The Historical Reputation of Thaddeus Stevens

James A. Jolly

On a Sunday afternoon in August of 1968, a small group of people gathered at Shreiner's Cemetery in the city of Lancaster, Pennsylvania to commemorate the hundredth year of Thaddeus Stevens' interment. The aged cemetery, consisting of private plots, had fallen into an unkept state, and American Legion Red Rose Post No. 7 accepted as a worthy project the restoration and maintenance of the grounds. A flag and pole were dedicated and speeches were given; it was a peaceful, discreet ceremony, far-removed in time, aura, and stature from the Old Commoner.

During his lifetime, and subsequent to it Thaddeus Stevens (1792-1868) was praised by some and despised by others. On several points, however, there has been general agreement among his contemporaries and most students of history. Few will argue with the observation that he was the most powerful, remarkable, and dictatorial legislative and party leader of his time, or, perhaps, of any time in this nation's history. Within the years 1865 to 1868 he was probably the most important man in the nation; he was the center of attraction as engineer of the program for punitive reconstruc-

tion of the South; he was the most significant parliamentary giant in the decade of conflict, sponsoring, among other things, war taxes, tariffs, reconstruction measures, greenbacks, transcontinental railroads, presidential impeachment proceedings, and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. In a crucial era, this eerie legislator was the man of the hour, leader of the Radical Republicans in the House of Representatives, a master of congressional manipulation, and an energizer for the policies he would promote.²

Great power came to Stevens subsequent to the American Iliad (1861-1865) because he was an audacious and commanding personage, capable of articulating the intense feelings of ardent Unionists and anti-slavery elements who were determined that the war should not have been fought in vain. He filled a vacuum; and seemed, to those in agreement with him, to be an almost indispensable oracle and leader. Stern times demand stern and unequivocal masters. He exerted this power, not by virtue of office—he was never Speaker of the House, but rather by his personality. Purposeful hate seemed to consume him, craft and vindictiveness were often his means; and sarcasm and rebuke were his weapons. Men wilted before his hypnotic spell, compulsiveness, and harsh ridi-It was so much easier to consent to his wishes than to be victimized by his biting tongue. Stevens' contemporaries were overawed in his presence, and sometimes felt inferior before him; they knew of his ability to make them appear absurd or amoral, and worst of all from a politicians' point of view, he had the ability of hitting them with telling words of scorn, which would be printed in the hometown newspapers and long-remembered by their constituencies.3

While recognizing Stevens' prestige and techniques, it nevertheless should not be assumed that he necessarily got his way in all things; for, though no one questioned the fact of his influence, some of his proposals were compromised or rejected, and his goals for Reconstruction, such as significantly improving the economic condition of the freed Negro, were unfulfilled. Furthermore, toward the end of his life, he was disappointed when the Pennsylavnia legislature did not elect him to the U.S. Senate, in a three-man race with Andrew Curtin, the Civil War governor, and politico Simon Cameron, who won and for whom Stevens had long standing disrespect. This should not be construed as a real repudiation; other factors were that Cameron had a superb political organization, some thought Stevens too old, and others realized that he would lose seniority if transferred to the Senate.

Historians and biographers have written a great deal on the subjects of Stevens and the trauma of Reconstruction (1865-1877); neither of them have ordinarily been presented with cool objectivity; both of them have been subjected to diverse schools, sections, and periods of interpretation. During much of the twentieth century, historians have caricaturized Radical Reconstruction as a

melancholy watershed of corruption and oppression. Some Southern state histories have been especially biased. In the past fifteen years, however, and predictably in the immediate future, more historians will extol the motives, emphasize the accomplishments, and applaud the goals of the Radicals. This can be partially explained by the greater emphasis on the Negro and by the impetus of the civil rights movement.

We need to explore the background of Stevens' historical image. In studies of the "War of the Rebellion," Northern historians in the early decades after the Civil War, as more recently, were inclined to emphasize the evils of secession and slavery as causes of an irrepressible conflict. The few Southern historians thought in terms of the "War for Southern Independence" or "War Between the States." In the twentieth century there would be revisionist historians implying that the Civil War had been generated by fanatics, sensationalists, and a blundering generation; and a still harsher indictment was leveled against Reconstruction.

The change of approach toward America's Homeric period and

Reconstruction was to some extent due to emotional and sociological reasons. Sometimes the victors forget; the conquered remember. In contrast to treatment meted to a losing side in other strife-torn lands, here the winners did not cut heads off, but rather pushed heads down in the dirt,—the faces of proud men who were allowed to live and to transmit to their issue a hatred for the conquerors plus nostalgia and legend about the ante-bellum Dixie. This sentimentalism over the "Lost Cause" influenced history and public opinion. Southerners pointed to Reconstruction as an explanation for Southern deficiencies; and the role of a malevolent Thaddeus Stevens was to be emphasized until he became the personification of Reconstruction,—a grotesque man and a grotesque time. In contrast to the Civil War, which also knew some moral delinquency, the memory of Reconstruction did not inspire either pride or sentimentality. This in part was the result of the growing ethnocentricism apparent by the latter nineteenth century, and which accounts for by then the growing Northern ambivalence toward race and the accomplishments of the Radical Republicans to protect the Negro. The white middle class grew apprehensive over the influx and assimilability of New Stock immigrants (from Southern and Eastern Europe); and attendant to this the Old Stock developed an empathy for the Southern Whites' attitude toward the Black Man. There was a tendency to lump the New Immigration and Negroes together in an unassimilable category and to be acquiescent regarding racial segregation.6

During the first decade of this century, James Ford Rhodes, William A. Dunning, and John W. Burgess influenced historical interpretations, studies, and later textbooks. They were "nationalist" historians, who desired to reconcile the sections; consequently they tried to distribute the blame for the war and aftermath and not condemn one side much more than the other. Rhodes (1848-1927),

and a retiree at the age of 36; whereupon he wrote history as a hobby. Though from a Democratic family with a friendship for Stephen A. Douglas, Rhodes kept changing party allegiance and was critical of Douglas; though from a business background, as a historian, he minimized economic factors. He was sympathetic to abolitionists, John Brown, and the early Republican party, and believed slavery to be the major cause of the Civil War. Like Dunning and Burgess, he believed Northerners were right during the Civil War, but Southerners right during Reconstruction; this trio suspected the motives of the Radicals, and considered the Negroes as basically inferior to the Whites. Rhodes deplored giving voting rights to the Blacks. He criticized Stevens for vindictiveness and Johnson for crudeness and ineptitude.7 Dunning (1857-1922), son of a New Jer-

a college dropout who eventually received several honorary doctorates, made a fortune in the midwestern steel and iron industry, was a brother-in-law to industrialist Mark Hanna, the Republican boss,

stereotype of Reconstruction: decent native Whites against inferior Blacks, carpetbag-scalawag rule, and alien forces;—though he was willing to concede that corruption was not peculiar to the Reconstruction South during the Gilded Age, and that postwar conditions called for expensive projects like schools and welfare institutions. He believed the antipathy between Johnson and Congress was over hegemony.⁸ Burgess (1844-1931) was a Tennessean who had fought for the North. Marxian writer Enmale erroneously states that Burgess was an ex-Confederate. Burgess was trained as a lawyer and

studied abroad. He blamed the states rights fetish as much as slav-

sey manufacturer, was largely responsible for setting the negative

very as a cause for the war, and believed that giving the franchise to the Blacks had been premature. He was rather ambivalent toward Johnson.9 Rhodes, Dunning, and Burgess opposed slavery but not racism, taking the South's side after 1865; and this harmonized with the image of Lincoln, who was against slavery but assumedly would have opposed the Radicals. In short, there were promhad been right in the 1850's were wrong a decade later.¹⁰

inent historians who maintained that some of the Republicans who In the period 1910-1960 writers were customarily critical of Reconstruction. Ulrich B. Phillips of Georgia underscored the benign image of the ante-bellum paternalistic master and contented slave.11 Charles Beard believed the crux of the conflict was the dis-

harmony between the two sections' economic systems, with the ultimate ascendancy captured by the urban industrial North. Later Howard K. Beale, T. Harry Williams, and C. Vann Woodward favored the Beardian explanation. Sensationalistic journalism was in

vogue during and after the 1920's, and, during the 1930's, there was suspicion that the Radical Republican Reconstruction program had been economically motivated; the climate of thought in the Thirties was predominately anti-Republican and anti-business, and

the interpretation fit contemporary attitudes.12 Thomas Dixon in 1905 wrote The Clansman, which was adapted for the Griffith movie epic "Birth of a Nation" (1915). The movie depicted Southern Reconstruction being led by "Stoneman" (Stevens) and Charles Sumner, the championing of Negro barbarism, and finally the unfortunate time being brought to an end by a glamourized Ku Klux Klan. The Klan was revived, and prominent during the ethnocentric Twenties, its revival owing no small degree to the suggestive movie. 13

