

THE AGE OF WILLIAM A. DUNNING:
THE REALM OF MYTH MEETS THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD

by

Kathleen P. Barsalou

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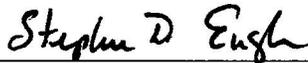
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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisor, Dr. Stephen D. Engle, Department of History, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:



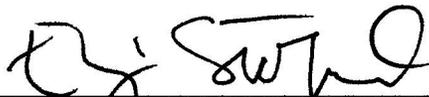
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Dissertation Advisor



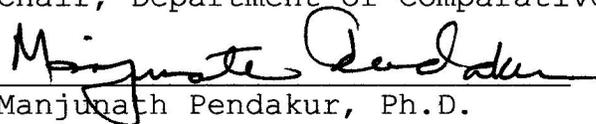
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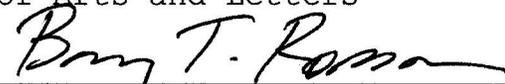
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Manjunath Pendakur, Ph.D.
Dean, The Dorothy F. Schmidt College
Of Arts and Letters



Barry T. Rosson, Ph.D.
Dean, Graduate College

11-4-08
Date

ABSTRACT

Author: Kathleen P. Barsalou
Title: The Age of William A. Dunning:
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Stripped of the intent of its author, L. Frank Baum, the children's fairy tale *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was left to be understood only within a changing cultural construct. Historian Hayden White, arguing that the similarities between a novel and a work of history were more significant than their differences, insisted that history was preeminently a subsection of literature. According to White, historical narratives were manifestly verbal fictions, and the only acceptable grounds upon which the historian should choose

his historical perspective were the moral and the aesthetic. White conflated historical consciousness with myth and blurred the boundary that had long divided history from fiction. Just as changing cultural concerns infused the Dorothy of Baum's children's literature with meaning so social, cultural, and moral imperatives came to dictate the content of historical stories particularly in the historiography of the Reconstruction era. The twenty first century conception of Reconstruction is different from the conception influential at the start of the twentieth. In assessing the scholarship of William A. Dunning, contemporary historians have adopted a new paradigm when describing the scholar's Reconstruction accounts. Modern commentators reject Dunning's authorial intention and the contextual framework needed to define it. Thus, Dunning has receded into the "realm of myth." Careful attendance to Dunning's historical context, contemporary audience, and his authorial intent, will reposition the perspective for analysis of Dunning's work. Removing Dunning from abstract analysis will allow historians to arrive at an understanding of his work, and view the importance of the real Dunning, rather than the fabricated image constructed from a partial and even fragmented reading of his work.

Taking Dunning on his own terms restores a meaningful past and brings into bas-relief the tremendous advances the U. S. of twenty first century has made in reshaping social and political patterns. Taking the Reconstruction era on its own terms impels historians to move beyond Dunning and return in their research to revisit primary records and documents as they work to clear the grisly ground of Reconstruction historiography for further fruitful examination.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Chapter

1. The Age of Oz: A New Intellectual Climate. 25

2. The Making of History: A New Intellectual
Triumverate 44

3. The Divine Spark: Dunning in his Time 65

4. A New Era: Dunning and his Epoch 87

5. Dunning's Disciples: a Voice for the South 104

6. Dunning's Reconstruction. 125

7. Dunning and the Negro 145

8. The Deconstruction of Reconstruction. 164

9. Contempt for the Centuries: From Methodology
to Mythology. 181

10. Point of Departure: Meaningfulness and the
Framework of Context 196

11. The Realm of Myth: Historical Narrative as
Verbal Fiction 219

Conclusion 235

Appendix 241

Selected Bibliography 248

INTRODUCTION

In 1900, L. Frank Baum wrote *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Reading the adventures of the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion calls to the mind's eye a country of distinctive geography filled with vivid colors, quirky characters, and of course a marvelous city. The imaginative tale was an instant success. It became the best selling children's story of the 1900 Christmas season, and by 1939, an estimated 80 million people had read the book. One of the fifteen best-selling novels of the twentieth century, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* has been translated into twenty-two languages, published in overwhelming numbers, and has never been out of print. It launched a highly successful series of children's books based on the Oz theme and a number of theatrical productions, as well as the 1939 cinematic extravaganza, *The Wizard of Oz*,

produced by MGM and starring Judy Garland, which has come to displace the original Oz tale.¹

Baum introduced his tale as one that was an intentional departure from the classic fairy tales such as those written for earlier generations of young children by the Grimm brothers and Hans Christian Andersen. Baum eschewed moral lessons claiming "the modern child seeks only entertainment in its wonder-tales," and announced his aim for a new style of fairy tale. "Having this thought in mind," wrote Baum, "the story of 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz' was written solely to pleasure children of today." He added that "It aspires to being a modernized fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heart-aches and nightmares are left out."²

Oz met with rave reviews at the time of its original publication, with the *New York Times* declaring the work to be "something new in the place of the old winged fairies... [which] rises far above the average

¹ L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. In *The Wizard of Oz and Who He Was*, eds., Martin Garner and Russell B. Nye, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994) 53; Paul Nathanson, *Over the Rainbow: The Wizard of Oz as a Secular Myth of America* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 4.

²L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. In *The Wizard of Oz and Who He Was*, eds., Martin Garner and Russell B. Nye, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994) 53.

children's book of today. . . ." At the time of Baum's death in 1919 the paper honored him, contending that "though the children cannot clamor for the newest Oz book, the crowding generations will plead for the old ones."³ Baum's work, however, met with critical neglect. Despite its position as a best seller, little mention of Baum or his story appeared in major contemporary magazines, nor did the tale find a spot on recommended reading lists. And although *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* has long been America's best known and loved native fairy tale, aside from an obscure 1929 monograph by Edward Wagenknecht, and a brief magazine article by James Thurber written in 1934, no recognition of its singularity as America's first original fairy tale can be found in recent histories of children's books. Today, critics of juvenile literature and librarians largely ignore it or charge that it was poorly written.⁴

In 1938, however, the political climate that prevailed in the years preceding World War II sent

³*New York Times* (New York), 8 September 1900, May 1919.

⁴Martin Gardner. "The Royal Historian of Oz," in *The Wizard of Oz and Who He Was*, eds., Martin Gardner and Russel B. Nye, (East Lansing; Michigan State University Press, 1994) 19; Edward Wagenknecht, *Utopia Americana* (Seattle: University of Washington Book Store, 1929), 12, 13; James Thurber, "The Wizard of Chittenango," *The New Republic* (12 December 1934): 141; Michael Patrick Hearn, *The Annotated Wizard of Oz* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1973), 67, 68, 76, 77.

librarians scurrying to ban copies of *Oz*. Librarians in the New York Public Library banished the tome from the children's reading room. They found a "socialist structure" in *Oz*: an "anarchistic culture" that was an "approximation of the Marxist dream."⁵ Twenty years later in the age of Joseph McCarthy, the Detroit library system's director declared that the quiet utopia of Baum's *Oz* was surely something other than what it seemed. Claiming the book to be "of no value," and branding *Oz* as a story that encouraged a "negativism" that "mislead[s] minds to accept a cowardly approach to life," he announced that the library had no intention of carrying copies of Baum's book.⁶ In 1961, the *California Villager* published an article charging Baum of harboring Communist inclinations. The specter of censorship caused a furor in the nation's press, and it seemed that the honeymoon-like whirlwind of popularity had ended.⁷

Not until 1964 did any serious literary critics return to Baum's work. Henry M. Littlefield was the first historian to strip the book of authorial intent and to analyze it as political satire. His work spearheaded a number of critical studies of the book

⁵Hearn, 75.

⁶Ibid, 76.

⁷Ibid, 75, 76.

based on the premise that Baum, in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* had interpreted his own time allegorically. Using this theory, a close reading found metaphors that reflected issues pertinent to Baum's day, particularly in terms of the Populist movement, the Agrarian myth, and the monetary debate of the late nineteenth century. For example, in Baum's use of colors, Littlefield found the metaphor of bimetallism: the Good Witch of the North ordered Dorothy to don magical silver slippers (reflecting the silver issue), to set them to the yellow brick road (alluding to William Jennings Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech), and to walk to the capital city Oz (the abbreviation for ounce, one unit of measure of the worth of gold and silver bullion), a city of brilliant, glimmering emerald green (the promise of the greenback). There, Dorothy surely would find the solutions to her problems and obtain her wish to return to Kansas.⁸

⁸ Henry M. Littlefield's essay first appeared in Henry M. Littlefield, "The Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism," *Atlantic Quarterly* 16, 1 (Spring, 1964), 47-58. This citation refers to the essay's publication in Henry M. Littlefield, "The Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism" in *Things in the Driver's Seat: Readings in Popular Culture*, Harry Russell Huebel, ed. (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing, 1972), 34-45; Ranjit S. Dighe, ed., *The Historian's Wizard of Oz: Reading L. Frank Baum's Classic as a Political and Monetary Allegory* (West Port, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 2002), x; For various analyses of Baum's novel see, Hugh Rockoff, "The 'Wizard of Oz' as a Monetary Allegory," *The Journal of Political Economy* 98, 4 (Aug, 1990), 739-760; Gretchen Ritter, "Silver Slippers and a Golden Cap: L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and Historical Memory in American Politics,"

Alas, just as Dorothy on her return trip to Kansas lost her silver slippers over the Great Plains of the American mid-west, so, with the twentieth century's turn, did Dorothy lose more of the original character Baum intended for her in the original. In 2007, a theatrical production brought to the American public a new Dorothy Gale. The play *Dorothy* featured "Dottie" Gale, fifteen years after her Oz odyssey, working as a social worker in a homeless shelter. This twenty-first century interpretation of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* elicited negative response from reviewers, with one headline screeching, "The Yellow Brick Road leads to a homeless shelter."⁹ Stripped of authorial intent, the reconstruction of Baum's children's fairy tale is left to the play's author, and to the mind of its readers and such investigators who, within a contemporary cultural construct, would give it meaningfulness.¹⁰

Journal of American Studies 31, no. 2 (1997) 171; Fred Erisman, "L. Frank Baum and the Progressive Dilemma," *American Quarterly* 20, 3 (Autumn 1968), 616, 623; Stuart Culver, "What Manikins Want: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz and the Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows," *Representations* 21 (Winter, 1988), 97-116;.

⁹ *Palm Beach Daily News*, 9 April 2007; *The Palm Beach Post*, 15 April 2007; Review in *The Palm Beach Post*. 18 April 2007.

¹⁰In *Metaphors We Live By*, linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explained this phenomenon using a theory they described as a "contextual system." Characterized by the notion that the presence of meaning must be predicated on the existence of context, this semiotic theory served to explain the manner in which those in different environments of changing historical, political and

In 1913, William A. Dunning argued that the "reconstruction of history" was always in the mind of the investigator. He warned that new achievements in scholarship afforded by the accumulation of historical knowledge might result in a "contempt for the centuries," that would intoxicate historians "with our superiority over the luckless generations that preceded us." Disdain for historical personages and their careers, as well as the ideas and lessons of the past, would cause them to recede into a "realm of myth." According to Dunning, this transformation not only would render historical figures and their ideas scarcely recognizable to themselves, but also would serve to "contradict the deductions that were once drawn from them." But, just as Baum and his book of children's literature lost original meaning when loosed from its moorings of authorial intent, so Dunning and his scholarship receded into the realm of myth as the passage of time, changes in culture and social concerns,

cultural contexts not only infuse the story with meaningfulness, but also interpret and subject it to the concerns unique to their own time. In *Mythologies*, linguist Roland Barthes suggested that language in literature was merely a system of codes used to hide certain social, economic, or political forces and propagate a specific worldview or ideology. George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 6; Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

and ideology obscured the context and intention of its author.¹¹

Few United States historians of the late nineteenth century were more influential than Dunning. In his own time, Dunning held a preeminent place among those engaged in the study of European History, political theory, and historical methodology. Like the German-American historian Francis Lieber before him, Dunning believed history and political science to be inseparable, and like Lieber he can be classified as both a political philosopher and a historian. Leadership in scholarly work won him accolades in both fields.¹²

One of the founders of the American Historical

¹¹All quotations found in William A. Dunning, "Truth in History," *The American Historical Review* 19, 2 (Jan. 1914), 220, 221, 222, 226, 227.

¹²R. Gordon Hoxie, *A History of the Faculty of Political Science, Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 215; J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton, "Introduction," in *Truth in History and Other Essays*, William A. Dunning (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), xi, xvii; Charles Edward Merriam, "William Archibald Dunning," in *American Masters of Social Science*, Howard W. Odum ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927), 131, 132; Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *Southern History in the Making: Pioneer Historians of the South* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 150, 156, 158, 161, 164; Howard W. Odum, "Pioneers and Masters of Social Science," in *American Masters of Social Science*, Howard W. Odum ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927), 3, 4; *New York Times*, 26 August 1922; *Springfield Sunday Republican*, 27 August 1922; *Columbia Alumni News*, Vol. XIV, no. I (1922), 7, in William A. Dunning Papers, Columbia University Archives, Butler Library, Columbia University; "Historical News," *American Historical Review* 28, 1 (October, 1922): 173.

Association, Dunning served as member of its Executive Council, and as chairman of its committee on publication. He represents the first generation of American professional historians for whom the university supplied the institutional setting for professional scholarship, and he was responsible for the implementation of defined standards and goals within the historical guild in the U. S. Dunning's work reflected the extensive organization and professionalization of research that was one consequence of the worldwide historical movement sweeping the intellectual landscape of the nineteenth century.¹³

As an original member of the American Political Science Association, Dunning not only frequently contributed to the *Political Science Quarterly*, but also served among its most estimable advisors, rendering noteworthy service as managing editor of the organization for nine years. His scholarship in the related fields of government and history was recognized by the double honor of being elected to the presidency

¹³Hamilton, xi, xvii; Odum, 3, 4.

of both the American Historical Association and the American Political Science Association.¹⁴

A New Jersey native, Dunning's tenure at Columbia University spanned four decades. In 1889, appointment to the faculty of political science, with only a brief interruption for study in a German university, began a Columbia professorship which culminated in his selection as the first holder of the Francis Lieber Professorship of History and Political Philosophy, a position he held until his death in 1922. Highly regarded as political theorist, political scientist, and educator of a generation of students of European and U. S. History, Dunning was revered at the time of his death. Nevertheless, historians of the second half of the twentieth century remembered him not for his scholarship and career in these disciplines but instead solely for his account of America's Reconstruction period.¹⁵

¹⁴*Columbia Alumni News*, 7, in William A. Dunning Papers, Columbia University Archives, Butler Library, Columbia University.

