880.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

sentiment which would secure his triumphant election.¹⁹¹ An anti-Grant address ‘issued to the Massachusetts republicans’ stated that Grant’s ‘nomination is often pressed by applying to him the character of the ‘strong man’ who is specially needed at this time.’¹⁹² A Democratic newspaper explained that one ‘reason why Republican stalwarts want Grant is clearly expressed in the statement that a ‘strong man,’ a ‘great soldier,’ is wanted to fight the South and the Democratic party.’¹⁹³ Where Grant’s image of a strong executive had previously led to warnings of oncoming tyranny among both Democrats and Republicans, now the trait had become a desirable quality to save the republic. Grant was no longer a tyrant but a ‘strong man’ capable of controlling treacherous unreconstructed Democrats.

Grant’s supporters could now argue (much as Johnson’s had done) that the greater threat to republican liberty lay in the legislative rather than the executive branch. But where Johnson had tied this claim to an attack on civil rights, Republicans could honestly claim to be trying to protect black voters and their white allies in the South. Many Republicans had begun to view fair elections as central to the survival of the republic rather than an aspect which could be sacrificed to preserve the nation. The platform of the Pennsylvanian Republicans affirmed this sentiment.¹⁹⁴ The Pennsylvanians claimed they believed in ‘the perfect security of free thought, free speech and a free press, and of equal rights and privileges to all men, everywhere, irrespective of nationality, color or religion’.¹⁹⁵ They were also committed to ‘a free and pure ballot, thoroughly protected, so that every man entitled to cast a vote may do so just once at each election without fear of molestation, moral or physical, on account of his

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² ‘Anti-Grant Address’, *St Albans Daily Messenger* (St Albans, Vermont), 7 April 1880.

¹⁹³ ‘The Grant Boom.’, *Jasper Weekly Courier* (Jasper, Indiana), 19 December 1879.

¹⁹⁴ ‘The Third Term’, *Augusta Chronicle*, 8 February 1880.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

political faith, nationality or the hue of his skin'.¹⁹⁶ Fair representation was now necessary to save the republic from the threats within.

The Pennsylvanian Convention then voted by a majority for Grant's nomination at the Republican national convention in 1880 and consistently pledged 32 to 36 of Pennsylvania's 58 votes to Grant in the convention itself.¹⁹⁷ The *New York Tribune* deduced that the desire for Grant's election revolved around the belief that these 'advocates of a 'strong man'' had promoted, which 'inferred that Grant, if elected, will do something at the South, to enforce laws and protect human rights that no other President will desire and be able to do.'¹⁹⁸ The *Tribune* acknowledged – even though it opposed a third term for Grant – that the ardour for Grant rested on the belief that he would 'use the Army at the South and seat Republican Legislatures by United States troops, as when under his order General DeTrobian and his soldiery organized the Louisiana Legislature, to be abandoned'.¹⁹⁹ It signalled that a significant change had occurred over who imperilled the republic. Many Republicans no longer saw a strong executive as a threat to the republic but a necessary adhesive to republican government.

One of Grant's former attorney generals – Amos T. Akerman who had vigorously pursued Ku Klux Klan prosecutions – reinforced the notion that Grant would protect the South from un-republican behaviour.²⁰⁰ In an interview with the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, Akerman stated that 'three-fourths of the Southern Republicans would prefer Gen. Grant, and mainly for the reason that to him they owe the enactment and enforcement of the Ku-Klux law of 1871'.²⁰¹ Akerman re-affirmed the claim of the necessity of a 'strong man' from which Grant derived

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ 'How They View It', *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 February 1880, and *Proceedings of the Republican National Convention 1880* (Chicago, 1880), pp. 196-271.

¹⁹⁸ 'Stalwart Or Conservative?', *New York Tribune*, 12 April 1880.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Smith, *Grant*, p. 542, and 'What Akerman Thinks', *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 5 April 1880.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

much of his support – a fact which the *New York Tribune* begrudgingly admitted.²⁰² The Ku Klux Klan Act, Akerman claimed, represented ‘a law which, in the words of the late Senator Morton, accomplished more good with less attendant evil than any other law ever passed in America.’²⁰³ It was a statement unlikely to have been uttered five years earlier after Grant’s interventions in Louisiana, and it illustrated how drastically the country had changed since the implementation of the agreement to remove troops from the South. The result of two years of Democratic control of Congress had led to praise for Grant’s Southern policy and a significant decrease in the accusations of tyranny and usurpation of power. Akerman continued to praise Grant, claiming that the Ku Klux Klan ‘law, as enforced by Gen. Grant, was a practical protection to Southern Republicans at a time when they needed protection against unprincipled and ferocious adversaries, and hence they gratefully remember the President by whom it was recommended and executed.’²⁰⁴ Five years previous this same newspaper, which now supported Grant’s potential third term and strong executive action in the South, had savaged Grant for his intervention in Louisiana in January 1875.

The *New York Tribune* admitted that in ‘the southern and southern tier of western states [lay] Grant’s greatest popularity as a candidate.’²⁰⁵ However, despite the desire of Southern and Western Republicans – as well as some Northern Republicans – for Grant’s re-election, there were numerous Republicans who still feared the consequences of the violation of Washington’s two-term precedent. Several newspapers restated their belief in ‘the unwritten law of the Republic’, which disqualified Grant from re-election.²⁰⁶ The *North American*

²⁰² *Ibid.*, and ‘Stalwart Or Conservative?’, *New York Tribune*, 12 April 1880.

²⁰³ ‘What Akerman Thinks’, *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 5 April 1880.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ ‘The Presidency’, *Springfield Republican*, 8 April 1880.