The 1920's and 1930's saw the canonization of Andrew Johnson as a courageous martyr for the Constitution. Robert Winston's biography is quite balanced; on the other hand, to Lloyd Stryker, Johnson was the personification of virtue, the Radicals the personification of evil.14 Perhaps the most popular work on Recontruction has been Claude Bowers' The Tragic Era, an exciting and biased book which caricaturizes the Radicals (a chapter is devoted to Stevens) and honors men like President Andrew Johnson and General Wade Hampton C. S. A. Bowers was semi-official historian for the Democratic party, an author on Jefferson and Jackson, and an ambassadorial appointee of Franklin Roosevelt's. 15 Southerner George Fort Milton, in contrast to Rhodes, praised Stephen A. Douglas as a great compromiser, and also sympathized with Johnson. 16 James G. Randall, who thought of the Radicals as "Vindictives," was critical of their program in general and of the impeachment proceedings in particular. Randall, Bowers, and later T. Harry Williams regarded Reconstruction as a Republican conspiracy to maintain control. 17 Ellis P. Oberholtzer, an aristocratic Philadelphian, also believed this concerning Republican motivation, and was something of a racist besides.¹⁸ Walter Fleming, son of a well-to-do farmer, opposed Reconstruction and also had racist lean-

In the Depression decade of the 1930's the Marxian interpreters contrasted with the above historians. James S. Allen, Richard Enmale (pseudonym—ENgels, MArx, LEnin), and Louis Hacker were associated with the Marxian and economic determinist approach. Allen, the pen name used by Sol Auerbach, cheered the Radicals and their industrialist allies for their inadvertent contribution to the evolutionary process—from the old Southern feudal system and toward a future Marxian society. Allen regarded Stevens and Sumner as revolutionary bourgeois leaders who made proposals that the

poor be provided with land confiscated from the former Southern masters, and who prodded the vacillating and moderate center, led by Lincoln, into action.²⁰ W. E. B. Dubois, who, until recent times, was the most significant of Negro scholars, also emphasized the class conflict theme. He regarded Johnson as an obstructionist.²¹

ings, 19 These historians, between the world wars, continued to down-

grade Reconstruction and rehabilitate Johnson.

The defense of Johnson was much in vogue during the Twenties and Thirties. His defenders pictured Radical Reconstruction as the work of a fanatic minority, consisting of men like Stevens and Sumner, able to dragoon their reluctant congressional colleagues into suppressing the South. David Donald, an objective native of

of congressional Republicans.²² David Dewitt, a lawyer schoolmaster, and Democrat legislator, provided the most exhaustive study (1903) of the impeachment; and, though critical of the Radicals, he did not excuse Johnson's shortcomings.²³ The recent trend has been for Johnson's reputation to decline; and, as Johnson is viewed as essentially a tool of the South, the Radicals' stock has gone up. Though the Radicals are now presented as being largely sincere and principled in motive, the impeachment of Johnson and their role in it has not been re-interpreted in their favor.²⁴

Mississippi, points out, however, that in reality the important Reconstruction legislation was supported by a considerable majority

Though the Radicals are now presented as being largely sincere and principled in motive, the impeachment of Johnson and their role in it has not been re-interpreted in their favor. Latter day praise for the Radicals has varied from guarded to enthusiastic. Avery O. Craven admits that the Radicals (Stevens, Sumner, Chase, and Wade) were dedicated to abstract justice rather than only being involved in some Northern industrialist—fanatic cabal. Nevertheless, he is quick to remind us that such characters lend little to social stability. In contrast to Beale and Williams, David Donald and Eric McKitrick have written that the Radicals did not necessarily pursue clearcut economic policies; the voting pattern of a Radical was determined more by the geographical region he represented than by any overall party policy. McKitrick has ef-

fectively downgraded Johnson.²⁶ John Hope Franklin (b. 1915), the outstanding Negro historian, stresses the Negro's constructive contributions to Reconstruction, and notes that the Radicals merely wanted to carry the crusade for justice to its natural conclusion. 27 Ebony magazine credits Stevens and Sumner with leading Congress and America into taking a long stride toward civil justice; their measures passed make today's civil rights bills look pale by comparison, and their measures unpassed could have reduced further racial strife.28 John and LaWanda Cox, James McPherson, and Kenneth Stampp are defenders of the Radicals' motives and goals. Stampp (b. 1912) regards the Radicals as the natural heirs of the Enlightenment, as indicated by their belief in natural rights and the dignity of mankind, the individual's right to equality before the law, and the individual's right to control his own destiny.29 Stampp, belittling the picture drawn of Reconstruction by Revisionists and Southern state histories, acknowledges that there were certainly mistakes, yet he believes there was little real brutality: the slaves were freed, and citizens' rights granted them; there were a few short-term imprisonments and also brief political disabilities for leaders of the Rebellion; there was weak military occupation which was terminated in 1877. Perhaps the most unique and enduring monuments produced by Reconstruction were the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, which probably could only have been passed during such a time as that.³⁰ It was unfortunate for the Negroes that the Fourteenth Amendment was, in the late nineteenth century, ignored with respect to their civil rights, and, instead, was utilized as a shield for big business. The courts interpreted the amendment in such a way that corporations were considered artificial "persons," and free of restrictive state regulations. Likely this



Thaddeus Stevens at thirty-eight from a painting by Jacob Eichhoitz.

was not the intent of its framers,—despite Senator Conkling's later comments.

Historians who are prejudicially favorable to the postwar South, and who have a latent disdain for the Negro, have considered Stevens the arch-villian in American history; and all sorts of amateurish psychological studies have been rendered in attempts to explain the man's vindictive and belligerent personality: his club foot, his unhappy childhood, his alcoholic and absent father, the destruction of his Caledonia iron works by the Confederates, his mulatto housekeeper—assumed to be his mistress, and his blighted ambition to be in the Cabinet or Senate.³¹ Undoubtedly these contributed to his bitterness, but fairness compels one to believe that he also was motivated by a greater light than merely desire for attention

or revenge.

rent's Old Thad Stevens: A Story of Ambition (1942), Ralph Korngold's Thaddeus Stevens: A Being Darkly Wise and Rudely Great (1955), and Fawn Brodie's Thaddeus Stevens: Scourge of the South (1959). Current's book is not sympathetic to Stevens; Korngold is sympathetic; Brodie tries to present a balanced portrayal as well as exploring the emotional sources of his behavior.

Among the better biographies on Stevens are Richard N. Cur-

The approaches, biases, and reputations of various historians and schools of interpretation have been briefly discussed; and their works and those of many others will be incorporated into a compostion.

ite picture of Stevens, emphasizing his accomplishments and reputa-In the lore concerning our past, Lincoln and Johnson have been symbols of magnanimity, whereas Stevens has been considered the personification of malice and quest for revenge.32 Stryker, a John-

son biographer, writes that Stevens was primarily motivated by a

desire for wealth; and this helps account for supposedly wanting revenge against the Southern forces which destroyed his iron works during the Gettysburg campaign.³³ Some authors imply that his compulsive and passionate commitment to racial equality is indicative of an irrational or even deranged mind incapable of statesmanship. According to Brett Howard, Stevens was first in an unholy triumvirate of like-minded fanatics, the other two being Ben Butler and Charles Sumner.34 It has been stated that Stevens' forte was to defend and to attack, but not to construct.35 James G. Blaine, the rather soiled "Plumed Knight" of the G. O. P., noted Stevens' reputation for political unscrupulousness and laxity in personal morals; —and, in Stevens' day and since, this has been an image of him. 36 In some ways Stevens remained fundamentally a Federalist: like Hamilton, he favored industralization and strong central government, and admired the British system.³⁷ Rhodes evidently had some feeling for the Southern aristocratic tradition, and he regarded Stevens' program as an attack upon civilization itself. This attitude was expressed earlier (1876) by Stevens' detractor Alexander Harris, a pro-Southern contemporary and fellow resident of Lancaster. Harris believed abolitionism and communism were of the same cloth, in that both were contrary to the will of nature, akin in trying to force equalization among diverse human beings.38 McKitrick is one of the few authors not taking Stevens seriously. He regards Stevens as a perpetual failure who verged on buffoonery, his importance being magnified by the fact that the President of the United

States, Andrew Johnson, singled him out for special abuse. Before then, claims McKitrick, Stevens had always been a troublemaker. but never a power; he was an astute parliamentarian—for shortterm objects, enjoying slyness for its own sake, affected, glorying in notoriety, developing himself as a character, and willing to lend his person to legend.³⁹ Harris, whose book is an intemperate diatribe, comments that Stevens did not stand out among persons with comparable credentials, but was ascendent because he astounded the memory of Thaddeus Stevens. In some ways nature had been cruel to Stevens. Undoubtedly his handicaps partially accounted for his grim visage, and, in turn, the visage accentuated an overall grotesqueness. Some authors have

dwelt upon his appearance, offering that it probably bespoke an

his inferiors and the timid. 40 Such are the criticisms surrounding

inner malevolence: the deep set, flashing eyes; the cruel, protruding underlip; the hawkish nose; the sepulchral voice; the sneer or occasional Voltairean smile. There was something fascinating, hypnotic, almost supernatural about his countenance and manner, which could not help but attract attention. Stryker dramatically suggests that it was like staring at a reptile.41 Though he could be mean toward landed aristocrats and foes, he empathized with persons who, through no fault of their own, were born disadvantaged and despised. Stevens was born a club footed cripple; his older brother was doubly afflicted. His family was not only poor, but must have felt cursed as well. While a shy, sensitive lad, Thad had been taunted by other children. When he was thirty-nine years old, a fever left him completely bald, and he thereafter wore a chestnut-colored wig. Stevens' wig, cane, and special boot are now displayed in the museum of the Lancaster County Historical Society. Perhaps his birth defect and later homeliness not only encouraged sympathy for some of the unfortunates but also accounts for his not seeking marriage. As a young man he was an excellent athelete in sports like horsemanship and swimming. Because both had a reputation as club footed athlete-swimmers. Stevens and Byron have been compared; to which can be added that both had repu-