¹⁵ Walter L. Fleming and others, *Studies in Southern History and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914); Charles Edward Merriam, Harry Elmer Barnes, eds., *A History of Political Theories, Recent Times*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1924); "Historical News," *American Historical Review* 28, 1 (October, 1922): 173; Phillip R. Muller, "Look Back without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," *The Journal of American History* 61, 2; (September 1974): 325, 326, 327; *New York Times*, 26 August 1922; *Springfield Sunday Republican*, 27 August 1922; *Columbia Alumni News*, Vol. XIV, no. I (1922), 7, in William A. Dunning Papers, Columbia University Archives, Butler Library, Columbia University.

In 1897, Dunning wrote *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction*. The culmination of more than a decade of research and writing, *Essays* represented his most important contribution to the historical understanding of the period he considered an unprecedented constitutional problem. His "Prefatory Note," stated his intention to write an account of the Civil War for the "younger generation of reading men at the present day" for whom the "military history of the Civil War is familiar or readily accessible; the constitutional and political history is neither." "Reconstruction," he said, was a term that represented to most people "merely a synonym for bad government, and conveys no idea of the profound problems of statecraft that had to be solved between 1865 and 1870." With this collection of essays Dunning intended to remedy this situation: "If in any degree they shall have contributed, either through statement, implication, or even omission, to throw light on the actual history of the time with which they deal, the end of the collection will have been attained."¹⁶

In 1907, Dunning contributed *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877* to the twenty-seven

¹⁶William Archibald Dunning, *Essays on Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1897), vii, viii.

volume series "The American Nation" edited by Harvard's Albert Bushnell Hart. In its preface Dunning noted that the "social, economic, and political forces that wrought positively for progress are to be found in the record, not of the vanquished, but of the victorious section." He declared that "In this record there is less that is spectacular, less that is pathetic, and more that seems inexcusably sordid than in the record of the South; but moral and dramatic values must not have greater weight in the writing than they have in the making of history." Dunning contended that his narrative therefore would analyze the Reconstruction Era from the perspective of the transformational politics that marked the emergence of the American nation. "While it may seem to slight the picturesque details of Ku-Klux operations and carpet-bag legislation and fraud," intoned Dunning, "it will be found, I trust, to present in something like their true relations the facts and forces which, manifested chiefly in the politics of the North and West, transformed the nation from what it was in 1865 to what it was in 1877."¹⁷ The two volumes set the benchmark for subsequent historians.

¹⁷William Archibald Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1907), 1, 2.

For example, in 1965, David Donald argued that Dunning's *Essays* "remains the best account of the constitutional and legislative history of the Reconstruction period."¹⁸

In 1988, Eric Foner noted that despite the revisionist "burst of creative activity" that discredited the Dunning account, "historians have yet to produce a coherent account of Reconstruction to take its place."¹⁹

Forthcoming reviews at the publication in 1897 of Dunning's *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* confirmed that the volume was well received. *The Nation* declared the book worthy of praise for its notable contribution to the constitutional history of the United States and accurate analysis upon the point that the "equality of the states" remained as the "alive and unsettled question from the Reconstruction period." This review, however, was critical only in its conclusion that opined, "the very narrowness of his [Dunning's] constitutional point of view should disappoint."²⁰ In 1908, reviewers met the appearance of *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*, with

¹⁸David Donald, "Introduction," William Archibald Dunning, *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1965), vii-xvi.

¹⁹Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), xxiv, Foner included John W. Burgess, Dunning, and his students into the term Dunning School in his historiographical analysis.

²⁰*Nation*, 21 July 1898.

enthusiastic praise. E. Benjamin Andrews, President of Brown University, described the volume as one of "extraordinary excellence, considering of particular importance the account of the "great court decisions touching reconstruction."²¹ But while legalism dominated historical scholarship in the late nineteenth century, the climate of opinion changed in the 1930s, when scholars revolted against the political and constitutional subject matter of the "scientific" school.²²

Strong reaction against political history, and emphasis on social history, relevance, and presentmindedness marked the work of the "new historians." These historians committed themselves to bringing progressive social and political change. The successful exploitation of social history supplanted traditional political history as the nodal point of the field. And, in 1939, Francis B. Simkins declared that the "great American race question" was the main issue of

²¹E. Benjamin Andrews, "The American Nation: A History. Reconstruction, Political and Economic (1865-1877)." *The American Historical Review* 13, 2 (Jan. 1908), 371-373.

²²Beard, Charles A., and Alfred Vagts. "Currents of Thought in Historiography." *The American Historical Review* 42, 3 (April 1937): 481.

Reconstruction. He admonished historians of the South to "adopt a more critical, creative, and tolerant attitude" to the end that their "great civic obligation" could be discharged.²³

The following year Howard K. Beale joined Simkins in this theme. He commended young historians for retelling the story "in terms of the economic and social forces at work."²⁴ In the 1940s, historians became psychologically-oriented modern social scientists concerned not with race, but with race relations: the social, psychological, and cultural consequences of the co-existence of diverse racial groups. In the 1950s, Carl N. Degler led the vanguard of the new direction in historical writing. From his extreme historiographical position, he rejected the traditionally accepted Reconstruction account and declared that the "tragedy of Reconstruction is that it failed": "Dunning-ism" was relegated to the "dustbin."²⁵ Moderate revisionism did not satisfy the students of the sophisticated new

²³Francis B. Simkins, "New Viewpoints of Southern Reconstruction," *The Journal of Southern History* 5, 1 (February 1939), 49, 61.

²⁴Howard K. Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," *The American Historical Review* 45, 4 (July 1940), 808

²⁵Carl N. Degler quoted in John H. and LaWanda Cox, "Negro Suffrage and Republican Politics: The Problem of Motivation in Reconstruction Historiography," *The Journal of Southern History* 33, 3 (August 1967), 312, 314.

generation of historians influenced by recent sociological, psychological, and anthropological analyses of man.²⁶

The Civil Rights Era of the 1960s presented a challenge in the form of what Foner called a "revolution of race relations." He claimed that "Reconstruction revisionism bore the mark of the modern civil rights movement."²⁷ Foner favored a modern revisionism that "radically reinterpreted national Reconstruction politics, and placed at center stage the aspirations and activities of blacks in the drama of the South."²⁸

Dunning, thrown in the dustbin in the 1950s, now emerged in the historiography of the 1960s as an "anti-Negro historian," chiefly concerned with vindicating the South and its racial policies since the Civil War.²⁹

As historians accepted this new paradigm, the charge of "racist" became common and Dunning's treatment

²⁶Ibid., 312, 314. Quoting Degler, the Coxes argued that the fifteenth amendment included the Negro within the "American Dream of equality and opportunity, gave the United States distinction as being the first nation committed to the proposition that in a 'bi-racial society. . .human beings must have equal rights.'"; Carl N. Degler, *Out of Our Past* (New York:Harper & Row, 1959), 211, 217-228.

²⁷Foner, *Reconstruction*, xxii.

²⁸Foner, "Reconstruction Revisited," *Reviews in American History* 10, 4 (Dec. 1982), 83.

²⁹ John Higham, Leonard Krieger, and Felix Gilbert, *History: The Development of Historical Studies in the United States* (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965), 168; Wharton, "Reconstruction," 313; I. A. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America, 1900-1930* (Baton rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 65, 66.

of the Reconstruction period came to be consistently analyzed from within the framework of racial beliefs. Six decades of preoccupation with racial politics have hidden from view Dunning's considerable significance. Modern historians' failure to examine Dunning's bold departure from the reigning contemporary ideas espoused by German historian Leopold von Ranke has hampered their understanding of Dunning's true historical philosophy and his significance in the political culture of the time. Although routinely credited to the work of Charles Beard and Carl Becker in the era after World War I, it was indeed Dunning who revealed a relativistic approach to the existence of "objective truth." In his presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1913 he asserted, "We must realize frankly that whatever a given age of people believes to be true is true for that age and that people."³⁰

Dunning made a considerable effort to understand the southern viewpoint, yet despite a fascination for the Reconstruction period, which he considered "the most dramatic period in our national history," he never

³⁰Dunning, "Truth in History," 227.

produced a comprehensive study of the era.³¹ Realizing that the South "bulked largest in the history of Reconstruction," Dunning was convinced that the "conditions in the South must be set forth by students qualified not only by scientific training but also by a personal contact or an inherent sympathy with southern society."³²

Through his students, Dunning gave voice to the South. Close analysis of Dunning's professional life at Columbia University reveals that southerners flocked to his graduate seminar to be trained in proper research, documentation, and historical methodology. These scholars, who came to be known as the Dunning School of Reconstruction Historiography, returned to the South. As the first generation of professional Southern historians they produced monographs about the political, economic, and social processes involved in the reconstruction of their respective states. In their role as historians, not advocates, they meticulously documented the history of their own region.³³

³¹Dunning quoted in Stephenson, *Southern History in the Making*, 159.

³²*Ibid.*, 159.

³³*Ibid.*, 160.

Because of their disapproval of the "southern attitude toward the Negro," many revisionist historians of the 1950s and 1960s began the attempt to silence that voice, not by undermining the factual arguments of the state accounts, but by promoting the moral cause of egalitarianism. These historians fused the scholarship of Dunning's southern students with Dunning's two volumes of Reconstruction history. In addition, revisionists severed Dunning's accounts of U. S. history from his total body of work including those concerning European History and political theory. Moreover, critics have isolated his analysis of the Reconstruction Era from his analysis of the constitutional and political aspects of the Civil War. Fragmenting Dunning's work has skewed criteria for determining the conduct of his historical investigation and his work in U. S. history; merging it will provide a new way to understand his Reconstruction account.³⁴

Many historians have argued that Dunning's viewpoint originated in the anti-Reconstruction propaganda of the southern Democrats after the war, and endured only because of its scholarly legitimacy. This

³⁴Ibid., 160; Simkins, 49, 61.

idea that racial stereotypes dictated his analysis of the era gained currency as historians reached for the moral high ground. Intellectual historian Hayden White led the charge in the effort to force a moral perspective on history. He argued that history had an obligation to be a "moral science" with the task of forcing "an awareness of how the past could be used to effect an ethically responsible transition from present to future." This philosophy appeared in the 1960s and was the harbinger of the attempt to revise the account of the past in order that it might meet the egalitarian ideals called for in the 1950s. It has led to a continuous and fervent effort to discredit Dunning.³⁵

There can be little doubt that the high ground of morality, the ease of metaphor, and the slight of hand of mythology have plunged Reconstruction historiography into what Bernard a. Weisberger appropriately termed a "dark and bloody ground." For in this dark place, historians have stripped William A. Dunning of context and authorial intent. Analysis of a contextless Dunning has resulted in reducing his identity to that of an essentially unprincipled historian motivated by

³⁵Hayden White quoted in Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: the "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 599.

political goals and racial ideology, shrilly charging him guilty of untold chicanery as a Reconstruction historian. For example, historian Alan D. Harper asserted that Dunning "turned his hand to the work of Nemesis," as his zeal carried him "beyond the historian's limits." According to Harper, Dunning's prejudice entered the popular culture "through a large number of textbooks and continues to compound our present difficulties by feeding the fires of hate." Otto H. Olsen complained that revisionists had failed to overturn the old Dunning monographs, lamenting that "the standard studies of southern states have remained white supremacist products of the Dunning school."³⁶

Intellectual historian Quentin Skinner warned that very frequently a "mythology of doctrines" will arise when twentieth and twenty-first-century historians are "set in approaching ideas of the past, and in effect,

³⁶ Hayden White, "Historical Pluralism," *Critical Inquiry* 12, 3 (Spring, 1986), 486, 487; *Metahistory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), xii; *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978), 1-25, 82. White has influenced the social sciences with his argument that many historical narratives, each "factual," may be told about a certain period or set of events; Bernard A. Weisberger, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography," *Journal of Southern History*, XXV (November 1959); Alan D. Harper, "William A. Dunning: The Historian as Nemesis," *Civil War History*, 10 (March 1964), 65, 66; Otto H. Olsen, "Setting the Record Straight on the Reconstruction South," *Reviews in American History* III (September, 1975), 334.

bring an unconscious paradigm to the work of a classic writer." This writer may be "discovered to have a certain view" and the myth perpetuated, because those under the influence of the paradigm will be intent on finding everywhere the theme. The long deceased author himself, however, will know nothing of this historiography, said Skinner, nor of the lessons that were to have been drawn of it. Analysis of Dunning's U. S. History texts must include the possibility that two critical aspects of modern historical interpretation exist: first, that a basic paradigm for investigation has been conceived as the elaboration of Dunning's doctrines on the theme of race, and second, that historians have succumbed to the constant temptation to find a "message" which can be abstracted from it and be therefore more readily communicated.³⁷

Because many modern historians consider Dunning's Reconstruction history an essentially malevolent endeavor by a racist, and because their estimation of Dunning's work is so stunningly different from that of his contemporaries, a challenge to their conclusions is legitimate. We must consider three questions. First,

³⁷ James Tully and Quentin Skinner, *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 32.

did Dunning analyze all subject matter in U. S. History in a similar manner? Secondly, does Dunning's account of Reconstruction differ from his other causal accounts of constitutional and political history, and in effect, attempt to make a point of discriminating against the black race? And finally, the Skinnerian question must apply, and that is: in light of the possibility that a mythology of doctrines exists concerning his work in U. S. History, would Dunning recognize himself in current Reconstruction historiography discussions?

Dunning was a significant figure in the intellectual history of his time, and has exerted considerable influence since. This dissertation will attempt to reconnect Dunning's work in the area of U. S. History to his corpus of scholarly work. In particular, it will examine Dunning's approach as a historian of political theory who was mindful of the principles of political science and interested in the causality of ideas and theories, as well as his professional work at Columbia University. Careful attendance to his historical context, contemporary audiences, and authorial intent will reposition the perspective of analyses of Dunning's work and provide a new angle from

which to secure a fresh look at American intellectual life, then and now. And perhaps most importantly, it will serve to clear the grisly ground of Reconstruction historiography for further fruitful examination.

CHAPTER 1

THE AGE OF OZ: A NEW INTELLECTUAL CLIMATE

Following the Civil War and Reconstruction in the United States, a heightened sense of national cohesion prompted an almost revolutionary advance in the pursuit of historical knowledge. To enhance the level of American scholarship, visionary professors in graduate schools urged that the status quo of the classical college change to that of the new scientific university. As the American graduate schools came fully of age, rapid professionalization of the field resulted in a burgeoning cadre of historians eager to take charge of historical scholarship in a field once dominated by patrician amateurs.¹

In the 1890s, Harvard University's Albert Bushnell Hart began planning for the twenty-six volume compendium of American history, the "American Nation Series." Between 1904 and 1907, Harper & Brothers published the twenty-two volume set, the first great professional

¹John Higham, Leonard Krieger, and Felix Gilbert, *History* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), 15, 16.

synthesis of American history. In contrast to a quasi-professional cooperative effort at historical synthesis attempted earlier in the century, the Hart-edited collection was the first attempt to legitimize the history of the past by university-trained historians, and it included a volume by Columbia University's William Archibald Dunning called *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*. In his contribution to the series, Dunning admonished readers to regard the Reconstruction period not as a sectional issue but as a "step in the progress of the American nation."²

Dunning's work on the history of the American Civil War and Reconstruction consisted of two volumes, including the earlier 1898 publication, *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction*. Together, these books represent the first scholarly examination of the constitutional and political challenges facing the American democratic republic in that complex period.³

As a scholar who had already established a corpus of work that included study in the areas of European

² William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1907), 1.