²⁰⁶ ‘Declaring For Blaine’, *New York Tribune*, 9 February 1880. See also ‘The Presidency’, *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 17 April 1880; ‘Grant Not Now So Strong’, *New York Tribune*, 13 April 1880; ‘How About a Fourth Term?’, *New York Tribune*, 3 March 1880; ‘The Third Term Canvass.’, *The New York Sun*, 25 December 1879; ‘The Latest’, *St Albans Daily Messenger* (St Albans, Vermont), 15 May 1880; ‘The Party’s Record on the Third Term’, *St Albans Daily Messenger* (St Albans, Vermont), 23 February 1880; ‘The Grant Party’, *Morning Oregonian*, 7 February 1880; ‘The Anti-Grant Boom’, *Indianapolis Sentinel*, 19 March 1880; ‘A Heavy

Review ran a series of articles which discussed ‘the abstract question of the propriety of electing anybody for a third term than to the qualifications of General Grant.’²⁰⁷ The editor believed in ‘the indefinite reeligibility of a President, especially when he has once descended to his place as a private citizen and surrendered the control of the patronage’; an argument which found support in many quarters especially among those supportive of a third term for Grant.²⁰⁸ However, an article by a guest writer in the journal critiqued the desire for ‘Gen. Grant and Strong Government’ by asserting that it would undermine ‘a fundamental principle of our republican form of government’.²⁰⁹ Many Republicans supported this view and claimed that Washington ‘set an example which was imitated by all his successors, and has become a part of the unwritten law of the land as sacred as any article in the Constitution.’²¹⁰

The argument against Grant originated in enduring anxieties about the stability of the post-war republic. The unstable nature of Reconstruction encouraged these anxieties which peaked in the aftermath of the disputed 1876 election.²¹¹ The recent memory of that event only exacerbated fears over violating one of the nation’s oldest principles. The *New York Tribune* even printed ‘a suggestion’ from ‘one of the most prominent Republicans now in [Philadelphia]’ in which the writer claimed to ‘favor a third term but insist[ed] that in his letter of acceptance General Grant must expressly decline a fourth term.’²¹² A letter to the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* also revealed concerns over the possibility of a perpetual presidency

Backset’, *Macon Telegraph and Messenger*, 4 March 1880; and ‘The Grant Programme’, *Arkansas Gazette*, 19 March 1880.

²⁰⁷ ‘Mr. Stoughton’s Brief’, *New York Tribune*, 23 February 1880.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* See also ‘New York Republican Convention’, *The Northern Pacific Farmer* (Wadena, Minnesota), 4 March 1880; and *Juniata Sentinel and Republican*, 2 June 1880.

²⁰⁹ ‘The North American Review’, *St Albans Daily Messenger* (St Albans, Vermont), 22 April 1880. See also ‘The Latest’, *St Albans Daily Messenger* (St Albans, Vermont), 15 May 1880; and ‘Declaring For Blaine’, *New York Tribune*, 9 February 1880; and ‘The Third Term Canvass.’, *The New York Sun*, 25 December 1879 which references the opinions of many leading Republicans.

²¹⁰ ‘A Champion For Sherman’, *New York Tribune*, 13 April 1880. See also ‘The Presidency’, *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 17 April 1880 and ‘Washington Letter’, *Belmont Chronicle* (St Clairsville, Ohio), 19 February 1880.

²¹¹ Downs, ‘The Mexicanization of American Politics’, pp. 387-409.

²¹² ‘Grant in Philadelphia’, *New York Tribune*, 20 December 1879.

(and presumably a perpetual struggle against it).²¹³ The Ohioan correspondent believed that the ‘time honored principle’ of the two-term precedent ensured stability in the country and feared its abolishment meant the establishment of ‘a permanent oligarchy or imperialism’.²¹⁴ The recent experiences of instability – not least in Democratic attempts to reverse the post-war settlement – increased the reluctance of many Republicans to willingly concede what was regarded as a guiding principle in politics.

Though Grant’s supporters tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade those Republicans fearful of violating Washington’s precedent that the republic would remain intact, they were unable to overcome republican concerns about another Grant administration. In their efforts to persuade the unconverted that a third term would not lead to monarchy, his supporters used a letter from Washington to the Marquis De Lafayette.²¹⁵ In the letter Washington professed his opposition for the necessity to limit the number of presidential terms an incumbent could serve.²¹⁶ ‘There cannot, in my judgement,’ he wrote, ‘be the least danger that the President will, by any practical intrigue, ever be able to continue himself one moment in office, much less perpetuate himself in it, but in the last stage of corrupted morals and political depravity’; however, Washington added that in this circumstance ‘there is as much danger that any other species of domination would prevail.’²¹⁷ Here Grant’s supporters attempted to undermine one of the most powerful arguments against the third term by revealing the true views of the figurehead their opponents so often turned to undercut the third term movement. However, their clever ploy to appeal to ‘[e]very honest and intelligent citizen ... [to] feel insulted when he is told there is danger to the country from a man being elected President the third time’

²¹³ ‘The Presidency’, *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 17 April 1880.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ ‘The Presidency—Washington’s Views On Rotation—Aspects of the Canvass’, *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 5 April 1880.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

backfired due to Washington's own warning.²¹⁸ Their use of his statement that the country would be 'in 'the last stage of corrupted morals and political depravity'' inadvertently preyed upon republican fears that the country had already descended into this state of despotism.²¹⁹