tations for sensuality. The gossip that he was a carnalist perhaps flattered Stevens more than it incensed him. If the portrait by Jacob Eichholtz is any indication, he was a distinguished and pleasant looking man at the age of thirty-eight. What disappointments and hurts contributed to transforming him to that later grimness is part record and part conjecture.42 As early as the 1840's, Stevens was regarded as the outstanding Pennsylvania orator for his party (then Whig). Three characteristics were prominent in his speeches. First, he was able to express in words what others felt, which gave him a following. Secondly, he was a master of sarcasm, and men feared to cross him. He would

brought him close to physical injury, were instruments of his overbearingness. Conkling had to act as his bodyguard in the volatile House of the 1850's. Carl Schurz observed "The fear that he inspired

use wit, but seldom humor. Thirdly, in contrast to the florid oratory then in vogue, his speeches were usually brief and clear. Senator Charles Sumner, Stevens' civil rights counterpart in the Senate, recalled "Nobody said more in fewer words or gave to language a sharper bite."43 Even his enemies respected his courage and candor; he despised hypocrisy and seemingly worried little about concealing faults. His frankness, sarcasm, and courage, which more than once

became a distinct element of power in his leadership."44

Stevens had a rather contradictory personality. He was vindictive, partisan, cynical about the intentions and opinions of others, noticeably absent from Lancaster social affairs, lived a lonely life, and had few close friends. On the otherhand, he was given to disinterested philanthropy. He contributed readily to charities. Perhaps the outward shell hid an inner core of compassion. He sympathized with the poor, the perpetually downtrodden, and the outcaste; and was willing that there be retribution for them at the expense of others. He was fond of children, and believed that a child with ability and motivation should not be hindered from advancement because of artificial reasons like color. His interest in the Negro was largely resultant from the fact that they were poor; and Stevens knew, from his own youth, the meaning of poverty. Likewise he knew the stigma attached to being a cripple, and he became, for many crippled boys a quiet benefactor. For instance, he gave orders for bills to be sent to him by his physician when the patients were crippled or deformed lads. He was even willing to defend Jeff Davis and Clement Clay after there was some mention that the government should prosecute them in connection with the Lincoln assassination. Stevens thought this would be an injustice. Congressman Ignatius Donnelly said of Stevens "He seemed to feel that every wrong inflicted upon the human race was a blow struck against himself."45

Several other of the Commoner's traits are worth mentioning. He loved flattery, and could be induced thereby to comply with requests, though not necessarily esteeming the flatterer. 46 His reading seldom deviated from biography, history, and philosophy.⁴⁷ Stevens loved his pious mother, whose memory he held sacred and to whom he attributed any of his ability. His father, an alcoholic, had deserted the family.⁴⁸ Stevens believed in God, and, though he did not belong to any denomination, he had a sentimental attachment to the Baptist faith, the belief of his mother. His tolerance of all religions was partly due to his divorcement from them and disinteresterness in creeds, though he was willing to give financial contributions. Regarding Scripture, he was understandably attracted to the Book of Job. Maybe Republicanism came closest to being a religion for him.⁴⁹ Stevens did not smoke or drink, and supported the temperance crusade. His chief form of relaxation was gambling; he gambled for enjoyment, not gain, and was generous with his earnings. 50

Stevens, though too radical to be accepted warmly by colleagues in the legal profession, was nevertheless the acknowledged leader of the Lancaster bar and one of the outstanding barristers in the State.⁵¹ He had the best law library in the region, and collected books on history and politics, all of which he freely loaned; and he was president of the Lancaster Law Library Association, the only organization of lawyers existing in the county at the time.⁵² Stevens accepted among his understudies those unable to pay but eager to learn. Some of his law students became congressmen.⁵³ Despite his heavy schedule, he was also willing to take the cases of fugitive slaves; and when courts ruled against him, he would try to purchase

their freedom.⁵⁴ He was apt in remembering and accurately repeating testimony without repairing to notes. His citations were few and his speech was direct rather than flowery. His writing was so illegible that Stevens himself found it difficult to read.⁵⁵

Stevens' defense of persons involved with the Christiana "Riot"

(1851) brought him greater notoriety and a temporary political setback. A strict fugitive slave law was part of the Compromise of 1850; this made it legally obligatory for Northerners to assist in the capture of runaway slaves who escaped to the North. Edward Gorsuch, a Maryland slaveholder, traced his runaways to Christiana, Pennsylvania, and there, while trying to capture them, incensed Negroes murdered and mutilated him and severely wounded his son. Today markers commemorate the event though the house is gone. Thirty-eight persons, including three local white Quakers who had refused to help Gorsuch, were brought to trial at Philadelphia by the U.S. Circuit Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. Stevens helped win their acquittal, and the fugitive slave law, practically speaking, became virtually a dead letter in the North. Edward Gorsuch's gun was later given to the famous Negro crusader Frederick Douglass as a momento.⁵⁶ Stevens, then serving his second term in Congress, was criticized for his part in the trial and for contributing to a local sentiment which could allow such a tragedy to occur. Among area Whigs he was head of the aggressively anti-slavery faction known as the "Wooley Heads." In Lancaster his popularity waned as a result of the "treason trials," and in August of 1852 a "Silver Grey" (Whig moderate) was nominated for Congress. Stevens, however, made a comeback in 1858.57 The 1830's witnessed much Anti-Masonic agitation. It resulted

from reaction to the probable murder of a wayward Mason (Morgan); as another means of attacking President Jackson, a Mason; and also because of suspicion by some citizens that the Masons constituted an elitist and secretive cabal, aimed at gaining control of society, their tactics maybe even including the compromising of jurors and employers. What preeminently accounted for Stevens' obsession against Masonry is unknown. Perhaps it reflected a certain resentment toward privilege, or maybe he had been blackballed by a lodge. Anyhow, because of efforts by Stevens and others, there was a considerable reduction in the number of Masonic lodges in Pennsylvania.⁵⁸

Stevens has been called "the Father of the Common School System of Pennsylvania;" and he considered his successful struggle in the Legislature for preservation and extension of the public school system to be the greatest service for which he wished to be remembered. Many legislators had been elected with a mandate to trim State expenses, and the public school system, launched by Governor Wolf and others, was especially marked for termination. Its abolition had passed the Senate, and the program seemed destined for a similar fate in the House, — until Stevens' speech. He believed that opposition to public schools

the common people could raise against their own exploitation, and the best assurance of advancement. Largely because of his defense of the schools, Stevens is a prominent figure depicted in the mural of outstanding Pennsylvanians in the House chamber of the State Capitol. But he was savior, not "Father," of the schools.

Subsequent to the Civil War, Stevens did not press for racial integration of schools to the extent that Sumner did; he thought it would be advancement enough, for the moment, if free public schools were established throughout the South.

was partly generated by the well-to-do desirous that the poor retain the stigma of illiteracy concomitant with differentiation of caste. Stevens believed that mass education was the most efficient defense

Education was also a claimant to his estate, — which was valued at \$116,000, exclusive of \$100,000 in small debts owed him. Stevens was the benefactor of the trade school in Lancaster which bears his name. His chief beneficiary would have been his nephew Thad, on condition that the young man could refrain from intoxicating beverages; otherwise the money was to go to a combination orphanage and trade school, which would give no preference based on race, religion, or ethnic group. Perhaps Stevens realized Thad could not meet the specified condition; anyhow, it was not met, and the institute in Lancaster was established with the help of \$50,000 from the estate.⁶¹

In the 1860's as Stevens became a national power, his pres-

tige in the Lancaster area grew. Stevens had moved from Gettysburg to Lancaster (a city of 8000 inhabitants) in 1842, mainly to improve his personal fortune, extend his practice and enlarge his political possibilities. He was one of the seventeen persons who met in Lancaster in 1855 to launch the local Republican organization, and he was a delegate to the first Republican national nominating convention in 1856. Stevens' successor, Oliver James Dickey, in the memorial addresses delivered in Congress, observed that Stevens was highly regarded by his constituents though often in advance of their opinions and sometimes running counter to their prejudices and passions. Dickey, a Republican and former district attorney, was elected to the Fortieth Congress to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Stevens, and was elected the same day to the forty-first Congress; he was later elected to the Forty-second Congress. After Stevens' death, the Republican party in his district, as a gesture of respect, nominated him again, and, though several months in his grave, he won re-election to Congress. By the twentieth century sentiment in Lancaster was still such that D. W. Griffith's "Birth of a Nation" was not permitted a showing there dur-

Hatred of slavery, of the South, and of Democrats gave a certain unity to Stevens' political activity. Early in his Gettysburg years he became an unrelenting foe of slavery and its advocates, and he was a caustic critic of the inconsistancies of "Jacksonian"

gress. Extremists attacked the institution of slavery as satanic and in need of eradication by any means; moderates, on the other hand, primarily attacked the geographical extension of slavery. Abolitionists like Stevens and Wade were in the tradition of Garrison and Lovejoy. Stevens welcomed the Civil War as the knell of slavery; but whereas Garrison thought the war completed abolitionist work, Stevens realized the program would need to be extended beyond 1865. 63