³Higham, 20; Dunning, *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1898).

history and political theory, Dunning used the historical and comparative method instituted in 1850 by German-born political scientist Francis Leiber. In 1858, Columbia had appointed Leiber to the chair of history and political science based on his reputation among American scholars as the outstanding political theorist in the country. It was Leiber's conviction that history and political theory were "inseparably woven," and he remained at Columbia School of Law as Professor of Constitutional History and Public Law until his death in 1872. Together with Columbia University political scientist John W. Burgess, Johns Hopkins University historian Herbert B. Adams, Cornell University's Andrew D. White, and Hart, Dunning's theoretical foundations established him and Columbia, alongside John Hopkins, Cornell, and Harvard in the vanguard for the training of historians in the use of modern methods of political inquiry.⁴

Dunning, however, brought to the study of history a distinct departure from the two schools of scientific history that developed in the nineteenth century.

⁴ Hoxie, 4, 5, 7, 166, 215, 257; J. Franklin Jameson, "Early Days of the American Historical Association, 1884-1895," *The American Historical Review* 40, 1 (Oct., 1934): 2; Raymond G. Gettell, *History of American Political Thought* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1928), 609.

First, he eschewed the teleological history of German Idealist Georg W. F. Hegel espoused by his graduate school mentor, Burgess. Hegel's was not the only idealistic philosophy in the nineteenth century, but it was perhaps the most influential, and it provided the authoritative model. Hegel believed that reason governed the world, and that therefore world history was a rational process. Reason, in history, provided the "connecting tissue" for a coherent pattern or the connectedness of history. Hegel assumed that this coherent pattern maintained a continuity with the rational structure of reality outside history. Hegel's dialectical reasoning claimed to reconcile opposites (thesis-antithesis) resulting in synthesis, thus providing the dimension of movement to history. Secondly, with a precocious skepticism, he distanced himself from the philosophy of historical interpretation held by German historian Leopold von Ranke, in which the pursuit of "fact" in its exact form and manner of happening informed the imperative of the rigid *wie es eigentlich gewesen*.⁵

⁵John Higham, 259; For more extensive explanation see, Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991), and G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to The Philosophy of History* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988). For another

The late nineteenth century presented an unprecedented environment for change. As the nineteenth century approached its end, the results of high velocity change in the world of business and industry as well as in the arena of politics and culture became the impetus that drove professionals to organize and to analyze a restructuring society. At the beginning of the century the French Revolution had changed the face of Europe as well as the estate of the people as it gave them for the first time a voice that demanded a hearing. Innovations in communication increased dispersed information, and allowed scientists to advance theories for all areas of life. Born of Enlightenment thought, the *Weltanschauung* of progress fueled Romantics, philosophers, and political scientists alike with the goal of liberty and the perfectibility of mankind.⁶

analysis of Hegel's dialectic, and philosophy of history see, Leonard Krieger, *Time's Reasons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 52-63; Ranke favored a scientific method of establishing facts objectively, free from philosophical considerations. According to Ranke the goal of the historian was to tell the simple historical truth: to narrate things as they really were ("wie es eigentlich gewesen"). See Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), 63, 64; Dunning, "Truth in History," *American Historical Review* 19, 2 (January 1914).

⁶*Weltanschauung* is the German word for worldview, a mental framework through which one would see and analyze his world. John W. Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1890), 89; John W. Burgess, "The Ideal of the American Commonwealth," *Political Science Quarterly* 10, 3

The philosophy of history held by many historians of the middle nineteenth-century stressed a transcendent determinism; they sought to emphasize the need for progress in civilization within a concept of historical destiny. Arguing from an idealistic, philosophical basis they wrote grand literary works designed to expand the reader's knowledge of the present by fortifying the continuum between the historical and the extrahistorical. In an age of historical theorists and philosophers of history, the all-pervasive role of evolution provided the connections among historical events. Devising doctrines of change and development, authoritative nineteenth-century philosophers of history such as Hegel provided authoritative models of scientific cohesion in historical schemes. The cultivated public enthusiastically received a myriad of publications whose narratives provided historical coherence as they expanded knowledge of the present by illuminating exotic places of the past. Because of such

(September, 1895): 416; John W. Burgess, "Germany, Great Britain, and the United States," *Political Science Quarterly* 19, 1 (March 1904): 3; Theodore Roosevelt, "A Letter from President Roosevelt on Race Suicide," *The American Monthly Review of Reviews* 35 (May, 1907): 550, 551; Ronald A. T. Judy, *Untimely Intellectuals and the University* (Duke University Press, 2000) [database online]; available from boundary 2 27.1 (2000); F. Garvin Davenport, "Thomas Dixon's Mythology of Southern History," *The Journal of Southern History* 36, 3 (August, 1970): 355.

historicism, history achieved an importance in the nineteenth century that many claim it has not held before or since.⁷

As the press expanded coverage of national and international events, and as the railways narrowed distances throughout Europe, an idealistic philosophy emerged. In the years between 1814 and 1848 the word *nationality* had become officially established in the linguistics of Western Europe. By mid-century, Nationalism appeared as a distinct political doctrine. As a result of the devastating conquests of Napoleon and the unification of Germany, Europe experienced renewed emotions for national independence. Johann Herder first introduced the organic view of nation-race that represented every race as a separate, complete whole. Before this time, nationality was considered an inward

⁷ Leonard Krieger argued that historicism is a term which has various definitions. In the nineteenth century it could be used as the historization of all of reality and subjecting it to laws of development, and unknowable absolute principles. With the turn of the century, Krieger argues, historicism was a term which came into increased usage in 1900 and was "associated with philosophers of cultural crisis and with historians who acknowledged and responded to the cultural crisis by ignoring the traditional values outside of history and insisting on social-scientific or philosophical derivation of coherent values for history that were compatible with history." With either definition, historical coherence was the central principle. Krieger, *Time's Reasons*, 107-109, 52, 53; Paul K. Conkin and Roland N. Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge: The History and Theory of History* (Illinois: Forum Press, Inc., 1989), 62; Higham, *History*, 6, 7; See Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, "Original History," "Reflective History," and "Philosophical History," 1-100.

principle, a spirit, the soul of a people. But the worldview of the Enlightenment was giving way to that of the German Romantics, and in romantic imagination of Herder to Hegel began the quest for general laws. The history of society was determined, they said: just as natural science brought the world of matter under the reign of law, so historical science would try to bring the world of men under the reign of law.⁸

Johann Gottlieb Fichte combined the romantic idea of freedom with national self-consciousness. Soon the developing ideal of the "nation" whose power, progress, and unity were the supreme moral good and ethical destiny fueled many nationalists to advocate any means, including war, as an indispensable means of moral progress for the human race. Hegel incorporated the moral ideal into his synthetic metahistoric system. He believed world history was a process of development. The *Weltgeist*, the "World Spirit," was the moving objective force in history, and the *Geist* was the "national spirit," or "mind," or "soul" which displayed itself in the pattern of progress as history played itself out, in

⁸ Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind of the 19th Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 127, 128, 132, 204, 205); George W. Stocking, "The American Social Scientists and Race Theory, 1890-1915" (Ph. D. diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1960), 72-75.

the general "progress of mankind," toward the ultimate goals of liberty and freedom. The state's highest duty was to perpetuate itself, insisted Hegel, and needed to bow to no law save the historical process. In this same manner, German writers broadened the idea of nationality into a biological concept and clothed it in the quasi-biological concept of the nation, the *Volk*. Initially described in the racial terms of blood relationships or unmixed origins, the Romantics were soon characterizing biological nationalism in the terms of uniqueness and simultaneously advocating an attitude of tolerance for national and cultural differences of other nations.⁹

By the 1860s, the idea of nationality as a distinct political doctrine and the normal criterion of political organization attained overwhelming importance from the functional work of Bismarck in Europe. By means of a tremendous struggle in the United States, the principle was maintained. The upheaval of the Civil War caused profound alterations and a different tone in the consciousness of people of the country, impacting their

⁹George L. Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 56, 57; For more extensive explanation see, Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991), and G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to The Philosophy of History* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988); Stocking, 72-75.

values, ideas, and long-held ideals of political and social organization. Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address echoed the longings of the president for the new, reunified American nation. In May 1865, the post-war Grand Review illustrated the growing force of national cohesion as the victorious soldiers presented a two-day march down Pennsylvania Avenue before the reviewing stand of President Andrew Johnson. In this parade, standardized uniforms of the new national army replaced the various uniforms worn by the separate state militias in 1861, demonstrating an intentional departure from the older values of the states-rights oriented Union and movement toward the new nationalistic imperatives of a modern nation. But perhaps the most telling indication of the new national unity was the emergence of a stunning linguistic change. In a grammatical shift in verb usage from earlier centuries when one said, "The United States are. . ." post-Civil War Americans used the singular form, "The United States is. . ." thus demonstrating the shift from a plural verb describing a union of individual states to the singular,

in agreement with the singular cohesive unit of one nation.¹⁰

With the close of the Civil War, political forces framed new social and economic formulas intended to deepen American individualism into *laissez faire* ideology. As the people became more educated and therefore more politically conscious, national consolidation promised a rational basis for political cohesion and unity that would provide for social stability and individual liberty. The United States of the post-war years gave a ready and sympathetic reception to the evolutionary ideas of Charles Darwin as well as to those of British railroad man turned philosopher Herbert Spencer. In 1865, the American Social Science Association, citing concern for the problems arising from the confused experience of the Civil War, launched the *Social Science Review* with the

¹⁰William A. Dunning, *Truth in History and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 71, 72; Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind of the 19th Century*, 127, 128; George M. Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965), 1; Abraham Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address," in *Great Issues of American History: From the Revolution to the Civil War, 1765-1865*, ed. Richard Hofstadter (New York: Vintage Books, 1958; *New York Times*, 24 May 1865, 25 May 1865; Burgess, John W. Burgess, *The Foundations of Political Science* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), xviii, xix; Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 72.

charge, "We should, at this period more especially, render ourselves familiar with the natural laws which govern mankind in its social state; and study well the manner of producing, distributing and consuming wealth."¹¹

In 1869, when the American Philosophical Society bestowed upon Darwin an honorary membership, the American scientific community promptly accepted the principle of natural selection with its claim that present-day life-forms had descended from a common ancestry gradually and over lengthy stretches of time. The American public gave a hearty reception to this scientific theory about race and the philosophies and political theories associated with it. It was not until the 1874 publication of *The Descent of Man* that Darwin wrote publicly about the presupposition that became the great organizing principle of the late nineteenth century, human evolution:

There is apparently much truth in the belief that the wonderful progress of the United States, as well as the character of the people, are the results of natural selection; for the most energetic, restless, and courageous men from all parts of Europe have emigrated during the last ten or twelve generations

¹¹Quoted in Edward Chase Kirkland, *Dream and Thought in the Business Community, 1860-1900* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 1956), 16.

to that great country, and have there succeeded best. . . .All other series of events—as that which resulted in the culture of the mind in Greece, and that which resulted in the empire of Rome—only appear to have purpose and value when viewed in connection with, or rather as subsidiary to. . . .the great stream of Anglo-Saxon emigration to the west. . . .¹²

Although the idea of evolution found wide reception in the post-war era, it entered scientific thought before Charles Darwin, when in the eighteenth century, French biological systematist John Baptiste Lamarck challenged the classification of scientific data by introducing the notion that animals could evolve from simpler forbears by the inheritance of acquired characters. Evolution clashed with the older, static concept of a natural world, with its manifold varieties all in present form, created by God. In the 1830 debate before Paris' Academy of Science, the evolutionary concept of life with a central belief in ordered progress through the natural sciences was victorious and became the cornerstone of the modern worldview. The 1859 publication of *On the Origin of the Species* marked a sea change in attitude as Darwin's scientific

¹²John P. Jackson, Jr., and Nadine M. Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 61; Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (New York: Crowell, 1874; reprint, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), 147 (page citations are to the reprint edition); Richard Hofstadter, 4-6; John P. Jackson, Jr. and Nadine M. Weidman, 77-79.

explanation of natural life assisted in making evolution respectable. Scientists in all fields of study applied the theory of evolution contending that only plants and animals, but also human society, human beings, and the human mind had an evolutionary history. This paradigm not only accommodated but also confirmed the earlier scientific ideas about race. Moreover, scientists applied the "truths" of evolution and evolutionary methodology to the study of man creating a new evolutionary hierarchy to replace the old organizing principles that girded the hierarchy of races. Spencer, for whom evolution was synonymous with aggressive, biological progress, matched and perhaps exceeded Darwin's influence. At the *fin de siècle*, Social Darwinism, a network of interconnected ideas about time, nature, human nature, and social reality dominated the socio-political discourse of the United States. It infused the social, economic, and the political sciences with the idea of the "social struggle for existence."¹³

¹³John P. Jackson, Jr. and Nadine M. Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2004), 61, 62, 64-66; George W. Stocking, "The American Social Scientists and Race Theory, 1890-1915" (Ph. D. diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1960), 90-94, 80, 81; Although historiographical arguments are beyond the scope of this paper, it must be noted that historians disagree not only on a definition for the term "Social Darwinism," but also on the degree to which social theorists (excluding Karl Marx) utilized Darwinism. Evidence seems

Political and social discourse centered on concern for society's adaptation to the conditions of the new life associated with the rise of industrial capitalism. The prevailing worldview of *Zeitgeist* informed the proclamations of social scientists who borrowed not only from Darwin and Spencer, but also from the behavioral evolution of Lamarck, and the biological theories of economist Thomas Robert Malthus.

Many adherents of Social Darwinism accepted the Lamarkian theory of inheritance of acquired characteristics for it played an extremely important role in social thought. Lamarkism provided a powerful scientific rationale for the doctrine of progress by making the biological organism's behavioral responses to environmental changes the mechanism of evolution. According to Lamarck, the needs of the organism produced

to suggest, however, that the language of selection and survival of the fit was included at some points in the careers of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. For historiographical analysis begin with Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), and Robert C. Bannister, "'The Survival of the Fittest is our Doctrine': History or Histrionics?," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31, 3 (Jul.-Sep., 1970), 377-308; For further discussion of social theorists see Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as a Model and Nature as a Threat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; George L. Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 206, 214; Mike Hawkins, 17; George W. Stocking, 90-94, 80, 81; Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection* (London: J. Murray, 1859; reprint Ontario: Broadview Press, 2003).

