

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most desolate drives in America is the stretch of Interstate 10 between Tallahassee and Pensacola. Miles and miles pass with nothing except trees and the occasional farm. After traveling west across the Panhandle, one will start to see hints of civilization as they drive through Milton and Pace, and eventually the scenery turns into a small metropolis as they enter Pensacola. Today, this small port city seems like the far side of Florida; the area that tourists pass by with hardly a thought as they continue towards Walt Disney World or Key West. However, this was not the case during the nineteenth century when Florida's population did not extend any further south after Gainesville. Pensacola boasted a flourishing port and timber industry that made the area one of the most prosperous in the state. During the Civil War and Reconstruction, the city became even more important as the North and South faced off for control of the bay and as Alabama and Florida bargained and negotiated over its annexation. If just some of these events had different outcomes, they may have drastically affected the course of American history. Perhaps Democratic nominee Al Gore may have won the Presidency in 2000 if Alabama had annexed West Florida which today boasts heavy Republican majorities. While these possibilities could produce endless debates, they signify that events involving Pensacola had the potential to direct the course of United States history.

The Civil War and Reconstruction eras in Florida have received little attention from historians when compared with states such as Georgia, Mississippi, and Virginia. In 1913, William Watson Davis produced the first significant work on the subject, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*. This study provides a thorough account of the events between 1860 and 1877, however the author provided numerous opportunities for revisionist scholars. In the

early 1900's, Professor William A. Dunning of Columbia University gave several lectures on Reconstruction and attracted a large following. Most of the works produced by the "Dunning school" examine state histories, and Davis falls directly in this category. This school of thought portrays carpetbaggers and Radical Republicans as wretched characters only looking to take advantage of the South. In their treatments of free blacks, the Dunning school made them appear as inherently inferior to whites and as an unruly class of people. Davis follows this pattern and portrays Florida during Reconstruction as a state tormented by Republicans and freedmen. In his treatment of the violence in Jackson County, he highlights incidents of blacks terrorizing whites and depicts the freedmen as corruptly ruling the area. While revisionists have produced new interpretations that make Davis seem highly biased, he produced the first significant study that laid out the research for succeeding historians to build upon.<sup>1</sup>

When dealing with the Civil War in Florida, historians have produced works that mostly describe the political and military events and connects them to national history. Since Davis, John E. Johns has written the most significant book on the subject, *Florida during the Civil War* ( 1963 ). Up to this date, no scholar has produced a work that covers the state as a whole during this period. Because of the events involving Pensacola's forts and Navy Yard, historians have devoted more attention to West Florida than almost any other part of the state. One of the first to focus solely on the city was Edwin C. Bearss who produced numerous articles on the subject. In his largest, "Civil War Operations In and Around Pensacola" ( 1957 ), he discussed the Fort Pickens Truce, the battle of Santa Rosa Island, and the artillery duels in November 1861. While Bearss provides thorough accounts, he does not connect the events with the rest of the war. In 2000, George F. Pearce produced the most complete work on the subject, *Pensacola during the Civil War: A Thorn in the Side of the Confederacy*. This book provides a thorough account of the war in West Florida and connects the events with the rest of the Confederacy. Pearce argues that the city had a significant role in the conflict and that Pensacola added a strategic advantage to the side that possessed it. The author does not attempt to revise Johns' *Florida during the Civil War*

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<sup>1</sup>William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* ( 1913; reprint, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1964 ), VII-X, 571-573; Fletcher M. Green, introduction to *The Civil War and Reconstruction of Florida*, by William Watson Davis, XXII-XXX.

but desires to add another “building block” to broaden the history.<sup>2</sup>

For the United States, probably no other subject generates as much controversy as Reconstruction, and historians have produced different interpretations over the past ninety years. Until the 1960's, the Dunning school largely went unchallenged except for the work W.E.B. DuBois who was an African American scholar. In 1935, DuBois wrote *Black Reconstruction* which defended the freedmen and highlighted their achievements after emancipation. In some ways, DuBois was excessive in his interpretations, because he leaned toward Marxist philosophy. While scholars continued to agree with the Dunning school, DuBois provided a counter argument that influenced later revisionists.<sup>3</sup>