Throughout his public life Stevens disdained the Democratic party, a coalition of Southern aristocrats, frontiersmen, and North-

Democracy." From the time he was first elected to the Congress, he was recognized as an anti-slavery leader in that body. The anti-slavery movement included both moderates and abolitionist extremists; the latter grew in power, and by 1867 held sway in Con-

ern urban workers and political machines. Stevens, who began as a Hamiltonian, remained sympathetic to the Northern business-industrial class. Some of his critics got the impression that he held property sacred, with the exception of slaves and plantations; and Stevens apparently regarded the Democrats as practioners of mobocracy and demagoguery; they seemed to hold no property sacred except slaves. After the Civil War the Democratic bid for Northern votes included appeal to racial prejudice. Yet, ironically, by sponsoring a harsh reconstruction program, Stevens inadvertently helped establish the Solid Democratic South which lasted until recent years. 44

reflective of a blind loyalty to the Republican party as an ultimate good in itself; it was a means. At a time in history, he believed the Republican party was the most likely vehicle for the expression and implementation of his convictions and goals. Stevens thought that the Republican organization, increasingly an agent of the Northern middle class and business community, was the only instrument capable of saving the Union and of subsequently retaining the hard won fruits and advancements of victory. Conversely, the Democratic party represented retrogression and a vehicle for a Southern comeback. Consequently, though his candor shocked non-partisan idealists, and oblique or diplomatic rationalizers, he unabashedly avowed

There are ample reasons, and examples to illustrate, that Stevens was basically democratic, — albeit some of his detractors maintain that the label "Old Commoner" is deceptive and hypocritical because of his affinity with the business leaders. The record of his battle against entrenched privilege, in behalf of the weak and exploited, is impressive. He preached equality before the law, and was particularly sensitive for persons handicapped and restricted in social vertical mobility due to accidents of birth or prejudice. He

considered such arbitrary hindrance unfair and artificial. Since he thought persons should be judged as individuals on merits of ability and character, maybe he regarded the industrial elite as

and maneuvered for the ascendency of his party. 65

caste of aristocrat-born. The following exemplify his philosophy: as a representative of Adams County at the State Constitutional Convention (1838), he refused to affix his name to the new constitution because it restricted suffrage to white males; during the Civil War, following a report by Secretary of War Stanton, he introduced a bill which would equalize the pay of black with white soldiers; and he rejoiced at the execution of the French puppet emperor of Mexico, Maximillian.⁶⁶

belonging to a natural and attained aristocracy, in contrast to a

Stevens' bourgeois allegiance was with the striving industrialists, and neither with the landed aristocracy nor with the banker-creditor element. He himself was an iron manufacturer, a supporter of economic Darwinism, and a friend of overland railroads but not of monopolies. His reconstruction policies were generally supported by the Northern industrial leaders fearing a Southern comeback to power, which they thought might mean a lower tariff, an attack on the national debt, and tampering with the postwar economic structure.⁶⁷

On monetary questions Stevens was considered rather radical,

and he was not regarded as a friend of Wall Street. Manufacturers did not want a reduction of currency in circulation; they, along with farmers and industrial workers, preferred easy money, whereas the money lenders and bondholders, who ultimately prevailed, demanded that funding of the national debt be conducted in gold, though there had been no definite government agreement on the matter. Stevens thought it discriminative to pay the laborer in greenbacks and the bondholder in gold, and he tried to stop what many regarded as a conspiracy by the oligarchy of the East against taxpayers in general and farmers in particular. Northern laborers supported Stevens in the 1860's. Stevens and his ilk believed in equality of opportunity, economic freedom, a protective tariff, and soft-money. He thought the United States could have its own economic standard regardless of gold standard countries. Others of his persuasion included Ben Wade. Wendell Phillips, Peter

Stevens had limited respect for his fellow countian Simon Cameron and his regard for James Buchanan, a Lancaster Democrat, can be described as that of great contempt. Buchanan was a "Doughface" President, meaning that he was a Northerner friendly to Southern grace, institutions, and policy; indeed. Stevens viewed Buchanan as the last Southern President of the United States and almost a traitor. Buchanan was a strict constitutional constructionalist, and, as Southern States began to secede in the interim be-

Cooper, and Henry Carey, the gold block included Garfield, Blaine,

Conkling, Morrill, Fessenden, and Washburne.68

tween his and Lincoln's administrations, he was perplexed as to what policy to pursue. He was certain that secession and the Confederacy were illegal, but he was uncertain about the constitutionality of coercing the Southern States to remain in the Union; the latter course could make a bad situation worse if other Southern

states were to take offense. Stevens was disgusted over what he regarded as Buchanan's doctrinaire and cowardly approach. It was not until their last days that the two men softened and were, aside from policy, almost reconciled. A mutual friend of the two statesmen, with Buchanan's approval, planned to bring the old combatants together for well-wishes. Stevens would be driven by Wheatland, Buchanan's Lancaster estate, and the carriage would stop when



A drawing of Stevens by the author, from a contemporary picture.

its occupants noticed Buchanan who would be in front of his home by prearrangement; whereupon Buchanan would offer Stevens his hand. Unfortunately, Stevens had to return to Washington and the contrived meeting did not occur. When Buchanan's death was announced in 1868 the Senate adjourned; the House refused even a resolution of respect despite Stevens' urging and he seemed genuinely embarrassed. Buchanan's death caused no great display of grief or official notice as did Stevens' passing two months later. 69

the nation was fighting for its life in unusual times, he was willing to be unconstitutional if need be in order to save the government. He was inclined to think that Congress, instead of the President, should control direction of the war. Likely Stevens' most important contribution to the war effort was as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, in charge of war appropriations. He more than any other individual was responsible for raising the four billion dollars in loans and taxes to support the Northern war machine. Stevens suffered a direct financial setback as a result of the war, when his Caledonia iron works (near Chambersburg, and named after the Vermont county of his birth) was destroyed as an act of vengeance during the Southern invasion of Pennsylvania in 1863. Today the remains of the furnace still exist in the Caledonia

The Civil War gave Stevens and men like him opportunity to free the slaves and punish the Southern aristocracy. The Radicals were primarily responsible for turning the struggle into a war not only to preserve the Union but also to extinguish slavery. Much of the nobility, idealism, and nerve connected with the Northern side were supplied by the Radical Republicans. Whereas slaveholders would destroy the Union to protect slavery, Stevens would destroy slavery because of its inherent evil and to save the Union. Since

1863. Today the remains of the furnace still exist in the Caledonia State Park. This wanton destruction during the Gettysburg campaign meant a loss to Stevens of \$75,000-\$90,000 in property. He claimed not a dollar in compensation; he said it was but a small sacrifice to pay in the national struggle full of sacrifices. His friends took a collection to recompense him, and, though he was touched by their concern, refused the money, which at his request was applied to relief of the Lancaster County poor. Some historians, like Stryker, have contended or implied that a degree of Stevens' anger against the South was resultant from his Caledonia disaster and a desire for retribution. Others, including Sumner, have refuted the accusation. In fairness, it seems that his longtime hatred of Southern civilization, not the 1863 destruction of his iron works, primarily motivated his policy.⁷¹

In temperament, philosophy, and policy, Lincoln and Stevens were different; and, though their relationship was guarded and unpleasant, in some ways they were useful to each other and to the execution of relevant administration. Lincoln was more tolerant of diverse opinions; Stevens did not appreciate the worth of patience and careful methods, and judged persons by their commitment to the anti-slavery crusade. Lincoln liked wit and humor, usually for its own solve or as relief from the person of effect.

and careful methods, and judged persons by their commitment to the anti-slavery crusade. Lincoln liked wit and humor, usually for its own sake or as relief from the cares of office; Stevens' wit was sardonic and used as a weapon. Lincoln and Andrew Johnson were more respectful of the Constitution and Executive primacy, and were not advocates of racial equality. Occasionally Stevens gave the impression that he was misanthropic concerning his own race. Lincoln, at least in theory, approved the idea of colonizing the free Negroes abroad; Stevens scoffed at the notion. Lincoln, who dominated the moderate (some say vacillating) wing of his party, com-

emancipation. Lincoln was a brake to Stevens, and Stevens was an essential goad to Lincoln.72 Lincoln and Stevens differed on implementing politics and policy. Lincoln thought of the war as a rebellion, that the Southern states had not legally left the Union; Stevens believed that by seces-

plained about Stevens and Sumner pushing him on the issue of

sion the Southern states had forfeited their rights under the Constitution and the South was an enemy foreign country to be conquered. In thinking toward restoration of the Union, Lincoln realized that if a strong Republican party were to be developed in the South it would need the support of many ex-Confederates; therefore a lenient policy would be smart politics as well as charitable. Lincoln's program called for bringing respective states back as quickly and painlessly as possible, allowing the machinery of reunification to begin when ten percent within a state would swear allegiance to the Federal Government and emancipation. Stevens did not trust the South; and thought Lincoln's plan to be naive and undemocratic since it was based on minority compliance. For the sake of Lincoln's historical reputation, Stevens suspected that the President's pre-reconstruction death came at the right time. Stevens did not wholly approve of Lincoln's cabinet either. He was close to Chase (Secretary of Treasury) whom he had known since 1842. Chase's iob was to determine the financial needs of the country; Steven's job was to see that they were met. Stevens would not have been displeased had Chase replaced Lincoln as the presidential candidate in 1864. Stevens had liftle regard for Seward (Secretary of State),