Perhaps most disconcerting for the third term supporters, was the assembly of an anti-third term convention which took place in St Louis, Missouri. The convention not only protested the election of any man to a third term, but promised to hold a new meeting to oppose the selection of Grant if he were re-nominated.²²⁰ The body was assembled in 'hostility to any movement tending in the least degree to the establishment of a monarchy', indicating that many Republicans still equated a third term with absolutism.²²¹ Their denunciation of Grant's nomination did not rest solely on opposition to the third term, but also with Grant personally, as they wished for 'the nomination of a candidate without a stain'.²²² Grant, they believed, would once again bring 'a dangerous tendency to personal government' into the federal government, which would be detrimental to the 'welfare and safety of the Republic.'²²³ Though the attendees were resistant to the idea of a third term, they were clearly more resistant to the idea of Grant in particular, and they proposed limiting executive patronage to stop such a figure from rising again.²²⁴ Grant's use of his patronage powers clearly still had the power to engender strong opposition to his potential election.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ 'Bound By Traditions', *New York Times*, 7 May 1880, and 'The Anti-Third-Term Convention', *Sacramento Daily Union*, 3 May 1880. See also *Official Proceedings of the Anti-Third Term Republican Convention* (St Louis, Missouri, 1880).

²²¹ 'Bound By Traditions', *New York Times*, 7 May 1880. See also the *Washington Star* in 'A Heavy Backset' *Macon Telegraph and Messenger*, 4 March 1880; 'Anti-Grant Address', *St Albans Daily Messenger* (St Albans, Vermont), 7 April 1880; 'The Third Term Canvass.', *The New York Sun*, 25 December 1879; 'Declaring for Blaine', *New York Tribune*, 9 February 1880; 'How About a Fourth Term?', *New York Tribune*, 3 March 1880; 'Literature', *The Salt Lake Herald*, 2 May 1880; and 'German Papers of To-Day', *The Cincinnati Daily Star*, 19 April 1879.

²²² 'Bound By Traditions', *New York Times*, 7 May 1880.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

Such opposition put Grant supporters on the defensive at the 1880 Republican convention.²²⁵ It did not help them that Grant made no attempt to actively campaign for the nomination or even express his desire for it. Much like the 1868 and 1872 conventions, he wished the nomination to come to him by the people's choice irrespective of his desire for it. Grant had outlined as much in his letter rejecting the prospect of re-nomination in 1876.²²⁶ It was a statement reiterated by his friends who, as General William T. Sherman stated to Grant, 'contend that you have not and will not, by word or deed, indicate a wish to be the nominee unless the country call again for you with a unanimity [*sic*] which is overwhelming'.²²⁷ Grant maintained just over 300 votes throughout the 36 ballots it took to choose a candidate, and finished on 306 votes. The supporters of James G. Blaine and John Sherman eventually swung behind Garfield to thwart Grant's supporters' attempts to win their man a third term. While the reasons for this are not clear, the lingering fears of a permanent executive certainly played a significant role in denying Grant support. It is worth noting that when Washington's precedent was finally violated during the Second World War by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Congress quickly moved to codify the two-term precedent. After Roosevelt's election for a record four terms, Congress passed the Twenty-Second Amendment which limited the President to two terms in 1947. As Grant had affirmed, only extraordinary circumstances would result in the retention of a President for an unprecedented third term.

Though the republic survived the violation of Washington's precedent the reaction of Congress indicated that even 67 years later, concerns remained about the potential of a widely-popular president to centralise power. It was clear that anxieties over executive aggrandisement still had the capacity to shape national politics. The destabilising effect of the Democratic challenge to the Reconstruction settlement and Grant's successful world tour left

²²⁵ *Proceedings of the Republican National Convention 1880*, pp. 270-271.

²²⁶ Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Volume 26, pp. 132-134.

²²⁷ John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Volume 29: October 1 1878-September 30 1880 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 2008), p. 139.

many Republicans grasping for the strong statesman in 1880. But while some Republicans desired further extensions of executive power to save the nation, others believed that such actions threatened the nation.

Conclusion

It was ironic that the very reason which formed the backbone of opposition to Grant's third term in 1876 came to engender support for a third term for Grant in 1880. The irony was not lost on Grant.²²⁸ The silent man denounced as a tyrant and a usurper of power in the last two years of his presidency announced 'surprise' at the support he garnered in the run up to the 1880 Republican national convention.²²⁹ States which had denounced the principle of a third term out of respect for the 'unwritten law of the republic' upended their 1876 resolutions and pledged delegates to the former President in 1880.²³⁰ Although many opponents of a third term still existed – some on principle, others due to the candidate – the attitude of the opposition had changed significantly. Former charges of usurpation and despotism were mostly abandoned which led a majority of the Republican opposition to focus on the principle of the third presidential term. Charges of tyranny and despotism still existed but they related, in the main, to the third term itself rather than Grant's administrations in particular. Many of Grant's erstwhile opponents now valued his republican simplicity.

Yet this acceptance came too late. The accusations of tyranny by an influential majority of the Republican Party drastically reduced the political capital of President Grant during the last two years of his presidency.²³¹ The opposition of the Republican Party to their President's attempts to protect and enforce civil rights in the South contributed significantly to the downfall of Reconstruction. The condemnations of federal enforcement of the

²²⁸ 'Grant and a Third Term', *St Albans Daily Messenger* (St Albans, Vermont), 23 February 1880.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ 'The Grand Review', *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 11 April 1880, and 'The Party's Record on the Third Term', *St Albans Daily Messenger* (St Albans, Vermont), 23 February 1880.

²³¹ 'Stalwart Or Conservative?', *New York Tribune*, 12 April 1880.

