

L. Q. C. Lamar: Pragmatic Patriot, by James B. Murphy. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973 (Southern Biography Series). \$11.95.

The central problems of Southern political history are to define the nature of and motivation for the policies of white Southern politicians on race and economics. When Southern white politicians deviated from strict racism—Ulrich B. Phillips' "central theme"—what accounted for their apostasy? When they seriously divided on economics, as they did in the New Deal period, what caused those divisions? Has class ever supplanted race as the central axis of Southern politics?

In looking at these problems, historians have traditionally employed the genre of the political biography. For the post-Reconstruction period in the South, the crucial figures were the "Redeemers," the white leaders who managed the overthrow of the Southern Republican regimes in the 1870s and governed the South through at least 1890. Of these leaders, the most prominent were Wade Hampton of South Carolina and Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar of Mississippi.

Lamar has enjoyed a better historical press than any mere mortal deserves. Only three years after his death in 1893, Lamar's son-in-law Edward Mayes, chief justice of the Mississippi Supreme Court, published an 800-page "life, times, and speeches" of his relative. While predictably sympathetic to his subject, Mayes did present material drawn from Lamar's critics, South and North, if only to reject those criticisms, and did manage to breathe some life into Lamar by presenting anecdotes and reminiscences of his friends and family. In contrast, Wirt Cate's 1935 biography, *L. Q. C. Lamar: Secession and Reunion*, cast Lamar as an alabaster saint, "the most gifted statesman" of the South from 1865 to 1900, to quote the preface, "the man to whom was due, more than to any other, the death of sectionalism and the healing of the wounds of the fratricidal war," "one of America's few authentic political philosophers," "a great teacher, orator, legislator, administrator, and jurist." In the mid-nineteen-fifties, a U.S. Senator and his ghostwriter, foraging through U.S. history in search of intrepid and heroic statesmen, came across Cate's panegyric and broadcast it for the popular audience. Since

then, the profile of Lamar as the epitome of courageous idealism has been etched into the minds of legions of high school students and other readers of popular history. Now Professor James B. Murphy has chipped away at, if not smashed, this idol in *L. Q. C. Lamar, Pragmatic Patriot*.

The case for Lamar's heroism rests on his attitudes and actions on economics and race, more specifically, on his 1878 support of the deflationary gold standard and his alleged tolerance of black political activity while representing a strongly racist and inflationist state in the U. S. House and Senate. On the former issue, Murphy recognizes Lamar's principled stand, but casts doubt on the dangers of that stand to his political career. After all, silver was not then the issue it was to become two decades later; Lamar voted in accord with the views of the vast majority of white Mississippi Democratic leaders on all other issues; when he voted against the Bland-Allison bill in early 1878, he had four years to recoup his political fortunes before facing reelection. As for other economic issues, Murphy shows that Lamar, a prewar Democrat, was, in effect, a postwar Whig. Since he retained his states' rights rhetoric on racial and other matters, it is not obvious why Lamar so strongly favored federal intervention in the economy, and Murphy does little to clarify this point. He does not relate his evidence to the Woodward-Alexander view of a postwar Whig takeover of the Southern Democratic party. In any case, economics is of less import in an evaluation of Lamar's career than race.

What were Lamar's policies on race, and why did he take the positions he did? All of his biographers agree that Lamar, a lawyer and small planter before the Civil War, was an avid supporter of slavery and a staunch believer, in the antebellum period at least, in the natural inferiority of black people. All agree also that after the War, Lamar desired a polity firmly in the control of whites, with little or no Negro participation. The most difficult point, on which all three biographers become somewhat ambiguous, is whether Lamar believed after 1865 that Negroes had any political rights, derived either from nature or constitutional law, that whites were bound to respect.

In April 1874, Lamar, erstwhile slaveholder, leading seces-

sionist, and protege of Jeff Davis, rose on the floor of the House of Representatives to deliver a short eulogy of the lately deceased chief spokesman of political antislavery and lifelong opponent of racism, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts. While carefully avoiding putting any blame for slavery's ills on the South, Lamar praised the unflinching dedication to liberty Sumner exhibited in his antebellum struggle against slavery. Turning to his chief point, Lamar asserted that after the War, Sumner had come to stand for sectional reconciliation, and challenged the North to fulfill the fallen idealist's magnanimous creed by conciliating the conquered and prostrate white South. The speech, which was the most important event in Lamar's public life, caused a sensation. The spectacle of a representative of the Southern aristocracy lauding perhaps the most famous critic of his class transfixed editorial writers and reportedly brought tears to Republican House Speaker James G. Blaine. Lamar instantly became the darling of that portion of the Northern press which already wished to abandon Reconstruction, and the hero as well to those Southern whites who, recognizing the failure of bald racism and sectionalism, had come to believe that a subtler policy was necessary, temporarily at least, if they were to regain complete political control of Southern society.

But as Murphy points out, the faint-hearted Yankees overlooked the fact that Lamar had entirely distorted Sumner's position—Sumner had favored reconciliation only with a racially democratized South—and had merely used Sumner's image to shield his (Lamar's) larger purpose of convincing the North to allow white Democratic dominion over the South. "I never in all my life," wrote Lamar to his wife the day after the speech, "opened my lips with a purpose more single to the interests of our Southern people than when I made this speech." No less resentful against Republican radicalism than the most unreconstructed rebel, Lamar realized that the frontal sectional attack had failed, and chose to work covertly on purely opportunistic grounds. (Murphy uses the gentler "pragmatic" as a synonym for opportunistic or expedient.) Lamar was opportunistic in another sense as well. Having nurtured the sentiments expounded in the eulogy for some years, he used Sumner's death as merely an "occasion," as he wrote to a political friend, to make his appeal

when Northerners might be prepared to listen sympathetically. Murphy's examination of Lamar's intentions in the eulogy, in other words, reveals not the sincere, principled reconciliator, but the guileful sectionalist.