Montgomery Blair (Postmaster General), and Edward Bates (Attorney General); Gideon Welles (Secretary of the Navy) disliked Stevens. Stevens was glad when Stanton replaced Cameron as Seccretary of War; both Stevens and Stanton believed in force and an aggressive policy, and both were to conspire against Andrew Johnson. 73

Stevens highly esteemed the Declaration of Independence and had little respect for the Constitution. He held that the Declaration's statement on the equality of man expressed or implied the objective of the Founding Fathers and the reason for the Republic. His dream was to use the unusual opportunities presented by civil war and

reconstruction to bring to full maturation the spirit and work of 1776. Because it had allowed slavery, Stevens had at best an ambivalent attitude toward the Constitution. He maintained that it had sanctified a distortion of the purpose of American government. Furthermore, in contrast to the Peace Democrats, he thought it silly

and futile trying to reconcile the extraordinary needs for martial law with the principles of the Constitution. In short, he believed the Constitution's provisions were archiac impediments to progress. In his attitude toward the Declaration of Independence he was idealistic; in the fact that he believed that the end justifies the means, to the point of undermining the government he would reform, he

was unidealistic. As it turned out, his efforts had a greater and

longer effect on the Constitution than those of most of the prominent statesmen in our history. 74

Stevens was a chief sponsor of the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment (1865) and the Fourteenth Amendment (1866); he was also an inspiration for the Fifteenth Amendment passed after his death, which disallowed any abridgement of a citizen's rights, including that of voting. In contrast to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation which freed slaves only in the states under rebellion, the Thirteenth Amendment freed all slaves, with no mention of compensation for the loss of \$3 billion in property. It was by necessity a congressional act. The Fourteenth Amendment stated that (1) all are citizens who were born or naturalized in the United States: (2) no state can deny the rights of any citizen, and where a group of citizens (e.g. Negroes) are not allowed to vote, that state's representation in the House should be reduced proportionately; (3) anyone who had once taken an oath of loyalty to the United States Government (e.g. congressmen, cabinet officials, military officers), and later supported secession, was to be disfranchised, and this could only be removed by two-thirds vote of Congress upon request; (4) the Northern debt was assured and the Southern debt repudiated. Neither Sumner nor Stevens were satisfied that section two allowed partial suffrage for the Negro, and Negro suffrage was rejected in some Northern states as well as Southern states;—this was later rectified by the Fifteenth Amendment. Stevens emphasized the second and third sections of the Fourteenth Amendment, which were essential to a continuing dominance of the Republican party. 75

Northern desire for revenge and for economic-political ascendency undoubtedly helps explain the motives and causes behind the Radicals' program of Reconstruction; but Southern arrogance and Johnson's ineptitude were also causes and aggravatives. Johnson, in common with the Radicals, had opposed secession, supported the Thirteenth Amendment, and hated the Southern planter aristocracy; however the President, in an intolerant and tactless fashion, tried to follow his predecessor's tolerant policy, without either the prestige or political dexterity of Abraham Lincoln. The later revisionist historians were to convince themselves and others that after the war Southerners were acceptant to the fact of defeat and acquiescent about emancipation. In rebuttal, it is true that Northern Republicans were sensitive to infractions; but if the Radicals were looking for excuses to subjugate the South, they had but a short time to wait. Southerners nearly ignored their status as a conquered peo-Johnson, believing only the South could knowledgeably cope with its problems, hurried to restore the Southern states to the Union before Congress was to meet in December. Little was done to humble the rebels, to create truly loyal governments, to assure no more secession, or to call a special session of Congress. In May Johnson issued a proclamation of general amnesty, with restoration of property rights except slaves, to those Confederates willing to take a loyalty oath supporting the Constitution and emancipation;

it exempted from amnesty Confederate government officials, highranking military officers, and persons owning property valued at more than twenty thousand dollars. Citizenship could be regained by obtaining a presidential pardon. In less than nine months Johnson issued almost 14,000 pardons. Recovery and building were needed, and, because of their background of experience and education, Johnson felt rather obliged to look to the old Southern leadership for assistance; and perhaps Johnson's vanity was flattered when fellow Southerners, some of whom having held him in low account, now asked him for mercy. Furthermore, Johnson's policy was based on the promise, which turned out to be erroneous, that, with the overthrow of the old regime, the masses in the South would vote for their own kind to fill governmental vacancies. Instead, the commoners, partially by habit, supported the idea of slavery and the old leadership. Consequently, the planter aristocrats and Confederate leaders captured the Johnson state governments and dominated the representation to Congress. The rebel heirarchy could come back to Congress stronger than before the bloody war, for the Negro no longer counted only three-fifths in determining a state's number of representatives to the House; thus the Southren delegation would be enhanced by nine more Congressmen than it had been entitled to in 1860. In addition, the Southern Democrats, joining with Northern Democrats, probably could eject from the White House the party which had saved the Union. By 1866 most of Johnson's

Johnson became anathema to Radicals for other reasons as well. Something of a Jeffersonian-Jacksonian, he was an anachronism. In an age of industrialism, his main concern was for the self-sufficient farmers; despite his courageous defense of the Union during the period of secession, in an age of consolidation there lingered with him a certain attachment to decentralization and states rights.

support came from Democrats.76

Though historians Milton and Rhodes maintain that Johnson was interested in the welfare of the Negroes, Johnson, a poor White from Tennessee, was an exponent of equality only as it related to his own race; and, insensitive to public opinion, he did little to assure the security of the four million ex-slaves,—a fact which alienated even the moderates among the Republicans. The legislation associated with the Radicals actually had widespread Republican support. Johnson castigated Stevens and Sumner, vetoed the Freedmen's Bureau bill and the Civil Rights bill, denounced the Fourteenth Amendment, and allowed Southern state governments to be dominated by ex-Confederates. Southern laws were aimed at keeping the Negroes in a state of semi-servitude; and there was intimidation—the Ku Klux Klan in the rural sections and mob violence in the cities. Some Northerners were understandably concerned that the war might have been fought without there resulting fundamental changes. Essential to

the cleavage between the President and the Radicals was a difference in goals: Johnson, as did Lincoln, thought in terms of a quick restoration, whereas the Radicals envisioned a reconstruction of

Southern society, its habits and institutions.78

realistic in their assessment of human nature. The war, the culmination of decades of feuding and learning to hate, was the bloodiest and most traumatic conflict in our history, a brothers' war on our soil; it caused wreckage and giant expenditures; in a total population of thirty-one and a half million, 500,000 were left maimed and scarred and 600,000 lost their lives. It is doubtful that immediately after World War II the Allies would have rejoiced had the German leaders (1933-1945) regained power; instead, in 1945 military occupation zones were established in conquered territory,—and that is what also happened under Radical Reconstruction.

Historians who seem to think that the Civil War should have been followed by a love feast and Republican nonchalance are un-

what also happened under Radical Reconstruction. A working arrangement, similar to that which existed between Lincoln and Stevens, might have been reached had Johnson and Stevens been willing to meet each other half way. In other times the seventeeth President and the Old Commoner might have been allies, for they had some similar characteristics. Both tended toward intransigency, loved the Union, resented the Southern aristocracy, fought for free public schools, and were skeptical of organized religion. In 1864 a Union (Lincoln-Johnson) ticket, rather than a Republican ticket, opposed the regular Democrats; this was designed to appeal to War Democrats as well as to Republicans. U.S. Senator Johnson of Tennessee, a Democrat, had remained pugnaciously loyal to the Union, even after the withdrawal of his state, and was considered a traitor by Confederates. He loved the Union and the Constitution, and when he died he was buried with a U.S. flag as a winding sheet and a copy of the Constitution was his pillow. Because of his past conflicts, resentments, and utterances, in April 1865 the Radicals thought he might be an ideal advocate of punitive reconstruction. He bitterly disappointed them. Johnson was generous with his old Southern foes and suffered the handicaps of being poorly educated, undignified, combative, and prone to question the integrity of those disagreeing with him. Though Johnson was willing to communicate with former rebels, Stevens' letters went unanswered. In February 1866, because of their opposition to his program, Johnson called Stevens, Sumner, and Wendell Phillips traitors and put them in the same category as the leaders of the rebellion. He also intimated that they were bent on his assassination. Back in 1864 Stevens opposed Johnson, a Southerner, being placed on the ticket,

Radicals like Stevens were able to successfully sponsor stern measures (despite the wishes of white Southerners, some Northerners and some Congressmen, the President and Supreme Court) largely because the Radicals had forceful leaders and a definite program; the moderates did not. Stevens did not trust the restoration of a state in which there was but a minority ready to comply with future loyalty. Stevens, more interested in the reconstruction of Southern society than in restoration of the former Union, would

and during their postwar conflict Stevens regarded Johnson as an alien from a foreign state, and therefore not legally President.⁷⁹

islative branch. Though a lawyer, he seemed willing to disregard as a hinderance the Constitution with its checks and balances.⁸² For the preliminary organization of the House Stevens had only the loyalist states placed on the roll, and, when the clerk, Stevens' friend James McPherson, called the names of states whose representatives should be permitted seats, those states reconstructed under the Lincoln-Johnson program were excluded. In caucus, Stevens established a fifteen member Joint-Committee on Reconstruction (nine from the House, six from the Senate), through which all bills

or resolutions on reconstruction must pass, he being one of the members from the House. Stevens fathered the First Reconstruction

have wiped out Southern state lines; he considered that area composed of conquered provinces which could be settled by new men; the rebels could leave the country and the Southern Whites remaining might be regarded as resident aliens. Believing in the rights of war, he advocated that in Dixie martial law be in effect, instead of the Constitution or civil law.⁸¹ Only Congress has authority over admission and representation of new states, and his aim was to increase the power of the national government, and especially its leg-