Reconstruction Acts in Southern states – especially the reaction to federal intervention in the Louisiana state legislature in 1875 – amounted to the abandonment of the Republican South. The refusal of Republicans to acknowledge the violations of law in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas led them to interpret Grant’s actions in republican terms as the usurpation of power. It also led to a willingness to remove troops placed in the South in exchange for the presidency in 1876.²³² This completed the acquiescence to the violation of the civil rights of Southern Republicans. Their denunciations had formed a powerful deterrent for future attempts to protect the civil rights of Southern Republicans. However, in the face of Democratic intransigence, many Republicans realised the necessity of federal intervention in the South to protect the gains of Reconstruction.

The tendency of Reconstruction historians to overlook the continuing resonance of republicanism in this era has hampered our understanding of Reconstruction’s downfall. Republicanism played a crucial role in Republicans’ conceptions of the acceptable limits of power. Louisiana – and the subsequent opposition to a third term which flowed from it – forms a prime example of this tendency to view the more extreme attempts to protect and enforce African-American civil rights in terms of encroachment upon the rights of ‘self-government’ in the states. Grant’s attempts to protect African-American civil rights began to appear tyrannical even to his supporters in the wake of the Louisiana incident in January 1875. Even when Republicans accepted that the Democrats had effected a coup d’état, they still believed that the use of federal troops to reverse the coup went against the principles of the nation. Although they did not accept the Democratic doctrine of states’ rights in its strictest terms, these Republicans interpreted the use of the military to restore democracy in the Louisiana legislature as a threat to the existence of the republic. In this climate, Grant

²³² Holt, *By One Vote*, pp. 175-184.

faced an impossible task to protect and enforce the former slaves' civil rights from unscrupulous Southern Democrats.

Only after a new, more threatening, form of tyranny occurred in the shape of Democratic congressional coercion to reverse the gains of Reconstruction in 1879 did white Republicans clamour for the strong president whose dedication to the laws of the United States became so plain during the Louisiana crisis that one of the most ardent Radicals announced 'give him your sympathy.'²³³ It took a flagrant attempt by the Democrats to reverse the settlement of Reconstruction before the Republicans realised the necessity of the force which Grant had used to enforce Reconstruction in the South in 1875. Until this point, the necessity of guarding the liberties of the republic led many Republicans to oppose Grant's use of executive power. Fears of a phantom tyrant in the White House weakened the President's ability to use military force against the very real tyranny of the White Leagues and other white Democratic militias in the South. Yet republicanism was malleable enough in 1879 to raise the prospect that the 'strong man' might return to office. The supposed tyrant became, to some at least, the saviour. Republican fears, however, remained over electing a president for a third term and led to substantial opposition to Grant's re-nomination. The exaggerated fears evident in the opposition to the third term could not be overcome.

²³³ Phillips, *Wendell Phillips, in Faneuil Hall, on Louisiana Difficulties*, p. 5.

Conclusion

Few Americans living in the nineteenth century could have anticipated the downfall of the reputation of Ulysses S. Grant in the twentieth century. Despite often being called the most popular nineteenth-century American, Grant's presidency was largely portrayed as a failure.¹ To one set of twentieth-century historians he destroyed Reconstruction through his overzealous support for African-American civil rights, while a later generation claimed he was a weak president who abandoned the former slaves. But Grant's historiography has made great strides since these assessments as many historians such as Brooks D. Simpson, John Y. Simon, and lawyer Frank J. Scaturro have sought to show that Grant did care for African-Americans and their plight. Their work has attempted to restore both Grant's humanity and his dedication to Reconstruction to the record by illustrating both his compassion and his political acumen both in the army and in political office. By presenting a man more committed to Reconstruction than has been previously acknowledged, they have elevated Grant's image.

Yet recent works on Reconstruction still persist in presenting Grant's presidency in its old guises, which raises questions over the resilience of the older evaluations compared to newer assessments. Part of the reason for this is the lack of an in-depth scholarly analysis by a historian – excluding biographies – of Grant's presidency which has allowed the influence of older works to dominate the historiography. But it also suggests that for all Grant's good intentions there were other forces at work which have been overlooked by scholars of Reconstruction. As such work still remains to be done to understand more fully why Reconstruction failed and why Grant's presidency is still held in such low repute. One

¹ Waugh, *U.S. Grant*, pp. 73, 164, 227. See also Scott Porch, 'What Lincoln Could Teach Fox News', *The Daily Beast*, 6 November 2014 <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/11/06/what-lincoln-could-teach-fox-news.html> [accessed 19 November 2014].

possible solution, this thesis suggests, is to look at the interactions between federal power and the dominant political culture of the era: republicanism.

By looking at the language and culture through which Americans understood their politics, my research has shown that many Americans interpreted Grant's actions through long-standing fears such as the centralisation of power, the stability of the republic, and the dangers of a large standing army, which led them to judge interventionist efforts on the behalf of African-Americans' civil rights more harshly. The republican political culture of the nineteenth century, which informed many Americans' perceptions of power during the Reconstruction era, has often been ignored in studies of Grant's presidency, even though historians have begun to acknowledge the presence of many republican fears and ideas during Reconstruction. This is understandable as it is difficult to discern whether Americans using this language believed in the ideals of republicanism or used it simply to gain political ground.