"an inclination toward the actions appropriate to their satisfaction; [and] actions becoming habitual have occasioned the development of the organisms which execute them."¹⁴ Although devised a half-century before Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, Lamarck's behavioral theory of biological evolution provided an important theoretical link between biology and social theory.¹⁵

Malthus focused on the social struggle between closely related members of the same species. Darwin formed the basis for his thesis of natural selection by appropriating Malthus' argument of intraspecies struggle and making it the engine for organic change. In this manner, Malthusian doctrine fueled the Social Darwinian spirit of individualism and free-market theory.¹⁶

To the benefit of the business community, the government defended the policy of *laissez faire* individualism. Big business embraced the Malthusian doctrine that criticized government interference in economic and social affairs of the people. Believing

¹⁴J. B. Lamarck quoted in George W. Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 238, 239.

¹⁵Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, 234-239.

¹⁶Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 234-239. Stocking, "The American social Scientists and Race Theory," 98, 99; John P. Jackson, 64, 65; Hawkins, 15-16, 42, 43, 155; Peter Vorzimmer, "Darwin, Malthus, and the Theory of Natural Selection," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30, 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1969), 540; R. J. Halliday, "Social Darwinism: A Definition," *Victorian Studies*, XIV 4 (June 1971), 394, 395.

struggle was endemic because of the omnipresent threat of over-population, Malthus had suggested that there was a natural law which enabled society to progress. The consequent competition for the scarce resources in the economy would be beneficial to the economy; the "best people" would rise to the challenge and gain wealth due to their superior skills and energy. According to Malthusian wisdom, government must refrain from intervention in the economic affairs of the people because, with maximum efficiency, the natural laws of society would create the optimal situation for all. Hence, in the heyday of the Gilded Age, national legislation discouraged welfare administration in favor of a free labor market which encouraged competition, struggle, and the voluntary beneficence of individuals. It was in this manner that Social Darwinism perpetuated the idea of extending the influence of the "fit," limited the possibilities of the "unfit," and created the correlations between pauperism and genetic inferiority, and between legislation and loss of liberty.¹⁷

¹⁷ R. J. Halliday, 390-392, 394, 395); Hawkins, 9; John P. Jackson, Jr. and Nadine M. Weidman, 64, 65; Sumner quoted in Hofstadter, 10, 11.

With the turn in American ideology from romanticism to realism, policy makers grappled with political questions that reflected the shift to modern life and to leadership by an industrial aristocracy, the captains of industry. Cultural and political leaders used prevailing scientific theories to set both legal and social policy as they searched for patterns not only to explain the rise and fall of the great civilizations, but also to develop a paradigm for the optimum functional, civilized society. Social and political reformers concentrated on the dangers of tobacco, alcohol, and meat eating. Crusaders for temperance, and a pure American race remained serious forces in American politics for nearly a century. The secular principles of individualism and of *laissez faire* which when couched in religious forms and language had driven the steady transformation of the abolitionist crusade from one that condemned the evil slaveholder into a national antislavery campaign for free land and free soil politics fueled the individualist argument promoting the "Negro" as a man capable of equal achievement. In the *laissez faire* environment it became the dominant theme in securing a moral framework for philosophy in which

the Negro would assume his place as a competitive unit in the political and social economy.¹⁸

In transmitting the spirit of the Great Awakening, such religious leaders as Samuel Hopkins, Charles G. Finney and Theodore Dwight Weld continued to encourage the breakdown of Calvin's corporate philosophy. By reducing the Calvinistic social morality to a code of personal righteousness that reinforced individualism, religion joined in the drive to establish the proper moral values in order that *laissez faire* could function in the social, economic, and political spheres. Capitalists transformed industry by applying new scientific methods to production. It seemed quite natural, therefore, for intellectuals to turn to science in the effort to systematically organize knowledge in both the social and political realms.¹⁹

¹⁸ Higham, *History*, 92, 93; Merriam, *American Political Ideas, 1865-1917*, 2; Fogel and Elton, 8, 9; Herbert Hovenkamp, "Social Science and Segregation Before *Brown*," *Duke Law Journal* (June, Sept. 1985), 624, 627; William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966), 251-254.

¹⁹ Higham, *History*, 92, 93; Merriam, *American Political Ideas, 1865-1917*, 2; Fogel and Elton, 8, 9; Hovenkamp, 624, 627; Williams, 251-254.

CHAPTER 2

THE MAKING OF HISTORY: EMERGENCE OF A NEW INTELLECTUAL TRIUMVERATE

American historiography followed the political, economic, and cultural shift. With the politics of popular sovereignty and its corollary the supposed abolition of all forms of political privilege now the hallmark of European government, political theorists turned their attention to the theoretical and practical questions pertinent to the interests of rising nations. They sought to analyze the new functions of government in the modern state with its contingent social, business, and industrial conditions. In these new regimes of popular government, significant matters of practical democracy, representative government, constitutionalism, and universal suffrage came to the fore, creating class contests for economic and political power. Historians broadened their conception of the American-European community as expansion of European powers brought the specter of imperialism, and the

prospect of internationalism appeared on the horizon of the governments of the nation-states.¹

American scholars widened their study of Europe to include the mutual political involvement and rapid development of the expanding nations, foreshadowing the professional interest in European political history that characterized late nineteenth-century historical writing. By the century's turn, these historians achieved remarkable success. Publications including such distinct forms of historical writing as the monograph and textbook flourished and marked the change in which the production of scholarly history became the characteristic norm, and historical scholarship became a profession. American scholars generally shared the belief that history was a science.²

With the growing influence of the natural sciences, American culture turned from romanticism to realism. Realism shaped not only the worldview of contemporary novelists and painters, but also the form and manner of historical writing. The historical scholar adopted an impersonal tone, distrusted imagination, and "avoided

¹Chadwick, 129; Merriam, *American Political Ideas, 1865-1917*, 1, 2, 4, 5, 7.

²Higham, *History*, 253-255; W. Stull Holt, "The Idea of Scientific History in America," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1, 3 (June 1940): 352, 353, 354.

identifying himself with his subject. . .he stood apart from it, observing from the outside," assiduously avoiding submerging himself in the feelings and mood of the given event or situation.³ By 1895, half of the American academic historians had trained in the "scientific" approach to history in German universities, and effort was underway to transfer German historical methods to the graduate seminars in America.⁴

The revolutionary new theories and discoveries in biology deeply influenced many of these scholars. Historians came to believe that history, like nature, was governed by natural law and therefore it represented a continuum in the universe of nature. The ubiquitous role of the Darwinian idea provided the evolutionary connections that moved historical events forward in the path of progress; contemporary growth in the prestige of science affected the spread of this determinist history throughout Europe and America subsequent to its rise in Germany. Confident about the progressive nature of history itself, many American historians chronicled the distant and not-so-distant past as part of the ever-moving ascent of civilization. They paid high tribute

³ Higham, *History*, 93.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 92-94; J. F. Jameson, "The American Historical Review, 1885-1920," *American Historical Review* 26 (1920): 2.

both to the importance of philosophical presuppositions and to the dominance of the natural sciences with many attempting to use the methods of the natural sciences to derive law-like statements concerning the social behavior of human beings. This methodology led to deep division among historians during the late nineteenth century.⁵

Two main schools of thought fueled the growth of scientific history. Darwinian evolution gave unity to history and a scheme which appealed to the philosophers of history. Leopold von Ranke assigned to history the ideal of complete objectivity, put within the scholar's reach by a recently perfected method. This "laboratory style," scientific method vied for ascendancy over the philosophical, teleological approach represented in the Hegelian-inspired concept of historical coherence for which Darwin had supplied the theoretical basis. By 1900, the empirical, methodological, critical, approach

⁵ Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind of the 19th Century*, 203; Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe, The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 1; Fogel and Elton, *Which Road to the Past?: Two Views of History*, 8, 9, 10; Keith R. Burich, "Henry Adams, the Second Law of Thermodynamics, and the Course of History," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48, 3 (July-September, 1987): 468.

of Ranke surpassed the systematic, teleological tendency in scientific history.⁶

Among philosophers of history of the nineteenth century the rationalists Hegel and Auguste Comte were dominant. The emerging discipline of sociology provided a forum for Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Comte. Their social theories cut into the traditions of intellectual inquiry pursued in European schools of history. Sometimes called the father of positivism, Comte provided the authoritative model for evolutionary scientific connectedness in historical schemes. Comte claimed that the laws which governed society could be discovered in the same manner as were the principles of geology by applying science to society. Hegel, with the most elaborate scheme of the two, provided the ideal of dialectical connectedness which was perhaps the most influential of the century. Hegel stood in counterpoint to Leopold von Ranke. Considered by most to be the father of modern historical scholarship, Ranke had as his ideal the goal of complete objectivity, and he

⁶ Higham, *History*, 255; Krieger, *Time's Reasons*, 52, 53; W. Stull Holt, "The Idea of Scientific History in America," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1, 3 (June 1940): 354, 355.

admonished historians to "describe what actually happened."⁷

German philosophers in this age of idealistic philosophy amplified Immanuel Kant's theory of a universal moral principle. Providence became a powerful case for metahistory. This belief in historical destiny joined the idea that truth was a matter of linear movement and development. Hegel's philosophy incorporated a variety of transcendental, cosmic, reality-behind-appearance patterns in his metaphysical scheme. Nurturing Kant's idea of Providence, he combined it with the concepts of the "Ideal" and the cosmic "Ego" and produced his vast *The Philosophy of History*.⁸

⁷ Holt, 354; Krieger, *Time's Reasons*, 53, 93; Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, 6; Conkin, *Heritage and Challenge*, 66,67; Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe*, 204; Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European mind of the 19th Century*, 7, 8; As previously noted, historians disagree on the degree with which social theorists (excluding Karl Marx) utilized Darwinism. Evidence seems to suggest, however, that the language of selection and survival of the fit was included at some points in the careers of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. For further discussion of social theorists see Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as a Model and Nature as a Threat*.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), 1949, x, ix, 100; Arthur M. Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, and M. Richard Zinman, *History and the Idea of Progress* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 6, Melzer, et al argue that, in fact, Kant set the tone for the discomfort with progressive, universal history. They contend in their introduction to *History and the Idea of Progress*, that Kant, in the end, ultimately rejected the philosophy of history because he could not accept the fact that progress, in effect, sacrificed the

The genius of Hegel countered the static worldview held by earlier philosophers. His dialectical reasoning built time, movement, and history into a two-dimensional, closed super-system of reasoning capable of deducing the whole of reality from certain *apriori* first principles using the now famous formula of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Hegel held that all was involved in the continual flux, the "becoming" of life, the *Werden*. In each epoch was a grand "Idea." Because "Reason rules the world," he asserted, it was a world not subject to chance, for Reason in history, in combination with the belief in the world of intelligence, would reveal the rational process of the World Spirit.⁹ "The History of the world," argued rationalist Hegel, "begins with its general aim-the realization of the Idea of Spirit. . . ."¹⁰ The issue was the "ultimate end of mankind" toward which the *Weltgeist* progressed: ". . . The aim of the world spirit in world history is to

happiness of earlier generations for that of the later ones. This constituted an affront to the autonomy and moral worth of the individual leading to his conclusion that faith in progress was not ultimately a moral faith.; Conkin, *Heritage and Challenge*, 61, 62; Krieger, *Times Reasons*, 52, 53; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), x.

⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing company, 1988), 13.

¹⁰ Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991), 25.

realize its essence and to obtain the prerogative of freedom."¹¹ The empirical investigator must study the past in order to find the pattern.¹²

According to Hegel, the world worked dialectically in the progress of history. Opposing elements led to the disintegration of what seemed stable, and the emergence of something new reconciled the previously opposing elements, leading to the next series of internal tensions. Use of this scheme enabled him to interpret history as a teleological process aimed at unfolding, in the dialectic sequence, toward a self-consistent position as it escaped self-contradictions. The "cunning" of Hegel's history, (which had a will of its own), utilized people as its tools. French socialist Comte de Saint-Simon agreed with Hegel, claiming that the "supreme law of progress" carried along and dominated all: men were but its instruments. Nationalism and the romantic quest for liberty defined this theory in which a heightened sense of the past was a source of wisdom capable of revealing the force that controlled human destiny. Although the point is much

¹¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, xii, 63.

¹² Conkin, *Heritage and Challenge*, 62; Hegel, *Lectures*, x; Krieger, *Times's Reasons*, 54.

contested, Hegel also seemed to believe that his dialectic of historical change had culminated in the Prussian military state, and this perhaps served to augment his concept of the nation as the *telos* of history.¹³

Although at one with Hegel in believing the world to be divinely ordered and seeing an objective continuity in Western civilization, German historian Leopold von Ranke differed with Hegel's insistence on the preeminence of universal truths. He introduced the scientific methods of research that dominated historical training in the late nineteenth century. Ranke, whose influence became paramount as the graduate seminar was transplanted to the American University from Germany, amplified the differences between the theory and the practice of history. Believing "history can never possess the unity of a philosophical system,"¹⁴ and stressing that the way to acquire knowledge of human

¹³ Anthony Chase, *Law and History: The Evolution of the American Legal System* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 39; Peter Singer, *Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 79, 80; Michael Forster, "Hegel's Dialectical Method," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, Fredrick. Beisner, ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 136; Conkin, *Heritage and Challenge*, 61, 62; Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind of the 19th Century*, 127.

¹⁴ Leopold von Ranke, "A Fragment from the 1860's," in *The Varieties of History: from Voltaire to the Present*, ed., Fritz Stern (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1958), 60.

affairs was "through the perception of the particular,"¹⁵ Ranke thoroughly rejected the *apriori* patterns of the philosophers of history. Valuing the "investigation of a single detail"¹⁶ and believing that to "comprehend the whole while obeying the dictates of exact research will of course always remain an ideal goal" Ranke asserted that the connectedness of history belonged not a universal extrahistorical pattern but to the actual material of the past.¹⁷

Ranke saw objectivity as the commitment to the reality of the past. It was a commitment that required a deep immersion in the primary sources. This quest for the authenticity of evidence yielded the heavily-documented monograph typical of the era and formed the basis for what is now described as the scientific study of history. Rejecting the applicability of the laws of the natural sciences and the use of hypotheses and historical schemes, Ranke's scientific history relied upon the critical methods developed and learned in the

¹⁵ Leopold von Ranke, "A Fragment from the 1930's," in *The Varieties of History: from Voltaire to the Present*, ed., Fritz Stern (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 58;

¹⁶ Ranke, "A Fragment from the 1860's," 62.

¹⁷ Ranke, *Ibid.*, 62; Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 27; Higham, *History*, 255; Michael Kraus and Davis D. Joyce, *The Writing of American History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 4; Krieger, *Time's Reasons*, 101.

historical seminars of Germany.¹⁸

With the rise of history as an independent discipline administered by a separate profession, these seminars were key to the growth in the nascent graduate programs in American universities. It is possible to identify the influence of Hegel, Ranke and Darwin in the scientific history Henry Adams taught in his historical law of thermodynamics seminar at Harvard as well as in the subjects discussed in the seminars offered by Germanophile John William Burgess at Columbia University, which explored the Teutonic, evolutionary, "germ theory" of institutional development.¹⁹

Burgess intensely pursued the search for patterns within history and his political thought was based upon a commitment to the ideas of the "movement of modern political history toward the development of national states," the "plan of universal history," and the "march of modern civilization."²⁰ Nevertheless, Burgess urged young historians to remember that "the true and faithful" recording of the "facts of human experience"

¹⁸Fogel and Elton, *Which Road to the Past*, 9, 10.