Until the 1960's, Davis' *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* was the principle work on the state for the post war period. However as the Civil Rights movement gained strength, scholars began to question Davis' conclusions and new interpretations emerged. The two most notable works are *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida, 1865-1877* ( 1965 ) by Joe M. Richardson and *Nor Is It Over Yet* ( 1974 ) by Jerrell H. Shofner. In the first work, Richardson provides a detailed account of free blacks in Florida society and includes accounts of their education, employment, religion, and politics. This interpretation is almost a polar opposite of Davis', because it offers a more favorable depiction of freedmen and a harsher view towards conservative whites. Instead of portraying blacks and carpetbaggers as tormenting the South, Richardson highlights the obstinacy of ex-Confederates in accepting Reconstruction and blames them for much of the difficulties endured by the state. In the second work *Nor Is It Over Yet*, Shofner provides an overall account of Florida during Reconstruction. Working at the same time as Richardson ( both scholars received their PhD's from the Florida State University in 1963 ), he uses roughly the same interpretations about free blacks as his colleague. Instead of focusing solely on the state's freedmen, Shofner examines all aspects of Florida including economics and

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<sup>2</sup>Johns, John E., *Florida during the Civil War* ( Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1963 ), 1-3; Edwin C. Bearss, “Civil War Operations In and Around Pensacola,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 36, part 1 ( July 1957-April 1958 ), 125-127; George F. Pearce, *Pensacola during the Civil War: A Thorn in the Side of the Confederacy* ( Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000 ), XI-XII.

<sup>3</sup>W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* ( New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935 ), 3-16; Green, introduction to *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, XXVII-XXIX.

politics to provide a complete revision of Davis' work. *Nor Is It Over Yet* covers Florida's government, railroads, industries, development, and lawlessness as well as the Freedmen's Bureau and black adjustment to emancipation. To this date, the works of Richardson and Shofner stand as the authorities of Florida during Reconstruction.<sup>4</sup>

In 1988, Eric Foner produced the most modern interpretation of post Civil War America, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*. This single volume provides analytical accounts of politics, economics, and society in the United States. Foner attempts to combine the best aspects of the Dunning school with the findings of modern scholarship to provide the strongest history of the period to date. His major focus is on free blacks and how their emancipation influenced Southern society, and he builds on more modern interpretations for this aspect. From the Dunning school, he uses its "broad interpretive framework" to create a comprehensive account. For current historians, Foner's volume stands as the authority on Reconstruction.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike the Civil War, scholars have not devoted much attention to Reconstruction in Pensacola. While this study provides accounts of both periods, it emphasizes the city between 1865 and 1877. Since historians have already produced several works on the Civil War period, the study avoids a basic account of the events and provides new interpretations. For the year 1861, it analyzes why the Union chose to hold Fort Pickens and how that affected the North's overall strategy for defeating the South. After the rebels abandoned Pensacola in 1862, the city fell under federal control. Between the takeover and 1865, the study focuses mostly on the progress made by free blacks and evaluates why the city failed to gain an early start on Reconstruction.

In dealing with the post war period, the study examines events in Pensacola and why the city had an easier transition to Reconstruction. While many scholars do not believe that the period ended in 1877 ( including this one ), the study concludes with the election of President

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<sup>4</sup>Joe M. Richardson, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida, 1865-1877* ( Tallahassee: The Florida State University, 1965 ), 1-12; Jerrell H. Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet: Florida in the Era of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* ( Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1974 ), V-VIII.

<sup>5</sup>Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* ( New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 1988 ), XX-XXV.

Rutherford B. Hayes and the Compromise of 1877. The chapters on Reconstruction emphasize two critical factors, a continuous military presence and the timber industry. These two elements provided employment and enhanced the economy. With a stable market and soldiers to keep the peace, freedmen and Republicans endured far less hardship than their contemporaries in other parts of Florida. This study argues that the military and timber industry were the elements that made Pensacola one of the safest and most prosperous communities in the state at a time when poverty and lawlessness swept the South.

While the Army and lumber companies were the major factors in Pensacola during Reconstruction, other elements shaped the city's future such as the Freedmen's Bureau, yellow fever, and the attempted annexation to Alabama. Each of these forced changes from which society suffered and benefitted. Without the bureau, Pensacola's freedmen would not have had any protection under the law and little opportunity for self-improvement. Recurring yellow fever epidemics caused the city to enact strict public health measures and damaged the area's appeal to tourists. While outbreaks resulted in misery for Pensacola, the annexation issue only offered gain. If Florida ceded the Panhandle to Alabama, the city could prosper even more, and if not politicians in Tallahassee would have to construct a railroad connecting Pensacola with the capital. These elements indeed affected the city, however they were not the significant factors that made Reconstruction in Pensacola a relatively peaceful time.

While this study highlights factors contributing to a prosperous West Florida, it does point out difficulties that paralleled those in the state's other counties such as racial violence, discrimination, and political tension. These problems occurred in Pensacola on a much smaller scale but served to prove that the city still dealt with the same issues as the rest of the South. By examining as many aspects as possible, this study attempts to provide the most comprehensive account of Pensacola that covers its people, politics, industries, and progress.