There was one other element in the Southern sectional diplomacy necessary for Yankees to end Reconstruction with salved consciences: representatives of the Southern ruling class had to promise to abide by the postwar constitutional amendments guaranteeing Negro rights. Lamar hastened to provide the proper assurances, and he was joined in this effort by the Mississippi Conservative-Democratic convention of 1875, whose first plank favored the "civil and political equality of all men" and pledged fidelity to the U. S. Constitution, including the recent amendments. During the bitter election campaign of 1875, in which Democrats killed about two hundred Republican blacks, Lamar condemned the extreme white liners and appealed to Negroes to vote for the Conservatives. Four years later, in a *North American Review* symposium on the topic, "Ought the Negro to be Disfranchised? Ought He to Have Been Enfranchised?" Lamar condemned disfranchisement as impossible. Such rhetoric has led many to see Lamar as a racial liberal, and a few to go so far as to employ his name at the head of a group apparently devoted to providing liberal answers to the problems of Southern society, including racial problems, in the 1970s. How far is his reputation for racial liberalism justified?

Not very far, according to Murphy's account. At the same time that he made statements opposing white line violence, Lamar carefully orchestrated the defense, on the stage of Northern public opinion, of the 1874 Vicksburg "massacre" of approximately thirty blacks and two whites. Nothing should be allowed to endanger the growing sectional detente, he thought. Besides, as he said in a private letter, there had been "very little needless slaughter of negroes" at Vicksburg—little more than was needed to put the blacks back into their subordinate places, one supposes he meant. In Congress, moreover, Lamar was a staunch opponent of the Civil Rights Bill, which had represented Charles Sumner's true legacy, and of all other measures designed to protect the freedman and prevent violent and extralegal subversion of the

electoral process. During the 1875 campaign in Mississippi, Lamar averred publicly that Negroes should not have been enfranchised in the 1860s. In the 1879 symposium, he capily refrained from commenting on whether blacks should have been enfranchised. Further, Lamar did not state that Negroes "ought" not be disfranchised, only, in effect, that they "could" not be. The implication is that he accepted Negro suffrage only as long as Northern intervention to protect it was a real threat. (Murphy, who mis-cites the symposium by leaving out the question, "Ought He [the Negro] to Have Been Enfranchised?" misinterprets Lamar's statement on these points.

In addition, according to Murphy, Lamar did not want to stop "color line methods, and he lent his energy and reputation to obscuring the existence of political intimidation." Faced with the threat of a Greenback-Independent movement in Mississippi in 1881-2, Lamar resorted to the time-honored Democratic rhetorical tactic: whites must unite behind the Democrats, he said, to prevent "the negro from grasping the power of the State." Finally, Lamar repeatedly employed the same mendacious defense of Southern racial practices which numberless Southern politicians, ante- and post-bellum, engaged in. In an 1878 Senate debate, for instance, Lamar claimed that there was not "a single right of freedom or of citizenship belonging to the black race of the South that was not as secure and as well enjoyed as that of the proudest and freest white in the land." Federal intervention to protect Negro rights was therefore superfluous. In sum, Lamar defended white racist violence, denounced any substantial Negro participation in government, opposed all efforts to enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, and dissembled about Southern conditions in an effort to gull Northern audiences. Some liberal!

What of Lamar's qualities of mind, which were much praised by previous historians? Far from an "authentic political philosopher," Lamar expressed, according to Murphy, mostly commonplace and derivative thoughts. While conceding that Lamar was an imaginative teacher, Murphy concludes that there is no convincing evidence that he introduced the case method to American legal education, as Cate claimed. Although Lamar

was an excellent speaker, his record as Congressman and Senator was barren of significant legislative accomplishment. He was merely "reasonably competent" as Secretary of the Interior, and "average" as U. S. Supreme Court Justice. Thus, whereas Cate had pictured Lamar as a pure, brilliant idealist in politics, Murphy shows us a not particularly perceptive opportunist, merely a skilled actor who "more or less self-consciously prepared" an image as a sectional reconciliation and racial paternalist and "artfully cultivated" that image from 1874 until his death. His racial and sectional diplomacy, Murphy concludes, was unconsciously, if not consciously hypocritical. The "L. Q. C. Lamar Society," if it continues to exist, ought to adopt a better name.

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The Strange Career of Jim Crow, 3rd revised edition, by C. Vann Woodward. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974. 256 pp. \$8.95, paper \$1.95.

The boundaries of Southern culture were determined largely by white society's love and hatred of the Afro-American. Perceptive liberal Southern historians like Willie Lee Rose and conservatives like Ulrich B. Phillips have understood that the black man's position in the economic and cultural center of a white man's country generated both beauty and violence in the South. Northern liberals and neoabolitionist historians have consistently misinterpreted the unique class character and traditions of Southern society. In contrast, historian C. Vann Woodward, born in Arkansas and educated at Emory University, has captured for three decades the mind and mood of Southern life. The third revised edition of his classic on the history of Southern race relations, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, is a powerful statement on the century-long cultural and political struggle in the Southern mind on the status of the black community. *Strange Career's* later chapters and pro-integrationist bias, however, provide the most interesting commentary on the future of black-white relations.

The contours of *Strange Career* are familiar to the black and Southern historian. Woodward's central thesis is simply that