¹⁹Keith R. Burich, "Henry Adams, and the Second Law of Thermodynamics, and the Course of History," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48, 3 (July 1987), 467-482; Higham, *History*, 255, 256.

²⁰John W. Burgess, *The Civil War and the Constitution*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 134, 135.

was their primary task.²¹ Following Francis Leiber's model of objective political inquiry, Burgess sought to use scientific methods of historical study and research to facilitate "individuality of view, independence of judgment, and comprehensive all-sided knowledge."²²

Born in the fall of 1844 in Tennessee, Burgess was the son of a slave-owning but fiercely pro-Unionist planter. Following the Battle of Shiloh, Burgess joined the Union army. In late 1864, Burgess enrolled in Amherst College. Convinced of the intimate relationship between history and political science, he chose a career path based on memories of fearful war experiences, particularly those of the winter of 1863 when he "first resolved to consecrate my life's work to substituting the reign of reason for the rule of force."²³ With the lofty goal of "substituting conservative methods of peace for the destructive effects of war," Burgess single-mindedly argued for a truly American university geared toward preparing men for leadership in a democratic nation. After a three-year term of study at

²¹ John W. Burgess, "Political Science and History," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (1896): 209-210.

²² John W. Burgess quoted in Hoxie, *The Faculty of Political Science, Columbia University*, 23.

²³ John W. Burgess, *Reminiscences of an American Scholar: The Beginnings of Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 197.

the Universities of Göttingen, Leipzig, and Berlin, Burgess returned to Amherst. His alma mater, however, rejected his plans to inaugurate graduate instruction, rendering him receptive to a Columbia offer to join the faculty there. Burgess arrived at Columbia in 1876, after his election as Professor of Political Science, History, and International Law. He assumed the daunting tasks of transforming the entire institution into a university and advancing the level of instruction in history and political science on a par with that of Cornell, Harvard, Yale, and the new Johns Hopkins. ²⁴

In 1880, Burgess became the central figure in the founding of the School of Political Science. As originator, architect, and founding director of the first advanced institution for the study of political science in the United States, the zealous Burgess realized his dream. With the birth of the graduate school of Political Science and History at Columbia University Americans would no longer be forced to study abroad because of the lack of opportunity for an advanced university education at home. His insistence on raising American historical scholarship to

²⁴ Ibid., 20, 24, 51, 22; Hoxie, 5, 6.

intellectual parity with the new principles of higher education enabled Columbia to institute graduate school training in political science and history which not only had the potential to supplanting the foreign point of view in regard to American affairs, but also to allow these disciplines to join with medicine and the natural sciences in the tradition of original research and commitment to the scientific quest for truth.²⁵

During his tenure at Columbia, Burgess demanded that professors also be scholars. Rigorous adherence to the scientific principles of German scholarship established history as a legitimate discipline, a social science, in the research university oriented to the natural sciences. This insistence on superior academic standards catapulted Columbia's history department to the forefront of American graduate schools, and it quickly became the nation's most prominent. Columbia University joined Johns Hopkins and some fifteen other newly developed graduate schools in training doctoral candidates in history. His role in the establishment of history as a profession may be ranked with that of the Hopkins' Herbert B. Adams. By the turn of the century,

²⁵Ibid., 22, 51.

the attraction of post-graduate study in Germany sharply declined, and students ceased going to Europe for the professional degree.²⁶

In the field of Political Science, Burgess merged the American version of organic European nationalism with the assumption that "Progress" held a necessary and positive role in the march toward the perfectibility of civilization. The basic intellectual element in Burgess' thought was the intersection at which German ideology met the political and intellectual problems concerning the United States. Burgess's views were intensely nationalistic. He highly esteemed the role the U.S. Constitution played in the unification of the American nation, and believed the war had created a new constitutional arrangement among the states that was characterized by the emergence of a clearly superior national government. Burgess' study experience in Germany left him with the firm conviction of the superiority of German civilization and its counterpart, the Anglo-Saxon. Imperialist tendencies not only nourished, but also required the theories of Western

²⁶ Richard Hofstadter, "The Department of History," 113: Wendell H. Stephenson, "A Half Century of Southern Historical Scholarship," *The Journal of Southern History* 11, 1 (February, 1945): 15; Higham, *History*, 19.

European racial superiority that manifested in Germany as Teutonism; in France as Celticism; in many countries as anti-Semitism; and in England and the United States primarily as Anglo-Saxonism. Each nation had its peculiar genius. The genius of the Teutonic peoples was in the field of government, law, and liberty. The views which considered the Teutonic race as the world's ordering force and the theories of the "Teutonic germ" school peaked in popularity in the 1870s and 1880s. Burgess expressed such views when abstractly defending imperialism as the inevitable manifestation of "Teutonic" superiority.²⁷

In the Darwinian atmosphere of the last decades of nineteenth-century racial theories took shape under the leadership of such scientists as Columbia anthropologist Franz Boas, Harvard biologist Charles B. Davenport, and

²⁷ In *The Civil War and the Constitution*, Burgess argued that both slavery and "state sovereignty" must go, and in their places universal freedom and national sovereignty must be enthroned. Furthermore, he stated that in the plan of universal history, the meaning of secession was "the hastening of emancipation and nationalization. The United States were lagging in the march of modern civilization. Slavery and "State sovereignty" were the fetters which held them back. . . ." John W. Burgess, *The Civil War and the Constitution* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), I, 135. For another view on the necessity of abolition see William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History* (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks, 1966), 254, 255. Williams argues that William Lloyd Garrison, in his anti-slavery campaign, helped to the complete transition needed in the country to establish the proper moral framework for laissez faire.; John W. Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1890), I, 30-48; Burgess, *The Foundations of Political Science*, xi.

Yale educated geneticist Madison Grant. The ideologies of progress and such biological and anthropological studies as "Race and Culture in the Modern World," and "Race as a Factor in Political Theory," informed political thought as it highlighted the importance of political origins and development.²⁸

President Theodore Roosevelt, Burgess' former student at Columbia Law, demonstrated the pervasive influence of the doctrines of Social Darwinist ideology when in 1907 he responded to an article in which a physician was arguing the need for a smaller American family. Roosevelt treated the medical doctor's argument as if it were part of a discussion concerning racial purity and race suicide, remarking that were the average American family to have at most only three or less children the race instantly would diminish in numbers, a tendency which if left unchecked would, as a form of race suicide, "hurry us to extinction." To the medical doctor's opinion that larger families would result in the production of defective children Roosevelt retorted:

²⁸ Jackson, 130-137, 113, 111; Raymond G. Gettell, *History of American Political Thought* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1928), 611; A. A. Goldenweiser, "Race and Culture in the Modern World," *Journal of Social Forces*, (Nov. 1924); F. H. Hankins, "Race as a Factor in Political Theory," in C. E. Merriam and H. E. Barnes, eds., *History of Political Theories, Recent Times* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1924), 508-550.

The greatest problem of civilizations is to be found in the fact that the well-to-do families tend to die out; there results, in consequence, a tendency to the elimination instead of the survival of the fittest. . . .²⁹

Roosevelt also held to an evolutionary imperialist view of American history. For example, he favored a foreign policy which included the view of America as a nation at the pinnacle of a mighty history of racial growth begun with the expansions and migrations of the great Germanic tribes:

During the past three centuries, the spread of the English-speaking peoples over the world's waste spaces has been not only the most striking feature of the world's history, but also the event of all others most far-reaching in its effects and its importance.³⁰

Roosevelt's endorsement of this aspect of the past underscored his approval for the spread of an American civilization whose future would be successfully accomplished because it was based upon the foundation of a specific Darwinian theory of human society framed by a grand evolutionary design.

²⁹ Theodore Roosevelt, "A Letter from President Roosevelt on Race Suicide," *The American Monthly Review of Reviews*, 35 (May 1907), 550, 551.

³⁰ Theodore Roosevelt quoted in Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 174.

In the field of economics, statistician Fredrick L. Hoffman conducted an enormous investigation on the issue of race relations in the United States. Written under the auspices of the Prudential Insurance Company of America, and published by the American Economic Association, *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* was designed to investigate "longevity and physiological peculiarities among the colored population." With exclusive use of the statistical method and concise tabular statements its author claimed the facts to be free of "sectional prejudice and sectional regard of those arrayed on either side of the race question."³¹ Biology and ideas of biological evolution, emphasizing the preeminence of heredity, undermined earlier ideas of human equality and of the capacity of the individual for improvement through education. These theories hardened into the scientific racism that led to the eugenics movement.³²

³¹ Fredrick L. Hoffman, *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1896): v, vi; Roosevelt, 174-179.

³²Raymond G. Gettell, *History of American Political Thought* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1928), 611; A. A. Goldenweiser, "Race and Culture in the Modern World," *Journal of Social Forces*, (Nov. 1924); F. H. Hankins, "Race as a Factor in Political Theory," in C. E. Merriam and H. E. Barnes, eds., *History of Political Theories, Recent Times* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1924), 508-550; Jackson, 97.

Never a science destined for the ivory tower, eugenics had as its mission the goal of translating scientific truths into public policy. In the mid 1880s, sociologist Lester Frank Ward opposed what he considered the ignoble activity and animality of conservative Darwinism. In response to August Weismann's rejection of Lamarck's inheritance of acquired characters, Ward proposed a division between neo-Darwinists and neo-Lamarckians. Natural selection would explain man's animal characteristics, including the intellectual cunning required in commercial enterprises. Lamarckian theory would explain the higher faculties, whose intense exercises would impress themselves "profoundly upon the plastic brain substance" with the result that "germs of posterity" transmitted them to descendants throughout the centuries of developing civilization. In the period from 1900 to 1914, social reformers of the Progressive Age emphasized the need for scientific expertise to solve social problems. Scientists devised physical and intelligence measurements which they used to determine the characteristics of racial typography and superiority. In 1926, the American Eugenics Society announced a policy that included a two-pronged approach

to social programs. The first was a negative eugenics that dealt with the "elimination of dysgenic elements from society," favoring use of sterilization and laws preventing the unfit from marrying." Laws against miscegenation and interracial marriage were already well established in American legal culture beginning in the eighteenth century, so they were not included in this category. In contrast, the approach of positive eugenics dealt "with forces which tend upward, or with the furtherance of human evolution." Biological identifiers became the basis for many evolutionary theories which reached their zenith in the decade immediately preceding World War II.³³

³³Stocking, 69, 72-75, 80, 81; Jackson, 60, 61, 251. For in-depth discussion of scientific racism see pages 97-127; John W. Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1890), I, 30-48; Burgess, *The Foundations of Political Science*, xi. For further discussion of Lester Ward's ideas see Bannister, 392, 393, 394.

CHAPTER 3

THE DIVINE SPARK: DUNNING IN HIS TIME

In 1887, Columbia University appointed William Archibald Dunning Fellow and Assistant in History and Political Science. Dunning was the first man with a primary interest of history named to the staff of the university. His appointment represented the institutionalization of the role Burgess played in the establishment of history as a profession in America. Although Burgess had written an extensive three-volume history of the United States from 1817 to 1876, he was primarily a political scientist whose scholarship exemplified the maxim history must be studied politically, "political science must be studied historically, and history must be studied politically, in order to secure a correct comprehension of either."¹ In 1885, Dunning had earned his doctoral degree from the school of Political Science after submitting his

¹William R. Shepherd, "John William Burgess," in *American Masters of Social Science*, ed. Howard W. Odum (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927), 49.

doctoral dissertation, *The Constitution of the United States in Civil War and Reconstruction, 1860-1867*, to advisor Burgess. The study was a political interpretation of Reconstruction which he developed further in his 1898 book, *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction*. Dunning considered *Essays* an accurate portrayal of his true bent in the study and writing of the Reconstruction Era, "As is my wont I follow out the legal questions up to the readmission of the states to representation in Congress." Upon completion of the essay "The Process of Reconstruction," Dunning described it to friend, historian Fredric Bancroft as "a stupid lot of dry law" that had not "elicited a word of important recognition anywhere." Surely, added Dunning, the essays had met their proper fate and "have gone to the library shelves to get dusty with the rest of the accumulation of ages."²

Although Dunning and Burgess remained personally and professionally close throughout their careers at Columbia, Dunning, in *Essays*, and in his three volume

² All quotes are from the Fredric Bancroft Papers, (Columbia University, Butler Library), Dunning to Bancroft, 11 August 1897, 28 April 1898; Hoxie, 212, 213, 214; Hofstadter, "The Department of History," 114; Phillip R. Muller, "Look Back Without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," *The Journal of American History* 61, 2 (September 1974): 328.

History of Political Theories, revealed crucial intellectual divergence from his academic mentor in several significant areas. First, Dunning made it plain that he lacked Burgess' veneration for the American constitution as an integral step in the movement of the world spirit, the *Weltgeist*; second, his interpretation of the constitutional dangers inherent within the Civil War and Reconstruction Era differed from that of Burgess, a change that appeared only when his accepted and signed dissertation became the first two chapters of the book *Essays*; third, Dunning rejected Burgess' synthetic, Hegelian approach to history including its idea of the *Geist*, the extrahistorical grand design. And finally, Dunning discounted the strict racial definitions included in Burgess' expression of "Teutonic" superiority and repudiated his former professor's belief in a systematic theory of race. Thus Dunning staked out his own interpretive foundation.³

A prolific writer, Dunning's interest in political theory revealed a larger worldview that favored

³ William A. Dunning, "Truth in History," *American Historical Review* 19, 2 (December 29, 1913): 118; Muller, "Look Back Without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," 329, 338; Higham, *History*, 259; George W. Stocking, "The American Social Scientists and Race Theory, 1890-1915" (Ph. D. diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1960), 171.

constitutional, intellectual and institutional subjects impacting not only the history of western civilization but also the whole of Western culture including that of the United States. His work demonstrated that the practice of history in the field of political inquiry, and his scientific training set him precisely in the mainstream of the first generation of American professional historians. Nonetheless, at the brink of the twentieth century Dunning's historical methods divulged a relativism that signaled a stunning break from practitioners of Rankean methodology who held close to their hearts the importance of objectivity and the relentless pursuit of the "fact."⁴

In his 1913 presidential address to the American Historical Society, "Truth in History," Dunning expressed his conviction, "we must realize frankly that whatever a given age or people believes to be true is true for that age and that people."⁵ This philosophy of history particularly informed Dunning's accounts of the controversial period known as Reconstruction. Colleagues as well as students considered the two volumes *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* and

⁴Dunning, "Truth in History," 226.

⁵Ibid., 226.

Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877,

"evidence of a conscientious effort to understand the southern view."⁶

When Ohioan Albert Bushnell Hart published *The Southern South*, he noted his intention to contribute to the "knowledge and appreciation of Southern conditions" that would be accomplished by observing two principles. First, he insisted that "no statement of fact be made without a basis in printed material, written memoranda, or personal memory of the testimony of people believed to speak the truth."⁷ And secondly, that "in the discussion there be no animus against the South as a section or a people."⁸ In his review for the *Political Science Quarterly*, Dunning praised Hart's effort as "a clear, complete, compendious and unbiased account of the facts and opinions that dominate Southern life today."⁹ According to Dunning, the book was essential reading for "all those who minimized the importance of race problem." Dunning insisted that there still persisted

⁶Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *Southern History in the Making: Pioneer Historians of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964),160.

⁷Albert Bushnell Hart, *The Southern South* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1910), 1-6.

⁸Ibid., 1-6.

⁹Dunning, review of Albert Bushnell Hart, *The Southern South*, in *Political Science Quarterly* 25, 3 (Sep. 1910), 523, 524.

"in some Northern circles," either the "idea that there is no real race problem," or that what passed for a race problem was "merely the exhibition of total depravity by some Southern whites." Northerner Hart, continued Dunning, was a trained historian who had coolly and emotionlessly collected and handled the facts, even as his analysis included the "sympathy and tolerance that are so indispensable to a fair and fruitful analysis of Southern social conditions."¹⁰ Moreover, argued Dunning, Hart's consideration of various matters in the typically "southern" South such as education, wealth, and industry were "subjected to temperate and discriminating analysis and criticism," that led "straight every time, however, to the one great and overshadowing feature—the race problem." That the study of the race problem constituted the backbone of Hart's study presented the "strongest testimony to the scientific validity of the volume."¹¹

Dunning contended that it was not the role of the historian to advocate or to judge which feelings of the actors were or were not abstractly preferable, but only

¹⁰Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*, 213.

¹¹All quotes found in Dunning, review of Albert Bushnell Hart, *The Southern South*, in *Political Science Quarterly* 25, 3 (Sep. 1910), 523, 524.

to record: "the fact that such feeling and spirit were at work must be taken squarely into account by the historian."¹² Dunning's philosophy of the historical process created an intellectual atmosphere in his graduate seminar that encouraged the spirit of historical interest and inquiry. Those of his students who came from the South, and whose work focused on the thorny issues involved in the restoration of the individual southern states to the Union in the years after the Civil War, came to be known as the Dunning School of Reconstruction Historiography. The work of the "Dunning School" gave a voice to the South. It reordered the sectional intellectual discourse of the nineteenth century, permitting expression to white southerners forced to endure stunning new cultural, political, economic, and social standards brought by the complex system of race relations that had assumed a radical form after the close of the war.¹³

¹²Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*, 213.

¹³ Dunning *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*, 213; Higham, *History*, 259; William Archibald Dunning, *A History of Political Theories: Ancient and Medieval*; William Archibald Dunning, *A History of Political Theories from Luther to Montesquieu*; William Archibald Dunning, *A History of Political Theories From Rousseau to Spencer*; Leonard Krieger, *Time's Reasons*, 52, 53; *Nation*, 2 January 1908; Fogel, *Which Road to the Past*, 11; Higham, *History*, 20, 167, 259, 260; Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *Southern History in the Making*:

In the pioneering era of historical scholarship few were more widely influential than Dunning. He held an unusual position in the scholarly world of historians and political scientists. A successful academic career at Columbia University combined his talents as teacher, investigator, and editor. Thirty Ph.D. candidates acknowledged his assistance in the period between 1900 and 1923, manifesting the wide range of fields in which he advised students. Contemporaries considered his three-volume, *A History of Political Theories* a "masterwork in its field," and it became standard classroom reading during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Dunning's election to the presidencies of the leading political science and historical guilds prompted the publication of two commemorative volumes written in his honor. These compilations of essays written by and inscribed to him by his graduate students, the volumes *Studies in Southern History and Politics* and *A History of Political Theories, Recent Times* remain as tangible evidence of his influence and his students' esteem. His teaching, scholarship, inspiration, and ready wit caused the

Pioneer Historians of the South (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 160.

Columbia professor to be affectionately known to them as the "Old Chief."¹⁴

Born in 1857 in Plainfield, New Jersey, Dunning emerged from an unusual background of interests that included business, art, and education. Dunning's father, a carriage manufacturer, was a man of keen intellect and artistic interests, a critic of art and a painter of some talent. At the age of seventy-eight, displaying evidence of unflagging interest in cultural matters, Dunning's father took up the study of Greek. It was he who initially inspired his son with a love of history and "an interest in the problems of Reconstruction."¹⁵

¹⁴David Donald, "Introduction," xvi; J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton, "Introduction," in *Truth in History and Other Essays*, William A. Dunning (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), xi, xvii; Charles Edward Merriam, "William Archibald Dunning," in *American Masters of Social Science*, Howard W. Odum ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927), 131, 132; Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *Southern History in the Making: Pioneer Historians of the South* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 150, 156, 158, 161, 164; Howard W. Odum, "Pioneers and Masters of Social Science," in *American Masters of Social Science*, Howard W. Odum ed. (New York: Henry Holt and company, 1927), 3, 4; *New York Times*, 26 August 1922; *Springfield Sunday Republican*, 27 August 1922; *Columbia Alumni News*, Vol. XIV, no. I (1922), 7, in William A. Dunning Papers, Columbian Library, Columbia University; Phillip R. Muller, "Look Back without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," *The Journal of American History* 61, 2; (September 1974): 325, 326, 327; Walter L. Fleming and others, *Studies in Southern History and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914); Charles Edward Merriam, Harry Elmer Barnes, eds., *A History of Political Theories, Recent Times*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924); "Historical News," *American Historical Review* 28, 1 (October, 1922): 173.

¹⁵ William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1935), Dunning

Despite a penchant for boyish mischief, Dunning applied himself seriously to academic achievement. In high school he kept a diary which revealed not only conscientious preparation of assignments and a pattern of leisurely reading, but also afternoons devoted to archery, baseball, and kite flying, indicating a well-rounded development. Diary confessions also record an episode of imperfect deportment by reporting that his teacher gave him a mark for "cutting up like everything" in class.¹⁶ The misdemeanors of a normal boy stood in sharp contrast to report cards that showed academic marks consistently in the nineties. Dunning graduated as valedictorian of his class in 1874.¹⁷

Financial reversals following the panic of 1873 seriously reduced the family income. The money reserved for Dunning's college education was lost, making it necessary for the student to pay his own way. Noting that Dunning showed a flair for writing and held boyhood ambitions to be a newspaper reporter, a respected high

dedicated this volume to his father. It was included in the *American Nation Series* as Volume 22; Merriam, "William Archibald Dunning," 133; J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, "Dunning, William Archibald," Dumas Malone and Allen Johnson, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography* (22 vols., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), III, 523; Hamilton, "Introduction," xi.

¹⁶ William A. Dunning quoted in Stephenson, *Southern History in the Making*, 145.

¹⁷ Stephenson, *Southern History in the Making*, 145; Muller, "Look Back without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," 326.

school teacher introduced him to several Dartmouth College educated journalists in New York, who afforded Dunning the opportunity to report for their papers. In the fall of 1877, Dunning realized his ambition to enter Dartmouth College.¹⁸

His stay at Dartmouth was short-lived. As a participant in an altercation involving a reprisal raid on a group of sophomores, Dunning and a number of his classmates were dismissed permanently. Briefly, he considered a total abandonment higher education. "I don't believe I'll go to Princeton," he told his former teacher, "I don't believe I'll go anywhere."¹⁹ Of course, Dunning reconsidered, and in the late 1870s he entered Columbia and began a four-decade stay.²⁰

Dunning graduated from Columbia University in 1881, took the degree of Master of Arts in 1884, and in 1885, he received one of the first Doctor of Philosophy degrees in history and political science awarded by the university. Following tradition, Dunning then studied

¹⁸ Merriam, "William Archibald Dunning," 133; Hamilton, "Introduction," xii; Muller, "Look Back without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," 326.

¹⁹ Dunning quoted in Hamilton, "Introduction," xiii.

²⁰ Hamilton, "Introduction," xii; Muller, "Looking Back without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," 326; Stephenson, *Southern History in the Making*, 146, 147; Hamilton, "Dunning, William Archibald," 523.

for a time in Germany under Professor Heinrich von Treitschke at the University of Berlin. Upon his return in 1887, appointment as Fellow and Assistant in History and Political Science established him as a member of the faculty. Upward movement marked Dunning's career. He was successively instructor in Political Science and History in 1889, adjunct professor of History in 1891, and professor in 1896. The degree of doctor of laws was conferred upon him by Columbia in 1904, and in 1916, even Dartmouth College which had dismissed him awarded Dunning the doctor of letters. The culmination of his career came however, with his selection, in 1904, as the first to hold the Leiber Professorship.²¹

Dunning's scholarly work won high honors in the fields of history and political science. One of the founders of the American Historical Association, Dunning served as a member of the Executive Council, 1892-1902, and as chairman of its committee on publication, 1906-1910. An original member of the American Political Science Association, Dunning not only frequently contributed to the *Political Science Quarterly* but also

²¹ Hofstadter, "The Department of History," 214, 215; Muller, "Look Back without Anger," 326, 327; Hamilton, "Introduction," xiii, *Columbia Alumni News*, Dunning Papers, Columbia University Archives, Butler Library, Columbia University, 7; Merriam, "William Archibald Dunning," 134.

was among its most estimable advisors, rendering noteworthy service as managing editor of the journal for nine years. The American Historical Association and the American Political Science Association recognized his scholarship and extended to the historian the rare honor of election to the presidency of both organizations.²²

By any measure, Dunning was an outstanding member of the community of American scholars. With a unique reputation, Dunning was widely known in the field of political philosophy, an area in which he took "particular pride and interest."²³ Yet he was also highly influential among scholars who considered him to be one of the great authorities in American history and politics. Dunning's prestige was responsible, to a

²² Hamilton, "Introduction," xv; Merriam, "William Archibald Dunning," 134; "Historical News." *American Historical Review*, 174,175; *Columbia Alumni News*, in Dunning Papers; Hofstadter, "The Department of History," 214, 215; Hamilton, "Dunning, William Archibald," 523.

²³ Upon his promotion, in 1891, to Adjunct Professor of History, Dunning wrote to Columbia president, Seth Low, requesting a change in his proposed title: "I should very much prefer to have added the words "and Political Philosophy," to indicate more distinctly work that I am doing and in which I take particular pride and interest." Dunning indicated that he had spoken to Professor John Burgess about the matter, and insisted that if the change was possible and not inconvenient, "I should consider it a particular favor if it were made." Dunning to Columbia University President Seth Low, 21 Feb. 1891, Dunning Papers Columbia University Archives, Butler Library, Columbia University).

great extent, for the high reputation Columbia's history department held as one of the best in the country.²⁴

Dunning came of age in a time when constitutional issues were central to the professional historians' analyses of the American Democratic Republic and in particular to the Civil War and Reconstruction era, and his reputation as an impartial authority was well established. The acknowledged master in this field of U. S. history, his influence proved most enduring. Southerners had, with few exceptions, two choices if they were interested in studying the history of their region. They could study with Herbert B. Adams at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, or they could cross the Mason and Dixon Line and study with Dunning at Columbia University. Because his revisionist work represented a departure from the northern bias and Radical Republican perspective from which much of the history of the period had been written by previous scholars, Dunning attracted flocks of southern students. Indeed, he schooled a small brigade of doctoral students who collectively came to be "Dunning school."²⁵

²⁴ Letter from Professor W. Sloane to President Butler, 12 Aug. 1903, Dunning Papers; Merriam, "William Archibald Dunning," 144.

²⁵ Higham, *History*, 167; Stephenson, "A Half Century of Southern Historical Scholarship," 18, 20; By 1907, Dunning's students had

In 1903, Johns Hopkins University offered Dunning Herbert Adams' position as Chairman of the Department of History. The Hopkins' offer was prestigious, and it was an attractive one which would have given him full control of the Hopkins Department of History and a \$5,000 annual salary. The history department at Hopkins had been the first to make American history a serious subject for university study. Adams had developed the department there, numbering among his Ph.D. students Woodrow Wilson and Fredrick Jackson Turner. But, John Burgess was adamant about keeping Dunning at Columbia. Colleagues warned President Nicholas Murray Butler that "we cannot lose him . . . especially to a southern college."²⁶ In a letter to the financial committee in which he sought the funds for Dunning that would match the offer of the Hopkins, Butler argued, "there are only three Professors of American History of the first rank in the United States. Of these Professor Dunning is one Professor McLaughlin of the University of Michigan, is another The third is Professor

produced dissertations on Mississippi (James W. Garner, 1901), Georgia (Edwin C. Woolley, 1901), Alabama (Walter L. Fleming, 1905), North Carolina (J. G. de Roulac Hamilton, 1906), Texas (Charles W. Ramsdell, 1910), Florida (William W. Davis, 1913), Georgia, C. Mildred Thomson, 1915), and Arkansas (Thomas S. Staples, 1923).

²⁶ Letter to Columbia President Nicholas Murray Butler, from Dunning's colleague Professor Sloane, 12 Aug. 1903, Dunning Papers.

Turner, of the University of Wisconsin."²⁷ Moreover, insisted Butler, his colleagues "are very strong in the belief that it would be a serious academic mistake for us to permit him to withdraw, and they think that the fact of his going from Columbia to Johns Hopkins at this time would be construed unfavorably in our interests. They are exceedingly anxious to have Professor Dunning remain and are using their best efforts to this end."²⁸

In October of that year, the Trustees of the Columbia took unprecedented action. At Dunning's request, they unanimously voted to change Dunning's title from that of Professor of History to that of Professor of History and Political Philosophy. In addition, they voted to raise his compensation to \$5,000 annually, retroactive to July 1903. Of the board's action President Nicholas Murray Butler commented to Dunning: "To the best of my knowledge and belief, this last action is unprecedented in the history of the Board, and serves to mark the high appreciation in which the University holds your scholarship and services."²⁹ Dunning remained at Columbia. The following year,

²⁷ Letter from President Butler to the chairman of the Finance Committee, 29 Sept. 1903, Dunning Papers.

²⁸ Ibid.; Robert A. McCaughey, *Stand Columbia* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2003), 203, 204.

²⁹ Butler to Dunning, 6 October 1903, Dunning Papers.

marking the 150th anniversary of the founding of King's College, the board honored Dunning by selecting him to be the inaugural holder of the Leiber Professorship.³⁰

Academic men felt at home in patrician circles at the turn of the century, and New York's Social Register listed most of Columbia's full professors, who seemed part of the intellectual aristocracy, on its roster of members. They were dignified, frock-coated gentlemen, and Dunning was no exception. He belonged to the Century Association and the Columbia University Club in New York City, and the Englewood Country Club in New Jersey. Because of his quick wit and charming conversation, the New Yorker was also known as "an institution" at the Cosmos Club in Washington. But, the *New York Times* brought Dunning out of the confines of the academic world and into the public eye when, in 1916, it reported his testimony as an expert witness in the field of political theories on behalf of Henry Ford in a widely publicized, million dollar libel suit against the *Chicago Tribune*.³¹

³⁰ Butler to Dunning, 31 Oct. 1904, Dunning Papers.