Act of March 1967, which was passed over Johnson's veto. It established five military districts in the South; and before states could be considered for re-entry into the Union they must hold conventions which should adopt the Fourteenth Amendment (ratified nationally by July 1868); they were supposed to accept it before it was officially the law of the land and before they were fully qualified as states to ratify a constitutional amendment; their acceptance of the amendment was counted in the number necessary for ratification. Negroes could elect and serve as delegates to the conventions; former rebels could not be voters or delegates. The South had been given reason to hope for leniency, and now felt betrayed, and Stevens was regarded by her as the most hated and hateful Yankee.⁸³

Stevens went so far as to advocate confiscation of Southern real property, a plan so extreme as to have few other supporters. In the 1850's the young Republican party was considered radical by many conservatives because it attacked the extension of slavery and therefore would compromise the rights of property, perhaps setting a dangerous precedent. By the late 1860's the majority, including most Republicans, did not accept the idea of confiscating Southern

land; there was neither a widespread desire to further endanger the sanctity of private property nor for a social revolution connected with even a distant area. Stevens calling for confiscation gave Blacks, the would be beneficiaries, false hopes, and stimulated more Southern resentment. His plan was that the government should take 394 million acres which belonged to 70,000 Southerners, each of whom possessed at least 200 acres. The freed male Negroes would each be given forty acres; the remaining 354 million acres

would each be given forty acres; the remaining 354 million acres could be sold, averaging \$10. an acre. The income from these sales should contribute to pensions for Union veterans, widows, and orphans; used to reimburse loyalists whose property had been damaged during the war; and to help reduce the national debt. The con-

fiscation might negatively affect only five to ten percent of Southern white families, and would allow the Blacks to step immediately from slavery to land ownership,—though perhaps at the cost of some resumed rebellion and injury. Stevens considered confiscation important because it would reward those persons having supported the Union cause; it would punish the major Rebels; it would help pay the national debt, largely incurred from the war for which he held the South responsible; and it was necessary for revolutionizing Southern society in that it could break the power of the Southern aristocrats which was economic in basis; and it might be more important than the franchise for giving the Blacks self-determination, economic self-reliance, and political power. One can only conjecture on the course of events and subsequent racial relationships had Stevens' plan been accepted.⁸⁴

Stevens' policies, both those implemented and those only proposed, earned him the label of revolutionist, a leader during an era which to some observers and writers seemed reminiscent of the French Revolution. He has been regarded as a fanatic leveler by conservatives; and by Marxists he has been hailed as a bourgeois revolutionist who contributed to sweeping away agrarian slavery, thereby unwittingly setting the stage for the future step of revolt by wage slaves in an industrialized nation. Writers have compared him to Robespierre, Marat, Danton, and Mirabeau.⁸⁵

Stevens in the House and Sumner in the Senate stood at the forefront in the attempt to extend civil rights, and with their passing (Stevens in 1868, Sumner in 1874) the Negroes lost their most prominent champions. The names of Stevens and Sumner have been connected as a team by historians. But the two brave giants of the Congress were not always in accord as to policy and differed greatly in personality. Sumner, whom Emerson called "the Conscience of the Senate," was neat and polished and never dropped the role of a great statesman motivated by lofty idealism; whereas the cynically frank Stevens was candid in admitting party purpose as a motive. Nevertheless Sumner respected Stevens' statesmanship, courage, and candor. Sumner, a pedantic and pompous egotist given to caustic and ornamented oratory, was more the abstractionist; Stevens' interests in the freedmen seemed the more sincere and realistic. Stevens claimed that the difference between himself and Sumner was that he worshipped his country and Sumner worshipped Sumner. Though almost killed by a Southern Congressman in the Capitol in 1856, probably Sumner felt less personal animosity toward the South than did Stevens; however the former could be more rigid and dogmatic regarding legislation; and, maybe partly because Sumner was less prone to compromise, he was not appointed by his colleagues to the Joint-Committee on Reconstruction. Sumner, to Stevens' disgust, initially opposed the Fourteenth Amendment because it

would allow a state to decide for itself on Negro franchisement; Stevens, more the pragmatist, though far from satisfied, would accept the amendment as the best that could be achieved at the moment. Stevens was theoretically opposed to segregation in schooling, but, in contrast to Sumner, did not publicly object to it because he would feel gratified to have at that time any free public school system firmly established in the South. Stevens generally favored high tariffs and inflation; Sumner leaned toward tariff reduction and the gold standard. So the famous collaborators were alike and also unalike in many ways. 68

In order to gain some desired ends in federal legislation, the more practical Radicals realized the necessity of tempering some demands. A Republican congressman from a safe district, unless he entertained aspirations to national office, did not need to be too concerned about creating a moderate image for purposes of reelection. He might however soften his stance because he realized that some compromise was needed to pass a bill or override a veto, and it was useful to parley with the moderates, who were the majority in the Joint-Committee on Reconstruction. The Radicals might take an extreme position on an issue in hopes of mustering bargaining power; and, by seeming to compromise, appear not altogether unreasonable; and their behavior might induce the conservatives to also abate their position.⁸⁷

The average Radical was forty-five years old, with a Whig background, and often came from New England or the Mid-Atlantic region or the Midwest. The average non-Radical was forty-three years of age, of varying political background, and was from a border state or the Midwest or the Mid-Atlantic region.⁸⁸

years of age, of varying political background, and was from a border state or the Midwest or the Mid-Atlantic region. The Radicals were an element composed of groups differing in intensities and respective goals. According to Professor David Donald, key votes of House members in the Thirty-ninth Congress indicate that, by February 1867, there were seventy-two Radical Republicans in that chamber: twelve were ultra-Radicals unwilling to compromise; forty-seven, following Stevens' lead, were compara-

tively disciplined, and, when necessary, would compromise; thirteen

were independent Radicals. In addition, twenty-five members were uncommitted or often did not vote; thirty-three were moderates (including one Democrat); thirteen were conservatives; and fortythree were Democrats. In voting on economic questions, the Radicals usually followed geographic considerations, not party lines. Among famous Radicals, Stevens, Wade, and Chandler were for high tariff; Chase favored lower tariff; Stevens, Wade, and Butler favored inflation; Sumner, Chandler, Julian, and Chase opposed inflation. In some districts Republican congressional candidates took political risk in advocating Negro suffrage. During the War the Republican party had a moderate-conservative wing and a more radical wing; Seward and Lincoln belonged to the former; the latter was led by Stevens in the House, Sumner in the Senate, Greeley in the press, and Wendell Phillips in the pulpit. Both groups were for the Union and industrialization, but the second element was also interested in greater social equality. The older Radicals tended to more emo-

tionally committed to uplifting the Negroes and smashing the South-

ern autocracy. The younger Radicals supported the program largely for the sake of expediency; the younger Radicals, enthusiasts for industrial capitalism, were primarily concerned with effecting economic and political changes; to them Negro emancipation and voting rights were not so much a part of a faith as they were a weapon. The younger men did not have a long history of suffering for the Abolitionist cause.⁸⁹

Stevens and other Radicals were prepared to make the Constitution, with its checks and balances, a dead letter, and to develop a government which would copy the British system, wherein the Congress (parliament) could dominate and the President (king) would be merely a figurehead; Congress should be supreme because it is (theoretically) more directly representative of the popular will.90 Likewise Stevens believed that the Supreme Court should not hinder the desires of Congress; he was particularly concerned that the judicial branch not take jurisdiction in any case arising from legislation concerning Reconstruction. Stevens was critical of the Court in Ex Parte Milligan (1866), which stated that, where civil courts are available, military tribunals should not be the bodies which try civilians. This struck at the concept of military reconstruction of the South. The angry Stevens masterminded bills which took decisions on Reconstruction away from the Court and recognized the South as conquered foreign territory. Partly as a result of intimidation, the Supreme Court played a passive role during most of the Reconstruction era.91

Congress passed laws insulting to the President, laws which were probably unconstitutional. The Command of the Army Act (connected with an appropriations bill) prohibited the President (the Commander-in-Chief) from issuing orders to the army except through the Commanding General, and this was Grant, who supported military control of the South. The Tenure of Office Act forbade the President to remove civil officials, including inet officials, without the consent of the Senate: but would apply only to the term of the President by whom they had been appointed Since Johnson was pugnacious, the Radicals were hoping that he would break these laws, thereby giving them the excuse to bring him to trial (impeachment) and, if he were convicted, remove him from office. Secretary of War Stanton, an ally of the Radicals, was particularly important to them as head of the military. Johnson dismissed Stanton, who at first refused to give up his office. Stanton's dismissal was held to be a violation of the Tenure of Office Act, though it likely was not; Lincoln had appointed Stanton, not Johnson. The House framed and presented to the

Thomas Nast portrays the Radicals politically killing Johnson, the bogus Caesar. Stevens is in the right background. Also see Mr. Jolly's book review of The Art and Politics of Thomas Nast, page 72 of this issue.