Yet the longevity of the language of republicanism suggests it remained part of the political landscape and a powerful aid to obtaining power whether or not those using it intended to act for a singular public good. This was the language which many Americans chose to use to disseminate their politics in the nineteenth century which gives it value because it was how many Americans understood their politics. Whether or not the ideology was used as simply rhetoric becomes less important than the impact that rhetoric had upon power and the public's perception of it. This was precisely the difficult line Grant walked in engaging with republicanism. Neither his supporters nor his opponents knew whether Grant was a true republican or a tyrant-in-waiting positioning himself to destroy the republic. It is a line that becomes discernible by looking at private papers to see whether public pronouncements match private statements. But many of Grant's supporters and all of his opponents did not have this privileged access to Grant's inner mind and thus allowed their own political

insecurities and anxieties – derived from their political language and culture – to define how they interpreted Grant’s actions both for themselves and for others.

Republicanism, whether used as an ideology or a discourse, played a crucial role in defining the parameters of the possible during Ulysses S. Grant’s presidency, and thus what he could achieve for African-Americans during Reconstruction. When his supporters could draw on the positive elements of republicanism – antipartisanship, self-sacrifice, patriotism, and honour – and portray Grant as a model republican, they could provide him with enough political capital to employ extraordinary means to enforce African-American civil rights and the Reconstruction settlement. However, when his critics succeeded in drawing on the negative elements of republicanism – fears of centralised power, anxieties over a large standing army, and suspicions about the federal intervention in state politics – they could portray Grant as a tyrant-in-waiting who, given the chance, would destroy the republic in favour of his own partisan aims, such as African-American suffrage. When this image gained credence it gnawed away at Grant’s ability to enforce Reconstruction. These two sides of the republican political culture fought for control over Grant’s image, his political capital, and ultimately, Reconstruction.

The first chapter explored how the 1868 presidential election, with its high political stakes, was fought upon a battlefield of republican tropes which focused, in large part, on the Republican candidate. It highlights how many Americans interpreted Reconstruction through a republican political culture which sought to stress the importance of republican qualities – antipartisanship, manly self-restraint, self-sacrifice, and honour – in politics alongside policies. It shows that evaluations of the election need to take into account the continuing use of republican ideas to both win elections and validate Reconstruction. The election, in many ways, set the terms which would define the rest of Grant’s presidency; the double-edged sword of republicanism was first showcased during this election. This chapter also suggests

that scholars need to consider Grant's own political education for explanations of his own actions during both the election and his presidency. In this respect it builds upon work completed by Brooks D. Simpson in highlighting Grant's distaste for partisanship in politics. It also builds on work by Adam I. P. Smith which shows how Americans during the Civil War used partisan antipartisanship to win elections by removing partisan issues and focusing on proving dedication and loyalty to the Union which a candidate like Grant could do ably.

Though the election has justly been seen as a referendum on Reconstruction by most historians, it was also a referendum on Grant's own character and how he would govern the nation. His refusal to express his political views resulted in a focus on his past deeds, in particular his military career, which led the campaign to focus heavily on his character. In this respect, the election represented Grant's attempt to redefine the presidency by removing the discussion of partisan policies from the canvass and instead forcing both parties to focus on the republican purity of the candidates. While the Democratic Party charged that Grant lacked the requisite republican traits for power – especially manly self-restraint – and would inaugurate despotism in the United States, the Republicans countered that the General epitomised the model republican through his patriotic duty to the nation, his sacrifices, sense of justice to all, and his antipartisanship. The election showed that the mantra of partisan antipartisanship could still yield dividends in this unstable era; the party which espoused republican traits, hid their partisanship, and produced a convincing antipartisan candidate won the election. In this respect, the 1868 presidential election illustrated the continuing power of republicanism to shape the way politics was fought in the Reconstruction era.

The second chapter explored the rise of the one term principle during Grant's first administration, illustrating how the battles over power between the executive and legislative branches led to suspicions over Grant's intentions which resulted in calls for civil service reform to restrict the executive's independence. It builds upon assessments of Grant's

reformist tendencies in office, especially with regard to his cabinet appointments, which have been acknowledged by historian John A. Carpenter and lawyer Frank J. Scaturro. As well as applying Grant's antipartisanship, acknowledged by Simpson, to his actions in office. The chapter shows that Grant's appointments stemmed from a calculated move at redefining the presidency rather than political naivety as most historians tend to claim. This attempt at moulding the presidency in his republican vision would have significant consequences for his legislative endeavours and later attempts to protect Reconstruction as it necessitated independence from the legislature which was interpreted as the aggrandisement of power in the executive office by many in his party. Republican fears of power, which persisted despite Andrew Johnson's near-conviction on impeachment charges, therefore need to be taken into account when assessing battles over power during Grant's first term. While many historians acknowledge Grant's commitment to Reconstruction, they fail to acknowledge the continuation of the conflicts which derailed Johnson's presidency. At a time when the limits of presidential power remained undefined, and the stability of the republic was still uncertain, the White House's course fostered genuine republican fears over Grant's intentions in power. This led many Republicans to concede that corruption had informed Grant's patronage appointments, which explained his reluctance to consult congressmen, just as Johnson had attempted to use his patronage to create a party which would re-elect him in 1868. This led to attempts to curtail Grant's power through civil service reform, which though ultimately unsuccessful, decreased his political capital and thus his ability to protect Reconstruction in the long-term.