³¹ Higham, *History*, 9, 10; *Columbia Alumni News*, Dunning Papers; Muller, "Look Back without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," 323; *New York Times*, 30 July 1919, 31 July 1919, The *Chicago Tribune* accused Ford of being an anarchist. Ford, however, was successful in the lawsuit against the newspaper due, in part, to

That Dunning was an inspiring, exacting, and dynamic teacher was reflected by his success in the classroom. A whole generation of students passed through his graduate seminars. Many historical investigators and professors of history in acclaimed universities including the University of Pennsylvania's Pulitzer Prize winning historian Roy F. Nichols, and Vassar's Mildred C. Thompson received stimulus and guidance from Professor Dunning. Dunning died before student Nichols completed his doctoral dissertation. Nichols wrote that Dunning's death reinforced his appreciation of the value and quality of Dunning's influence. Of the Dunning students who studied the events of 1850s, Nichols was perhaps the most distinguished. *The Disruption of American Democracy*, his most famous book, won the Pulitzer Prize in the late 1940s; he died in the early 1970s after a long career at the University of Pennsylvania. C. Mildred Thompson not

Dunning's expert testimony demonstrating that Ford's utterances or behavior could not be mistaken for those of an anarchist.; Merriam, "William Archibald Dunning," 144; Muller, "Look Back without Anger," 327; *New York Times*, 3 April 1922, in Dunning Papers.

only enjoyed a long career as dean at Vassar College, but also served at the United Nations with UNESCO.³²

Intellectual descendants in the areas of both political theory and American history respected Dunning as a pioneer in scientific research, a precisionist in literary craftsmanship, and a genius in the art of teaching. He was "supremely anxious in all his work to remain detached in interest and objective in method" and he held himself to the same high critical standards as those to which he held his students.³³ Moreover, said one political theory student, Charles Edward Merriam, Dunning did not simply pass on the light of traditional knowledge, but kindled "in many minds the divine spark of enthusiasm for research without which the great intellectual adventure of mankind would close."³⁴

Dunning left an impression upon his students that resulted in bonds of personal friendship and mutual intellectual interest evident in the recognizable unity

³² Stephenson, *Studies in Southern History*, 150; Charles Merriam became distinguished author, as well as did Walter L. Fleming, F. W. Coker, and James W. Garner.

³³ Charles E. Merriam quoted in Hofstadter, "The Department of History," 215; Dunning wrote to Bancroft that he was especially dismayed that he omitted a date from his research for their corroborated effort on a biography of Fred Schurz, saying he "can't for the life of me understand why I omitted a date." Dunning to Fredric Bancroft, 12 Jan. 1908, Fredric Bancroft Papers (Butler Library, Columbia University).

³⁴Merriam, "William Archibald Dunning," 145.

among them. Dunning's students of American history marked his election to the presidency of the American Historical Association with an inscribed collection of essays, *Studies in Southern History and Politics*.³⁵ To commemorate his election to the presidency of the American Political Science Association in 1922, his students of political theory contributed essays to the volume, *Political Theories, Recent Times*.³⁶ In the dedicatory preface students expressed respect for their professor's intellectual example and for his influence on both the university and the future of their profession: "no one in the last generation has done more. . .to advance the study of formal political theory, and to prepare the way for the increasingly intensive study of the evolution of the political mind."³⁷ The testimony of his political science students

³⁵Dunning students who contributed to *Studies in Southern History and Politics* include: Walter L. Fleming; Ulrich B. Phillips; Charles William Ramsdell; Milledge L. Bonham, Jr.; Sidney D. Brummer; J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton; C. Mildred Thompson; Edwin C. Woolley; William Watson Davis; W. Roy Smith; William K. Boyd; Holland Thompson; Charles Edward Merriam; David Y. Thomas; and James W. Garner.

³⁶Dunning students who contributed to *Political Theories, Recent Times* include: Charles E. Merriam; Malcolm M. Willey; F. W. Coker; E. M. Borchard; Caleb Perry Patterson; Paul H. Douglas; Carlton J. H. Hayes; Herbert W. Schneider; Harry Elmer Barnes; Charles Elmer Gehlke; Alexander A. Goldenweiser; Franklin Thomas; and Frank H. Hankins.

³⁷Merriam, Barnes, and others, eds., *Political Theories, Recent Times*, v, vi; James W. Garner, ed., *Studies in Southern History and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914).

joined that of Joseph Grégoire de Roulac Hamilton and others of his American history students in their esteem of the "Old Chief." Their inscription commended Dunning as one whose "shining personality, keen intellect, warm personal interest, and painstaking guidance placed them under obligations too great ever to be discharged, and bound them by warm affection that even his passing from among them could not weaken."³⁸

Besides earning the accolades of his students for his teaching, Dunning was also a prolific, highly influential writer. His *History of Political Theories*, dubbed a master work by the *New York Times*, was not only of enduring value to students of that subject, but also of utmost importance to those who would understand his work on Reconstruction. These volumes, distinctive for their lack of the *a priori* historical schemes found in the histories of Burgess and earlier historians, stimulated new research in the history of political philosophy. The works of Merriam and Francis William Coker exemplified this trend away from philosophical history as it became a common enterprise for Western

³⁸ Hamilton, "Introduction," xi; Stephenson, "A Half Century of Southern Historical Scholarship," 18.

historians to write of the political theories of western civilization.³⁹

³⁹ Muller, "Look Back without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," 328; Milton Halsey Thomas, *A Bibliography of the Faculty of Political Science of Columbia University, 1880-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 58-62; Krieger, *History*, 259, 260; See Merriam's *History of the Theory of Sovereignty Since Rousseau* (1900), and *History of American Political Theories* (1903); for Coker, see *Organismic Theories of State* (1910), *Readings in Political Philosophy* (1910).

CHAPTER 4

A NEW ERA: DUNNING AND HIS EPOCH

In 1898, Dunning first proposed to begin work on what he would come to call his "epoch-making contribution to history." Dunning spent summer in his traditional manner at "Dreamland," his vacation home on Lake Sunapee, New Hampshire, "a place where one could refresh and indeed travel, in the wings of the mind," and fell into his regular summer habit of "loafing absolutely . . . sailing, and golf the whole time."¹ However, in October of that year Dunning began a year-long sabbatical in Europe. During this time he commenced his life-long fascination and work in area of political theory.²

The project commanded his almost undivided attention for the next several years. With the exception of a few commercial writing jobs undertaken to

¹ Dunning often urged Fredric Bancroft to spend some time during the summers with him and his wife here, for it was a place where one could refresh and indeed travel, "in the wings of the mind." Dunning to Bancroft, 21 June 1888, Bancroft Papers.

² Dunning to Fredric Bancroft, 7 Aug, 19 Sept., 8 Dec., 28 June, 1899, Bancroft Papers.

cover medical expenses for his own periodically deteriorating health or for his wife's frequent illnesses, Dunning focused on the subject of political theories. His work came to fruition with the publication in 1902 of volume one, *Political Theories: Ancient and Medieval*, and in 1905 volume two, *Political Theories: From Rousseau to Spencer*. With appearance of the second volume, work on the series came to an almost complete stop. Dunning took advantage of two offers which promised to pay for accumulated medical bills and enable him to return comfortably to volume three. After collaborating with Fredrick Bancroft on a biography of Carl Schurz, Dunning honored the promise made to Albert Bushnell Hart of Harvard a few years earlier and set to work on a volume for Hart's *American Nation* series. Dunning's hastily written contribution, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic*, became a classic and gave Reconstruction its first scholarly history. This volume later earned the characterization as the quintessential "racist" interpretation of Reconstruction.³

³ *New York Times*, 26 August 1922; Muller, "Look Back without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," 327, 328, 336; Muller, "Look back without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," 327, 328, 338.

Dunning was neither a historian of the South nor a southerner. He was a mugwump—a term that came to describe the political independent, but was initially used in 1884 to describe those in the Republican party who refused to support the 1884 presidential candidacy of James C. Blaine—a northern intellectual educated in the East and Germany, whose interest lay in national problems. In the book *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* Dunning argued that the war had created a new constitutional arrangement among the states. Staking out his own intellectual ground, Dunning rejected two aspects of his mentor John Burgess' argument about Reconstruction. The first problem was Burgess' characterization of the new federal arrangement after the war as indicative of the emergence of a clearly superior national government. The second included Burgess' conclusion that the revolutionary accomplishments of the war were in danger of overthrow at the hands of the Supreme Court, threatening a return to the fragmented nationalism of the antebellum days, a return which would be reactionary and a positive threat to civil peace.⁴

⁴ Dunning, *Constitution of the United States in Civil War and Reconstruction*, 118, 119.

Dunning also objected to two views prominent in Burgess' approach to history, first, his reliance on schemes of evolutionary, universal history. In *The Civil War and the Constitution*, Burgess argued that both slavery and "state sovereignty" must go, and in their places universal freedom and national sovereignty must be enthroned. According to Burgess, in the plan of universal history, the meaning of secession was "the hastening of emancipation and nationalization. The United States were lagging in the march of modern civilization. Slavery and 'State sovereignty' were the fetters which held them back. . . ." ⁵ Secondly, Dunning rebuffed Burgess' Hegelian stress on the formation of the American nation, the centrality of the role of the U.S. Constitution in the unification of the United States, and the corollary emergence of a clearly superior national government within a new constitutional arrangement of states. In a note to Bancroft, Dunning described Burgess' deep veneration for the excellence of the U. S. Constitution, "Burgess has pretty strong

⁵ John W. Burgess, *The Civil War and the Constitution* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), I, 135. John W. Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1890), I, 30-48; Burgess, *The Foundations of Political Science*, xi.

convictions on the matter of the Articles of Confederation and he doesn't purpose to allow his rationalistic propaganda to be affected by the expression of any contrary views." In Dunning's opinion Burgess held such high level of respect for the Constitution because he "wanted to see that the citizens of the U. S. should not go to cutting one another's throats again too soon." ⁶ And in 1913, when Charles A. Beard sent to him a personal copy of his just-published book, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, apparently written to break down excessive respect for the Federal Constitution, Dunning responded with a word of personal congratulations to the author, "This is the true milk of the word. . . ." ⁷

Burgess' theories betray his adherence to the ideas of the Teutonic germ school which included the belief in the political superiority of the Teutonic race and its necessary role as world-ordering force in the progress of civilization. Of the Teutonic race Dunning wrote, "what idea the early Teuton associated with his customs he has nowhere recorded; the political theory that passes for his is likely to be in reality that of

⁶Dunning to Bancroft, 26 December 1888, Bancroft Papers.

⁷Dunning, *Truth in History and Other Essays*, xxviii.

Tacitus, lamenting the Roman Republic, or of Freeman preaching the unity of history."⁸ Concerning the history of political theories Dunning wrote that in contrast to the Oriental Aryans, who had failed to free their politics from a theological and metaphysical environment, the Aryans of Europe had proven themselves to be the only peoples to whom the term "political" could be properly applied. In his introduction to *History of Political Theories* he set his statement into the context of his own ideas:

Critics of the use of this term have assailed it as implying an arrogant assumption of superiority for our own race. The assaults are without foundation. Whether, from the standpoint of God, or nature, or the Unknowable, or abstract reason, "political peoples" are superior to other peoples, is not involved in the term; the only point is that a distinction may be perceived between two classes of people.⁹

Unlike Burgess, Dunning never developed a scientific, or systematic theory of race, and he rejected the trend in historical study that in its attempt to gauge the progress of civilizations included searches for such minor social facts as the techniques

⁸Dunning, *Political Theories, Ancient and Medieval*, xvi.

⁹Dunning, *Political Theories, Ancient and Medieval*, xx.

used by primitive Aryans to fatten their swine.¹⁰ For example, in the 1920 *Political Theories from Rousseau to Spencer*, Dunning took into consideration the German idealists who in the 1860s declared that in addition to the required physical dimension inherent in the definition of state as an organism—boundaries fixed by race or geography—analyses must also include the metaphysical and psychological: "'Person' had to be defined by the psychologist's analysis; *Volk* had to be traced to its germ by the investigations of the historian." Dunning argued that the development of anthropology and ethnology transformed the old ideas of the distinctions based upon boundaries fixed by race or geography: "to whatever the extent the idea of objectivity determined nationality persisted in the popular thought and emotional literature," he argued, "it ceased by the end of the eighth decade of the century to have any important place in political theory." Moreover, Dunning continued, "capitalistic industry and commerce created lines of union and of cleavage that crossed and endlessly confused the ancient lines of language and kindred." According to Dunning,

¹⁰Dunning, "Truth in History," 218.

"the historical and comparative methods of jurisprudence and philology destroyed on the one hand the myths of long-standing national solidarity and achievement, and proved on the other hand that institutions assumed to be the characteristic glory of certain peoples were as widespread as humanity itself." Political science "caught the full infection of the Darwinian spirit that ruled in the physical field," Dunning concluded, and "the state was regarded as at any time merely a stage in an endless series of evolutionary transformations."¹¹

An extensive study by anthropologist George W. Stocking illustrated that during the late nineteenth century social scientists were questioning the Aryan hypothesis, but not all social scientists had rejected the notion of a superior Aryan race by 1915. However, Dunning was among those historians who accepted the newer views on race, rejecting the older, Aryan hypothesis of race, which held that race was linked to linguistics.¹² Stocking found no evidence that Dunning was operating within the framework of evolutionary

¹¹ Stocking, "American Social Scientists and Race Theory," 603, 613. *Political Theories from Rousseau to Spencer* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920); 302, 334, 335.

¹²Dunning, *Political Theories from Rousseau to Spencer*, 334, 335.

social science. Examination of Dunning's work proved it to be without the patterns found in evolutionary paradigms such as Neo-Lamarckianism, Racial Hierarchy, Cultural Hierarchy, or Mental Differences. Stocking concluded that Dunning's references were expressions of the "general evolutionary sequences of social or cultural forms, or to specific sequences of specific social or cultural manifestations."¹³

Dunning insisted that racial policies were peripheral to the constitutional issues facing the South during Reconstruction.¹⁴ This attitude was apparent, for example, in a comment made to Bancroft concerning a review of *Essays* set to appear in the political magazine, the *Nation*, "because I didn't whoop it up for Garrison in paragraphs on slavery, the *Nation* will probably damn the work." The magazine, however, complimented *Essays* as a "book which is to be praised as a notable contribution to our constitutional history."¹⁵

¹³ Dunning, "Truth in History," 218; Stocking, "American Social Scientists and Race Theory: 1890-1915," 172. Stocking researched the work of the historians of the latter nineteenth and early twentieth century. Stocking included charts of all social scientists, including historians, citing their racial proclivities, 613. See 603-613 for analyses and charting of the most distinguished social scientists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century detailed within the report.