Tenure of Office Act, the ninth with violation of the Command of the Army Act, the tenth accused the President of defaming Congress in his speeches and bringing it into popular disrespect, and the eleventh of not faithfully executing the Reconstruction laws. Johnson would be removed from office if two-thirds of the Senators had voted him guilty. The Senate was Republican dominated. Had Johnson been found guilty, the president pro tempore of the Senate, Ben Wade, would have become the new President. The fact of Wade being next in line did nothing to help the Radicals gain support for ousting Johnson. Wade had too many opponents: he was tactless, and was considered a thoroughgoing radical, he was not only interested in rights for Negroes but also in giving voting rights to women and higher wages to laborers. The trial, beginning in March 1868, wore on for two months and was a national spectacle. It was conducted with dignity, Chief Justice Chase presiding. Five lawyers (including William Evarts) represented Johnson; seven managers were chosen by the House to present the charges, among them were Stevens, Ben Butler, and John Logan (founder of Memorial Day). Stevens was so faded in health that he had to be borne into Congress in a chair, as if he were its pontiff; his spirit seemed to be the one factor keeping him alive. Eyes were on him, and though he spoke little he guided the proceedings with signals. His speech had brevity but added little in solid argument. The coarse Butler was the most active of the managers. Insofar as dealing with constitutional and legal issues, the defense had the advantage; the only thing that could really be proven was that Johnson did not get along with Congress. Pressure was applied to Senators who might be pivotal; some of them courageously voted for acquital, realizing that it would likely damage their political careers; Senator Ross, for example, was such a "profile in courage." The call for conviction lost by one vote; — that one vote saved the Presidency from being reduced to a figurehead position which could function only at the pleasure of Congress. A precedent was not established, Johnson was not removed, and the Presidency was saved.92 Stories persist that Stevens and his program were influenced

Senate, the constitutional body to hear impeachment proceedings, eleven charges against Johnson: eight dealt with violation of the

Stories persist that Stevens and his program were influenced directly or indirectly by a Negro mistress, who was ultimately buried by his side in a Negro cemetary. This erroneous rumor owes its circulation largely to Dixon's book and the movie "Birth of a Nation." In the movie a dusky "Lydia Brown" flits between "Stoneman" (Stevens) and her colored co-conspirators; she is obviously his confidante and advisor. Lydia Hamilton Smith, a mulatto widow, was for twenty years Stevens' housekeeper, and assumed by gossips and the press to be his mistress. He was accused of using his servant for pleasure, not unlike the practice of some slaveholders who Stevens deplored. Bowers, Sandburg, Brock, Carter, Hershenson, and Brodie do not quarrel with this interpretation of their relationship; Howard, Milton, and Coulter are explicit; but Meltzer,



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McKitrick, Korngold, and Bennett emphasize that nothing was ever proven. Stevens merely denied any paternity relating to his servants; he did not disavow the innuendos about a liaison with his housekeeper, nor did he sue for libel. He insisted that she be called "Mrs. Smith" and hired the well-known artist Jacob Eichholtz to paint her portrait during her early employment; this

regard seems unusual. Lydia Smith was fathered by a white man; she married the Negro Jacob Smith and bore him two sons, William and Isaac. Her husband was buried in Gettysburg. She began working for Stevens as a young widow in 1848; Lydia Smith was thirty-five and Stevens fifty-six. She received \$5000. from his estate

and she survived him by sixteen years. The only known photograph

of her shows her in old age. Stevens is buried in Shreiner's Cemetary (Lancaster) beside his nephew Thad; Lydia Smith is buried in St. Mary's Catholic Cemetary (Lancaster) near her sons. The worn tombstone inscription gives this information: "LYDIA HAMILTON, Relict of Jacob Smith. For many years the trusted housekeeper of Hon. Thaddeus Stevens. Born at Gettysburg, Penna., on St. Valentine's Day, 1813. Died at Washington D. C., on St. Valentine's Day, 1884."93



Lydia Hamiiton Smith, a photograph made after Stevens' death in 1868.

Stevens' health worsened as he suffered from the ravages of old age, and he succumbed in Washington D. C., August 11, 1868 as the bells began tolling midnight. Though some white Southerners were pleased, and President Johnson made no official notice of the passing, nevertheless throughout the North the death and rites received wide attention. Stevens was embalmed under the direction of the Surgeon-General; and, as Lincoln had been three years

coffin was positioned in front of a statue of the late martyred President; and 6000 persons filed through to view the remains of the man who had recently been the most conspicuous member of the House of Representatives. The train bearing the body stopped by Harrisburg and York; minute guns were fired. He then laid in state at his home in Lancaster; and services were held there and at the graveside. Accompanied by tolling bells, the procession moved from the residence up S. Queen to center square, east on King to Lime to Chestnut, then down Chestnut to the cemetary on the corner of W. Chestnut and N. Mulberry. Between fifteen and twenty thousand persons were in attendance, almost half of whom were Negroes. 94 At least one writer has indicated that Stevens was buried in a Catholic cemetery, and several writers, including some eminent historians, have stated that he was interred in a Negro cemetery. These are inaccurate reports, probably based on rumors. The cemetery was not intended to be, nor has it been, a Negro cemetery. Martin Shreiner (a clock maker and manufacturer of fine engines, who died in 1866) established a cemetery across from his home in 1836. In contrast to some burial places, there was no restriction based on race. Only suicides were excluded. According to Judge Charles I. Landis (Lancaster judge, Republican, and local historian), by the year 1924, of the several hundred persons buried in Shreiner's Cemetery, only six were colored; at the time of Stevens' rites there was only one Negro, John Johnson, buried in the cemetery.95 The epitaph, written by Stevens and often noted, reads "I repose in this quiet and secluded spot, Not from any natural preference for solitude But, finding other Cemeteries limited as to Race by Charter Rules, I have chosen this that I might illustrate in my death The Principles which I advocated Through a long life: EQUALITY OF MAN BEFORE HIS CREATOR." Actually, Stevens took for granted racial equality before God; he was really more concerned with establishing equality in human affairs.96

earlier, laid in state in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. The body was enshrouded in a black suit with a scarf around the neck; the

James Blaine whispered at Stevens' bier that the death meant emancipation for the Republican party. Indeed as Stevens and the other old Radicals passed from the scene a new breed was coming to the fore,—politicians such as Blaine and Conkling, committed to the industrial community, appealing to party loyality and memories of the war, more interested in spoils than in positive and implemented legislation. The Gilded Age and Grantism had really arrived.⁹⁷

Stevens' efforts had brought a highwater mark to Reconstruction; and his passing quickened the decline of a controversial and remarkable period for which he was the incarnate symbol. He was a Jeffersonian in that he had more respect for the Declaration of Independence and its statement concerning equality than he did for the Constitution (which had tolerated slavery and provided

checks to Congressional hegemony). Yet he was something of a Hamiltonian in his contempt for the Southern landed aristocrats and slavery, and in his interest in industrialization, strong central government, and the British parliamentary system. He was a complicated person—bitter and witty, vindictive and compassionate, idealistic (in goals) and pragmatic (in means). His historical reputation will perhaps change as emphases and interpretations change, but one thing is certain, historians, as did his contemporaries, will have to continue reckoning with and trying to explain the Old Commoner.

NOTES

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⁷⁸ Stampp, Reconstruction, pp. 36, 49, 56, 113; Donald, "Why They Impeached Johnson," American Heritage, VIII (December 1956), pp. 22, 102, 103; Strout, "One Hundred Years Ago," New Republic, 154 (February 12, 1966), p. 17; Milton, Age of Hate, p. 286; Rhodes, History, VI, p. 27; Beale, Critical Year, p. 139; Allen, Reconstruction, p. 34; Lawanda Cox and John H. Cox, Politics, Principle, and Prejudice, 1865-1866 (London, 1963), p. 202; Donald, Politics of Reconstruction, p. 20; Lomask, Johnson, p. 274.

¹⁹ Hershenson, "Stevens," Lincoln Herald, 55 (Summer 1953), pp. 34, 35; Carter, Angry Scar, p. 101; Oberholtzer, History of United States, I, 38, 65-66, 405; Brodie, Stevens, pp. 218-219; Fleming, Sequel of Appomatox, pp. 71, 72; McPherson, Struggle for Equality, p. 363; Burgess, Reconstruction and Constitution, p. 67; Franklin, Reconstruction, p. 69; Patrick, Reconstruction, pp. 69, 130; Henry, Reconstruction, p. 159; Lomask, Johnson, p. 97; Rhodes, History, V, p. 543; Stryker, Johnson, pp. 122, 123; Dewitt, Impeachment and Trial of Johnson, p. 3.