The third chapter, which focuses on a series of *New York Herald* editorials named 'Caesarism' and published in July 1873, highlighted how widespread fears of the misuse of presidential power remained and in particular, suspicions over the ability of the President to use his patronage to achieve corrupt ends. It builds on fears over the fragility of the nation

explored by Gregory P. Downs, Andrew Heath, and Mark W. Summers, who have all looked at instances during Reconstruction where fears of power led many Americans to believe the nation was in danger of disintegrating. However, the only historian to explore this incident – Summers – concluded that it was a hoax intended to increase sales in the dry news season, yet the reaction of the press to the articles exposed deep-seated fears over presidential power, especially the centralisation of power which was necessary to enforce Reconstruction. From concerns over corruption, such as the Salary Grab Act, to anxieties over the President's interference in state elections, such as in Louisiana, the articles shed light on how even supporters of Grant held grave concerns about the newly emboldened presidential office whose boundaries remained uncertain. The *Herald* suggested that the enormous power of the President – which it argued had always existed but under Reconstruction had been greatly expanded – would allow him to secure a third term, possibly through dishonourable means. The solution, the author suggested, was the one term principle Sumner had championed the previous year. The response to the editorials showed just how extensive anxieties regarding federal power during Reconstruction were and how Grant's efforts to protect the settlement could rebound on him as proof of his corruption.

It highlighted just how carefully the President had to tread when enforcing Reconstruction: excessive use of power could easily be interpreted as the actions of a tyrant. By focusing on areas of long concern in republics – patronage, a standing army, and a strong popular president – the editorials heightened fears of the potential of the President to abuse his power in the name of securing a third term, or even perpetual power. The articles resulted in myriad concerns over federal power coming to light which, like the one term principle, focused on the ills to the republic of a strong president. In particular, the support of a few influential Republican newspapers for Grant's hypothetical third term led to increased fears that the Republican government had been corrupted. This resulted in increased scrutiny on the

President's use of power for fear, that if left unchecked, he would use his power to impose despotism on the republic. The articles illustrated that great concerns remained over majoritarian government, a point which *Harper's Weekly* highlighted, and that in the debate over democracy versus republicanism, the latter still held its own. In this respect, the articles, by heightening fears over Grant's power, ensured influential opinion-makers would remain vigilant in watching for acts of supposed executive usurpation which would endanger Reconstruction.

The fourth chapter examined the reaction to Grant's veto of the 1874 inflation bill which sought to increase the number of greenbacks in circulation without allowing for specie resumption. The President's veto of a party measure on a nationally significant bill illustrated how Grant was neither controlled by the Republican Party nor an inept decision-maker as it was heralded as one of the most politically adroit decisions of his administration. This contrasts sharply with most historians' views that the veto was both politically and economically detrimental to the country, and showed Grant's lack of fitness for office. While several historians have suggested Grant's veto was driven by selfish interest, my research has shown that even Grant's opponents felt it was motivated by his republicanism. Furthermore, my work has also shown that there was considerable support amongst both Southerners and Westerners to the veto which contrasts with existing scholarship which has tended to see both regions as strongly opposed to it. Grant's veto of the inflation bill was far more popular than has been previously recognised.

Celebrations of the veto highlighted how the republican values of antipartisanship, honour and the public good remained foremost in the minds of many Americans who believed the President had, once again, illustrated his republican simplicity by saving the nation's credit from dishonour. To pay creditors in deflated currency, they charged, would be dishonourable and would detract from the sacrifices made by many Americans in fighting the Civil War,

especially those who lost their lives. In this respect, the chapter shows how important honour remained for many Americans even in politics. But the response also demonstrated how Grant's actions – so often made independently of his party – could be seen as the aggrandisement of power. His opponents, who now included former loyal supporters angry over his veto, charged that his action represented tyranny. The response from both sides illustrated how political economy had become enmeshed with political culture, in this case republicanism. Much of the debate focused less on whether the bill would help the United States' economy and more on whether the President held the prerogative to veto such a measure. His supporters held that his veto had saved the country from ruin and thus had enacted the public good regardless of party wishes whilst his critics charged that he had usurped congressional power. These debates over power – far removed from the racially-charged arena of Reconstruction – indicated that many Americans still held serious concerns over the reach of executive power, which had been exacerbated by interventions in Southern states, accusations of 'Caesarism', and the supposed abuse of patronage powers. The bill also demonstrated how Grant's use of executive power in the pursuit of the public good had the ability to undercut his power to enforce Reconstruction by giving his actions the appearance of tyranny and by losing him supporters who would defend his actions.

The fifth chapter, by exploring the attempts to secure a third term for Grant in both the 1876 and 1880 elections, illustrates how Grant's vigorous attempts to protect the rights of African-Americans led to accusations of presidential tyranny which worked in 1876 to deny Grant a third term but paradoxically drummed up support for it in the 1880 election. This situation highlights how evaluations of the retreat from Reconstruction need to consider the role of republicanism which adjudicated on the acceptable limits of power. Most studies on the downfall of Reconstruction tend to claim that economic issues and corruption distracted attention from the South which allowed the Democrats to reclaim power; others suggest that

the fault lay in Grant's lack of commitment to protecting African-Americans and the absence of a coherent Southern policy. This chapter, however, builds on works by Andrew Slap and Downs. The former claims that republican beliefs regarding power – in this case the Liberal Republicans – led to the abandonment of Reconstruction for fear it would endanger the republic, while the latter highlights that longstanding anxieties over power, such as a large standing army and a large debt, which result in policy decisions which cripple the ability of the federal government to enforce Reconstruction policies. Both works highlight that fears and ideas – whether or not republican – undermined Reconstruction, which this chapter also claims by focusing on republicanism's power to define the parameters of power.