** Fleming, Sequel of Appomatox, pp. 122-123, 172-173; Brock, American Crisis, p. 291; Winston, Johnson, p. 316; Woodley, Great Leveler, p. 268; Rhodes, History, VI, p. 34; Milton, Age of Hate, p. 278; Meltzer, Stevens and Fight for Negro Rights, p. xi; McKitrick, Johnson and Reconstruction, pp. 99n, 100; Brown, "Pennsylvania and Rights of the Negro," Pennsylvania History, XXVIII (January 1961), p. 48.

si Stryker, Johnson, pp. 136, 158; Bowers, Tragic Era, p. 160; Woodburn, "Stevens' Attitude Toward the Conduct of the War," American Historical Review, 12 (April 1907), p. 581; Brock, American Crisis, p. 176; Beale, Critical Year, p. 149; Dewitt, Impeachment and Trial of Johnson, p. 27; Woodburn, Stevens, p. 232; Henry, Reconstruction, p. 34; Oberholtzer, History of United States, I, p. 155; Randall and Donald, Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 552-553; Horace L. Haldeman, "Thaddeus Stevens and the Southern States," Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society, XVII (1913), p. 159.

⁸² Josephson, Politicos, p. 21; Lomask, Johnson, p. 238; Oberholtzer, History of United States, I, p. 465.

⁸³ Rhodes, History, V, p. 544; Trefousse, Radical Republicans, pp. 325-326; Oberholtzer, History of United States, I, pp. 150-152, 162; Dunning, Reconstruction, pp. 92-93; DuBois, Black Reconstruction, p. 126; Carter, Angry Scar, pp. 100, 104; Henry, Reconstruction, p. 49; McKitrick, Johnson and Reconstruction, pp. 264-265; Strout, "One Hundred Years Ago," New Republic, 154 (February 12, 1966), p. 17.

**Bowers, Tragic Era, p. 159; E. Merton Coulter, The South during Reconstruction, 1865-1877 (Baton Rouge, 1947), p. 69; Craven, Reconstruction, pp. 138, 139, 141; Woodburn, Stevens, p. 533; Beale, "Rewriting," American Historical Review, XLV (1940), pp. 818-819; Carter, Angry Scar, pp. 104, 234; Patrick, Reconstruction, p. 91; McPherson, Struggles for Equality, pp. 408, 416; Cox and Cox, Politics, Principle, and Prejudice, p. 208; Korngold, Stevens, p. 284; Woodley, Great Leveler, p. 360; Stampp, Reconstruction, p. 127; DuBois, Black Reconstruction, pp. 185, 197, 198; Beale, Critical Year, p. 335n; McKitrick, Johnson and Reconstruction, p. 60; Hacker, American Capitalism, p. 353; John A. Garraty, The American Nation (N.Y., 1968), p. 439.

- 88 Bowers, Tragic Era, pp. 67, 72, 74; Dewitt, Impeachment and Trial of Johnson, p. 26; Brodie, Stevens, p. 368; Harris, Review of Political Conflict, pp. iii, 457; Franklin, Reconstruction, p. 76; Allen, Reconstruction, pp. 20-24, 26, 34, 40, 67; Dixon, Clansman, p. 40; Georges Clemenceau, American Reconstruction, 1865-1870 (N.Y., 1928), pp. 224-227; Korngold, Stevens, p. ix; Winston, Johnson, p. 318; Hensel, "Christiana Riot," Papers and Addresses of Lan-
- caster County Historical Society, XV (1911), p. 46; Josephson, Politicos, p. 19; Hacker, American Capitalism, pp. 340, 347; Lawson, Stevens, p. 3; Williams, Lincoln and Radicals, pp. 6, 199; Clemenceau was a young reporter for the Paris Le Temps, and he admired Stevens.
- 85 DuBois, Black Reconstruction, pp. 191, 294-295; Bennett, "Pioneers," Ebony, XX (February 1965), pp. 123, 130; Milton, Age of Hate, pp. 34, 262; Rhodes, History, V. p. 543; Dewitt, Impeachment and Trial of Johnson, p. 600; Dunning, Reconstruction, p. 87; Strout, "One Hundred Years Ago," New Republic, 154 (February 12, 1966), p. 17; Craven, Reconstruction, p. 139; Patrick, Reconstruction, p. 54; Woodley, Great Leveler, p. 434; Brodie, Stevens, pp. 268-270, 320; Stampp, Reconstruction, p. 106; Korngold, Stevens, p. 332; Fleming,
- 87 Cox and Cox, Politics, Principle, and Prejudice, p. 208; Donald, Politics of Reconstruction, pp. 576, 631; Stampp, Reconstruction, p. 110; Craven, Reconstruction, p. 141: Stevens won re-election to Congress with the following percentages: 1862-62.5, 1864-61.6, 1866-62.2.

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- 80 Donald, Politics of Reconstruction, pp. 62-63, 66; Linden, "Radicals and
- Economic Policies," Civil War History, 13 (March 1967), p. 65; Trefousse, Radical Republicans, pp. 25, 26, 60, 333; Cox and Cox "Negro Suffrage," Southern History, XXXIII (August 1967), p. 371; Hacker, American Capitalism, pp. 339-
- 90 Beale, Critical Year, p. 213; Henry, Reconstruction, pp. 184, 213; Wililams, Lincoln and Radicals, p. 82; Lomask, Johnson, p. 238; Hershenson, "Stevens," Lincoln Herald, 55 (Summer 1953), p. 35; Brodie, Stevens, p. 293.
- ⁹¹ Brodie, Stevens, pp. 290, 304-305, 323; Lomask, Johnson, p. 241; Henry, Reconstruction, p. 274; Stampp, Reconstruction, p. 146n; Morison and Commager, American Republic, II, p. 39.
- ⁹² Blum et al, The National Experience: A History of the United States (N.Y., 1968), pp. 380-382; Morison and Commager, American Republic, II, pp.
- 34-38; Brodie Stevens, pp. 337-357; Lomask, Johnson, pp. 272, 313, 314; Dixon, Clansman, pp. 171-172; Stampp, Reconstruction, p. 152; Franklin, Reconstruction, p. 72; Trefousse, Radical Republicans, pp. 396-397; Korngold, Stevens, pp. 424-425.
- ⁸³ Sandburg, Lincoln, p. 274; Brock, American Crisis, p. 79; Bowers, Tragic Era, p. 81; Hershenson, "Stevens," Lincoln Herald, 55 (Summer 1953), p. 30; Carter, Angry Scar, p. 100; Brodie, Stevens, pp. 86-93; Howard, "Plot to Impeach Johnson," Mankind, I (October 1968), p. 13; Milton, Age of Hate, p. 264; Coulter, South during Reconstruction, p. 119; Meltzer, Stevens and Fight for Negro Rights, p. 75; McKitrick, Johnson and Reconstruction, p. 263; Korngold, Stevens, pp. 72-76; Bennett, "Pioneers," Ebony, XX (February 1965), pp. 126, 128; Landis, "Refutation," Papers and Addresses of Lancaster County Histori-
- cal Society, XXVIII (1924), p. 50; Dixon, Clansman, p. 57,
- Patrick, Reconstruction, pp. 130-131; Brock, American Crisis, pp. 281-282; Brodie, Stevens, p. 366; Korngold, Stevens, p. 440; Lomask, Johnson, p. 343; Bowers, Tragic Era, pp. 220-223; Woodley, Great Leveler, pp. 410-412;
- Stampp, Reconstruction, p. 189; Hershenson, "Stevens," Lincoln Herald, 55 (Summer 1953), pp. 28-29; Lancaster Express, August 18, 1868, The New York Times contains a critical but penetrating analysis of Stevens' political legacy.
- ⁹⁶ Beers, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pa.), April 8, 1970; Lomask, Johnson, p. 343; Henry, Reconstruction, p. 334; DuBois, Reconstruction, p. 344;

there were no discriminatory provisions regarding race.

**McCall, Stevens, p. 353; Lomask, Johnson, p. 343; Patrick, Reconstruction, pp. 130-131; Henry, Reconstruction, p. 334; Brock, American Crisis, pp. 281-282; Woodley, Great Leveler, pp. 414-415; Korngold, Stevens, p. 441; Brodie, Stevens, p. 366; Howard, "Plot to Impeach Johnson," Mankind, I (October 1968), p. 13; Bennett, "Pioneers," Ebony, p. 130; Hood, "Stevens," Biographical History of Lancaster County, p. 597; Morison and Commager, American Republic, II, p. 28n.

**Brodie, Stevens, p. 366; Bowers, Tragic Era, p. 223; The New York Times, August 13, 1868; Paul H. Buck, The Road to Reunion (Boston, 1937), p. 88; Franklin, Reconstruction, p. 9; Trefousse, Radical Republicans, pp. 229, 399.

Stampp, Reconstruction, p. 104; Trefousse, Radical Republicans, p. 30; Bennett, "Pioneers," Ebony, XX (February 1965), p. 130; Morison and Commager, American Republic, II, p. 28n; Thomas A. Bailey, The American Pageant (Boston, 1966), p. 469; Russell, Francis, The American Heritage History of the Confident Years, The Period Between the Civil War and World War I (N.Y., 1969), p. 47; Landis, "Refutation," Papers and Addresses of Lancaster County Historical Society, XXVIII (1924), p. 50; Tombstone Inscriptions from Graveyards in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, vol. 8 (Lancaster, 1941), p. 1; it is difficult to be certain whether Landis' figures are correct, however the important point is that the cemetery was not designed to be ssolely for Whites or Blacks. and

Michigan State University, and is currently engaged in advanced graduate study with the University of Michigan. He has taught in Michigan and at Lebanon Valley College, Pa. (1964-66), and, since 1966, has been on the faculty of Millersville State College.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

James A. Jolly, Associate Professor of History, received his A.B. degree from Central Michigan University and the M.A. degree from