In this sense, republicanism could both detract from efforts to entrench Reconstruction, as in 1876, and provide power for it, as it attempted in 1880. Fears of the centralisation of power – both real, as in the forcible removal of unelected members of the Louisiana legislature by federal troops in January 1875, and imagined, as in the Caesarism scare – forestalled attempts both to protect the gains of Reconstruction and to provide Grant with a third term in 1876. Many Republicans began to fear that Grant's actions to protect universal male suffrage would endanger the stability of the republic for all by enabling the rise of a tyrant. As such they began to oppose strong executive action on behalf of civil rights as they feared it would endanger their own liberties. However, their belief that they were saving the republic by opposing a strong executive would be burst by the actions of the Democrats when they won a majority in the House of Representatives and proceeded to coerce the President to undermine Reconstruction. These underhand methods, combined with the elevation of Grant's stature from his world tour, led to renewed support for a strong executive, which Republicans began to see as the saviour of the republic rather than its destroyer. Yet the potency of republicanism to define the parameters of the possible in politics would be shown in the failure of Republicans to nominate Grant for a third term. The republican fears of power that

contributed to the downfall of Reconstruction would be the undoing of the attempts to nominate Grant for an unprecedented third term too.

My thesis contends that republicanism continued to play a vital role in American politics during Reconstruction as many Americans interpreted political events through its lens. Though the position of republicanism in late nineteenth-century historiography is still fiercely debated, there have been an increasing number of works which suggest it had relevance in both culture and language in influencing politics in this era. Longstanding fears over the centralisation of power, a large standing army, a large debt, and federal interventions in state politics, which republican ideas of power fostered worked to undermine Reconstruction. The instability of the Reconstruction period created great anxiety over the security of the republic which made vigorous executive action seem tyrannical at times. As the President lost supporters his actions became less defensible in republican terms which increased fears he would pursue unrepublican actions which in turn reduced his political capital and undermined his ability to protect Reconstruction. My research suggests that the relationship between republicanism and executive power during Reconstruction is crucial to understanding why President Grant was unable to pursue more vigorous actions to protect Reconstruction's longevity.

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As my thesis has shown, by exploring Grant's presidency primarily through the lens of the press a very different image emerges of his administration and the demise of Reconstruction. The press exposes an era enmeshed in republicanism; one where actions to defend civil rights are defined by perceptions of executive power, not just racism and economic ideologies. It illuminated widespread and entrenched fears of power which, when confronted by unprecedented governmental actions, could stymie reform. Caesarism, in particular, was an

example of how journals highlighted extensive fears that existed over patronage and the power of the president which later impeded efforts to enforce Reconstruction by cultivating fears over the safety of the republic. Furthermore, newspapers helped to illustrate the continuing resonance of many aspects of republicanism, such as antipartisanship, honour, and fears over the instability of the nation which have often been overlooked in this era.

Newspapers illustrated the desire for antipartisanship in politics when they showed that Grant's cabinet choices were commended by the public, but condemned by many party politicians; the salience of honour can be seen in how Grant's veto of the inflation bill was considered the greatest achievement of his presidency rather than the unwise, selfish action portrayed by scholars; and his vigorous efforts to protect the civil rights of the former slaves provoked allegations of tyranny from his own party which denied Grant crucial political capital to enforce Reconstruction. The press has shown a far more politically astute and committed President than the personal papers of Grant's political opponents have revealed. Though as a source it must be used with caution, the press can be invaluable in giving a window into popular perceptions held at the time on contemporary events.²

Republicanism helped shape many Americans' perceptions of the acceptable use of government power in the nineteenth century. The ideology played a central role in crafting Grant's image throughout his career in the public arena. The idea itself was malleable – the pursuit of the public good is difficult to define – and could also be contradictory as seen with the way it produced two images of Grant from the same actions. But despite its fluidity, many Americans clung to its ideals as a guiding principle especially when the nation's stability was threatened. It also developed throughout Grant's presidency as a result of his actions. For example, during his presidency the strong use of executive power was seen as a violation of the public good, yet by 1880 it was seen as a necessary corrective to other forces which

² Ethington, *The Public City*, pp. 19-24. See also Neely Jr., *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era*, pp. xi, 5-8.

threatened the stability of the republic. Grant too came to concede that the common good required engaging in somewhat unrepublican practises such as using patronage to build coalitions of friendly supporters who would help direct his legislative endeavours through Congress. But despite his clashes with Congress over his republican conception of power, republicanism remained a guiding force both in Grant's decisions and the way those decisions were interpreted throughout his presidency.

Yet it is interesting to note that despite the tensions with Congress caused by Grant's efforts to redefine the presidency in his republican vision, his successor, Rutherford B. Hayes, followed Grant's example in selecting his cabinet appointments independently; however, he did consult with other Republicans.³ Hayes also did not exclude the leading lights of the party from his cabinet, but nor did he discuss patronage appointments with many of the party managers or his nominees.⁴ Hayes' successor, James Garfield, did not have the privilege of independence, having won the nomination primarily through the determination of anti-Grant forces to deprive the former president of a third term.⁵ Tragically for Garfield, the perils of patronage would hit him with full force. His assassination by an office seeker resulted in a civil service reform measure – one very similar to Thomas A. Jenckes' original proposal which Grant had backed in principle – passing Congress.⁶ Though Garfield was not in the privileged position of Grant – who with two unanimous nominations and nationwide popularity could act in a manner aloof from his party – his murder highlighted the treacherous situation presidents encountered when allocating patronage. Grant, it seems, had been politically astute in breaking with conventional wisdom on patronage appointments.

³ Hoogenboom, *Rutherford B. Hayes*, pp. 295-297.

⁴ *Ibid.*, and Skidmore, *The Maligned Presidents*, p. 55.

⁵ Candice Millard, *Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine and the Murder of a President* (New York, 2011), pp. 79-82, 96.

⁶ Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils*, pp. 28, 202.

However, Grant's refusal to follow the accepted practices of the presidential office has not generally been seen as the mark of a strong president. Often historians, and political scientists, have viewed Grant's actions in office as the sign of an inexperienced and incompetent chief executive. Not only does this illustrate how the understanding of a presidency, when removed from its unique political culture, can become distorted but it also indicates the problems of comparing presidents in the quest of determining the value of an administration and in seeking out strong executives. Political scientists, in particular, have a tendency to expunge political culture from presidential studies. Though they appreciate the institutional changes of the office, they often do not appreciate the ideological context.

Yet some aspects of republicanism can still be found within twentieth and twenty-first century American politics. The language of republicanism, especially professions of self-sacrifice and antipartyism, still linger in attempts to portray presidential nominees as virtuous citizens. Perhaps the president who can claim the most similarity to Grant was Jimmy Carter, who has been read in an antebellum republican tradition.⁷ Some of the qualities which helped him win the presidency resonated with Grant's appeal in 1868, such as his inexperience and 'his disdain' for Washington's party politics.⁸ Carter tried to present himself in an antiparty vein during the election and once elected continued this trend by appointing some nationally important figures to patronage positions over party politicians.⁹ However, Carter damaged his image as the 'anti-politician' when he broke a campaign pledge to not raise taxes; a situation not too dissimilar from the one which Grant faced, in 1874, when he was forced to decide whether to sign a bill into law which would break his financial promises to the nation. Unlike Carter, Grant considered such an action dishonourable and the bill detrimental to the

⁷ Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York, 2008), pp. 69-98.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

country's economic recovery.¹⁰ Though, in appearance, Carter bore much resemblance to Grant's presidency, where they differed was their commitment to the image of a republican president. Ultimately Grant, who sacrificed a third term to protect African-American civil rights, could claim more ably than Carter to have followed an antebellum republican tradition.

But perhaps where republicanism has persisted most is in the exaggerated fears that emanated from the republican call to strenuously guard liberty, which have repeatedly risen in politics and influenced the trajectory of history. Most significantly, these worries have helped hinder progressive change within the country. In the twenty-first century suspicions of power and conspiracy theories have abounded throughout the presidency of Barack Obama. Many Americans have warned that Obama's attempts to provide universal healthcare represented the inauguration of socialism in the U.S. which would undermine democratic rights.¹¹ Some of his opponents, especially the right-wing Tea Party faction of the Republican Party, frequently make outrageous claims. In particular, they have accused Obama of being born outside of the country which would render him ineligible for the presidency.¹² However, the allegation which resonates most with Grant's presidency is the assertion that Obama's policies represent an attempt to force a monarchy, or at least a third term, on the American electorate.¹³ Magazine articles entitled 'Obama is Not a Monarch' attest to the widespread existence of such claims and the Democrats' perceived necessity to refute them.¹⁴ Saliently, suggestions that the election of Hilary Clinton – Obama's former Secretary of State – to the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-82.

¹¹ Sara Kenigsberg and Michael McAuliff, 'Obamacare is Socialism: Reps Louie Gohmert, Steve King Attack', *The Huffington Post*, 27 March 2012 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/27/obamacare-socialism-louie-gohmert-steve-king_n_1383973.html [accessed 19 January 2015].

¹² Maureen Dowd, 'Usurper in Chief?', *New York Times*, 14 December 2010 [accessed 19 January 2015].

¹³ Maryalice Aymong, 'The Latest Conspiracy Theory: Obama Will Seek a Third Term', *MSNBC.com*, 7 November 2013 <http://www.msnbc.com/hardball/the-latest-conspiracy-theory-obama-will-seek> [accessed 19 January 2013].

¹⁴ Sen. Ted Cruz, 'Obama is Not a Monarch', *Politico Magazine*, 19 November 2014 <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/11/president-obama-is-not-a-monarch-113028.html#.VOEdjvmsXp4> [accessed 19 January 2015].

presidency in 2016 would merely constitute a third term for Obama highlights how the fears John Russell Young gave voice to in his Caesarism editorials in the *New York Herald* over the power former presidents can wield on future politics still resonates in American politics over 140 years later.¹⁵ While the rest of the world has admired the United States' ability to bind a heterogeneous nation together, Americans seem obsessed with discovering attempts to render the country asunder. These examples suggest that elements of republicanism still reverberate throughout American politics.

Many of the problems faced by Grant during his presidency still exist in various guises in American society today and prove powerful forces in restraining the president's use of executive power. Suspicions of both federal and presidential power still hamper attempts to create an egalitarian society in the United States. Though little of the republican vision which guided Grant's attempts to reinvent the executive office can be seen in the position today, the forces which negatively shaped the office and often defined his presidency are still present. Fears of tyranny, a lack of self-restraint, and the dangers of too much accumulated power in one man are all still features of American politics. In particular, their potency can most poignantly be found in the reluctance of many presidents to use the military to protect the gains of Reconstruction; it would be over 70 years before a president replicated Grant's actions in support of African-American civil rights.¹⁶ The very ideology which encouraged Americans to rebel against British tyranny in the eighteenth century has, ironically, stymied efforts ever since to create an equal society in the United States.

¹⁵ Dan Merica, 'Obama 'Third Term' Label Concerns Some with Clinton Ties', *CNN.com*, 21 August 2014 <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/21/politics/clinton-third-term-obama/index.html> [accessed 19 January 2015].

¹⁶ It wouldn't be until Dwight D. Eisenhower's administration that federal troops were again mobilised to protect African-American civil rights. For information on Eisenhower's decision regarding the Little Rock Nine in Alabama, see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, 2011), pp. 115-130.

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