¹⁴ Dunning to Bancroft, Bancroft Papers, 5 September 1898.

¹⁵ Dunning to Bancroft, 7 August 1898; Six months after the original 1897 publication, Dunning commented to Bancroft that

Tending toward simple observation, Dunning confined his racial comments to cultural and social issues. He insisted it was the historian's duty to take into account not only actions or events, but also the feelings motivating them:

What animated the whites was pride in their race as such and a dread, partly instinctive, partly rational, lest their institutions, traditions, and ideals were to be appropriated or submerged. Whether or not this feeling and spirit were abstractly preferable to those which animated the northern idealist who preached equality, the fact that such feeling and spirit were at work must be taken squarely into account by the historian.¹⁶

In 1908, the *Nation* greeted the publication of *Reconstruction* with praise, declaring Dunning's narrative "well fortified with references to the sources, forbids us to pronounce them hasty." But his historical relativism, and detached attitude toward Hart's editorship of *Reconstruction* was evident in his reaction to Hart's objections to a negative characterization of Radical Republican Charles Sumner: "I remember Hart made some scratches about that and expressed doubt, but I just rubbed them out." He also

Essays, "haven't elicited a word of important recognition anywhere, which is a proper enough fate, and they have gone to library shelves to get dusty with the rest of the accumulation of ages," 28 April 1898, Bancroft Papers; *Nation*, 21 July 1898.

¹⁶Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic*, 213.

insisted that matters of race were not central to the "general subject" of Reconstruction, an assertion which contributed to later charges of racist.¹⁷ Dunning's philosophy was evident, for example, in the often quoted passage from an address that was included in the revised edition of *Essays*, in 1904. Dunning commented on race relations:

The ultimate root of the trouble in the South had been, not the institution of slavery, but the coexistence in one society of two races so distinct in character as to render coalescence impossible; . . . , slavery had been a *modus vivendi* through which social life was possible; and. . . , after its disappearance, its place must be taken by a set of conditions which, if more humane and beneficent in accidents, must in essence express the same fact of racial equality.¹⁸

He qualified the passage by noting that the idea was not his own, but was "the idea of Jefferson and Clay and Lincoln," and that "the progress in the acceptance of this idea in the North has measured the progress in the South of the undoing of reconstruction." Dunning originally presented the essay that contains this passage "The Undoing of Reconstruction" as an address to

¹⁷Bancroft Papers. Dunning to Bancroft, 3 January 1908; 24 May 2006; *Nation*, 2 January 1908.

¹⁸Dunning, *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction*, 384.

the American Historical Association in 1900. It is not known whether he had planned for its publication.¹⁹

Dunning viewed with contempt the effort to place race relations at the center of the Reconstruction process, for in his estimation it sullied Reconstruction history. For example, Dunning was critical of Johns Hopkins professor Herbert B. Adams. Adams held to the "germ" theory of political forms that emphasized the Teutonic roots of American institutional life; this was the crucial idea that pervaded the study in his Hopkins

¹⁹Ibid., 384, 385; Albert B. Moore, "The Sixth Annual Meeting of The Southern Historical Association," *The Journal of Southern History* 7,1 (Feb. 1941), 66: In 1940, at the sixth annual meeting of the Southern Historical Association, no reviewer in *The American Historical Association* found fault with the older histories of Reconstruction because of the authors' "racial prejudice or economic predilections" under the influence of Dunning and the Johns Hopkins Reconstruction accounts. The reviewers noted, however, that considerable "revisionist" literature had appeared. The burden of proof would be on them to challenge the abundance of substantial evidence of the scholars before them for they too would be liable to revision; Bernard A. Weisberger, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography," *The Journal of Southern History* 25, 4 (Nov. 1959), 427. It must be argued that the basis upon which historians of Reconstruction were analyzed shifted. In 1939, Francis Simkins, in an article for the *Journal of Southern History*, described a number of "New Viewpoints on Southern Reconstruction." "Frankly facing the fact that "the main issue of the Reconstruction period, the great American race question" was like "Banquo's ghost, and would not go down," Simpkins called for a fairer analysis of Reconstruction's achievements and failures. By adopting a more "critical, creative and tolerant attitude," he said, historians of the South could better "discharge their great civic obligation."; Philip R. Muller, "Look Back without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," Muller argues that historians who have chosen to analyze Dunning primarily within the framework of racial beliefs using Dunning's two volumes, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic* or *Essays*, invariably choose their evidence from the same list of quotations. Moreover, argues Muller, "the four references drawn from the *Essays*, do not comment directly on Dunning's view of race." See Alan D. Harper, "The Historian as Nemesis," *Civil War History*, X (March 1964), 54-66.

seminar. Dunning objected to Adams' inclusion in his historical analyses of such ethical discussions as miscegenation and racial purity, and found fault with Adams' focus on race conservation calling it a "sophistry" that could only serve to weaken the analysis of the general subject.²⁰ In Dunning's view, the great constitutional issues were at the base of the problems of Reconstruction, and he insisted "more than perfunctory attention" must be given to "the great issue of internal politics . . . the real issue is the breach between Congress and Johnson." He claimed it was a fallacy to elevate to central significance the "governmental development of the South . . . [by] going astray in dwelling on the Freedman's Bureau and Civil Rights Bills."²¹

A product of almost two decades of research and writing, *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* represents Dunning's most important contribution to the historical study of the period. In 1965, David Donald argued, "Dunning's book remains the best account of the constitutional and legislative history of the

²⁰24 March 1906, Bancroft Papers.

²¹Dunning to Bancroft, 5 Sep. 1898; Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *Southern History in the Making: Pioneer Historians of the South* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 58, 59.

Reconstruction period."²² Writing in 1967, John and LaWanda Cox agreed that few historians handled the political questions of the era with as much fairness as had Dunning. To be sure, Dunning's analysis of that dark and complex time remained the traditional account well into the twentieth century.²³

In the fall of 1905, Dunning focused his attention on the era of Reconstruction for the first time since the publication of *Essays*, almost eight years earlier, when he began work on his contribution to Hart's American Nation series, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*. Dunning considered *Reconstruction*, an inferior work, however, and reflective of the haste in which it was written.²⁴ Lack of attention to detail and literary finesse, as well as research shortcomings, were perhaps the result of Hart's insistence on a tight schedule and a brief volume. Dunning cut short his research because of lack of time, and later

²²David Donald, "Introduction," in *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction*, xvi.

²³ John and LaWanda Cox, "Negro Suffrage and Republican Politics: The Problem of Motivation in Reconstruction Historiography," *The Journal of Southern History* 33, 3 (August, 1967), 308; Muller, "Look Back without Anger: a Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," 329.

²⁴ Dunning to Bancroft, 24 May 1906, 30 July 1905, 4 May 1905, 14 March 1907, Bancroft Papers. Dunning described Hart as one who "keeps you on the jump, you'll turn out a chapter every 24 hours." Dunning was to write 3,200 words per chapter.

correspondence with Bancroft indicates that Dunning may have taken the job because he never saw it as a serious scholarly chore.²⁵ Dunning's acknowledgement of the recent publication of James Ford Rhodes' volume may be read in the context of Dunning's haste and lack of extensive research. Dunning spent only three days in Washington in the spring of 1905 researching the Andrew Johnson papers, and lacked the time for other intended research.²⁶ In a note to Bancroft, Dunning complained, "Reconstruction is progressing according to schedule. But, it is poor stuff, I fear, though Hart may never find out. . . . I ought to have 500,000 words instead of 65,000 to make anything worthwhile." He expressed frustration with the "exasperating little work for Hart" saying "it's all very unsatisfactory, but I rejoice at the approaching conclusion."²⁷

Unlike the work of most of his students and many later historians, Dunning attempted to see the period from a national perspective. Cautioning Fredric Bancroft that being in the midst of Washington politics

²⁵ Dunning to Bancroft, 25 June 1913, Bancroft Papers.

²⁶ Dunning to Bancroft, 16 April, 4 May 1905, 14 March, 16 May 1907, Bancroft Papers.

²⁷ Dunning to Bancroft, 30 July 1905, 24 March 1906, 14 March, 16 June 1907, Bancroft Papers.

would corrupt historical perspective, Dunning reminded his friend:

What kind of history of Reconstruction will you write if you are to judge by the petty, selfish, human motives that always play a part in big movements, instead of by the great continental heart throbs of a mighty people panting for and performing the work of Titans. Hie thee, man, to the topmost peak of the highest Himalayas and watch history from that point of view, where Hanna and the "old Cleveland free-trader" and the rest of the pygmies don't fill your spy glass.²⁸

Despite a concentration on this period of American history, a genuine desire to see scholars working on Civil War and Reconstruction, and a great sympathy with the South in its difficulties, Dunning never contemplated a comprehensive study of the era of Reconstruction. His concern with the constitutional issues critical to the historical understanding of the Reconstruction era included neither comprehensive analysis of the origin of the Fifteenth Amendment nor extensive treatment of the arguments which abounded after its passage.

In many ways, Dunning's views were stunningly modern, with analyses foreshadowing the political conclusions of Eric L. McKittrick in 1960, John and

²⁸ Dunning to Bancroft, 22 Jan. 1898, Bancroft Papers.

LaWanda Cox in 1963, and the careful constitutional studies of William R. Brock in 1963. *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* remains the history of Reconstruction against which all others are measured and the starting point for serious students of the era.

Modern commentators have largely ignored Dunning's wide-ranging scholarly career, and have chosen instead to base their analysis of his scholarly reputation solely on analysis of the narrative in his two books on the Reconstruction era, and on the work of the talented Southern-bred students who became known as the Dunning School.²⁹

²⁹ Donald, "Introduction," *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction*, xiv, xvi; See A. Caperton Braxton, *The Fifteenth Amendment: An Account of its Enactment, Address Delivered Before Virginia State Bar Association for the Year 1903*, (Lynchburg, Va.: J. P. Bell Co., n. d.). The forward is dated 30 April 1934. See also John Mabry Mathews, *Legislative and Judicial History of the Fifteenth Amendment* (Baltimore: 1909), for an in depth analysis of the works of Braxton and Mathews see John and LaWanda Cox, "Negro Suffrage and Republican Politics: The Problem of Motivation in Reconstruction Historiography," *The Journal of Southern History* 33, 3 (August 1967).

CHAPTER 5

DUNNING'S DISCIPLES: A VOICE FOR THE SOUTH

Because of his conviction that the "history of the Civil War and Reconstruction can never be properly written until the conditions of life in the South shall have been set forth by students qualified not only by scientific training but also by a personal contact or an inherent sympathy with southern society," Dunning provided significant opportunities for graduates of southern institutions of higher learning to study in the field of Civil War and Reconstruction.¹ Although such Southern scholars as Virginian Woodrow Wilson and others trained in Herbert Baxter Adams' seminar at Johns Hopkins had labored to give adequate treatment to the South, historical scholarship nevertheless remained in its infancy in the section of the nation that Ulrich B. Phillips once called "largely an unknown country to American historians. . . .known only for mere surface

¹Dunning, review of *The Lower South in American History*, by William Garrott Brown, *Political Science Quarterly* 17, 4 (Dec. 1902), 701-702.

politics."² In 1900, United States history was unbalanced: the East still dominated the South and West. Both the South and the West, however, found spokesmen at the turn of the century, as Fredrick Jackson Turner, who was building a reputation as an authority on sectional and frontier history at the University of Wisconsin, and Dunning at Columbia, changed the course of U. S. historiography.³

From 1900 on, Columbia University attracted southern historical scholars drawn to study under Dunning. His growing reputation as an impartial authority on the Civil War and Reconstruction, stemming from his 1898 *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* and other authoritative articles and coupled with his dynamic teaching style, brought to students confidence in the significance of history as a discipline. Upon Adams' retirement, Hopkins lost its attraction for Southerners seeking the doctorate in History. Dunning's decision to decline the position as Adam's successor assured Columbia University's primacy in the historical

²Ulrich B. Phillips quoted in Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *The South Lives in History: Southern Historians and their Legacy* (Baton rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1955), 79.

³Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *The South Lives in History: Southern Historians and Their Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1955), 80; Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *Southern History in the Making: Pioneer Historians of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 8.

training of southern students and effectively transferred the center of southern historical study from Baltimore to New York.⁴

Southerners had been remiss in their responsibility to adequately record their history. Late nineteenth-century scholars had provided abundant apologias, but the South had done little to provide reliable information on the Old South or the new. Because of Dunning's conviction that southern history should be written by the people of the South, he trained southern scholar in scientific methods to enable them to delve into the records. In this manner, the truth would be made available to anyone who sought a dispassionate view of the South and its people. Dunning directed thirty-three dissertations between 1900 and 1922, thirteen of these were written in the field of southern history. Dunning's able scholars, trained in systematic organization of research and the modern methods of scientific political inquiry, revised the nineteenth-century accounts of Reconstruction. From Dunning's seminars emanated the numerous state studies of

⁴Stephenson, *The South Lives in History*, 5; Stephenson, *Southern History in the Making*, 70.

Reconstruction that gave to the "Dunning school" its name and reputation.⁵

For more than twenty years Dunning's production of southern Ph.D.'s in history continued unabated, and his direction and guidance to history graduate students was not limited to those who specialized in the post-war epoch. Among his able group of southern students were Ulrich B. Phillips, *Georgia and State's Rights: A Study of the Political History of Georgia from the Revolution to the Civil War, with Particular Regard to Federal Relations* (1902); Paul Leland Haworth, *The Hayes-Tilden Disputed Presidential Election of 1876* (1906); Holland Thompson, *From the Cotton Field to the Cotton Mill: A Study of the Industrial Transition in North Carolina* (1906); Milledge L. Bonham, with *The British Consuls in the Confederacy* (1911); Benjamin B. Kendrick's *The Journal of the Joint Committee of Fifteen on Reconstruction, 39th Congress, 1865-1867* (1911); W. W. Pierson, *Texas vs. White* (1919); and Thomas S. Barclay, whose *Liberal Republicans in Missouri* (1926), along with Mary Scrugham's *Force or Consent as the Basis of the*

⁵Stephenson, *The South Lives in History*, 5, 6, 80; Stephenson, *Southern History in the Making*, 70.

American Government (1924), arrived after Dunning's death.⁶

In 1901, the first of the seven state studies on Civil War and Reconstruction launched the Dunning School of Reconstruction historiography. This group of notable southern scholars included James W. Garner, Edwin C. Woolley, Walter Lynwood Fleming, Charles William Ramsdell, William Watson Davis, J. G. deRoulhac Hamilton, and C. Mildred Thompson.⁷

⁶Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *Georgia and State's Rights: A Study of the Political History of Georgia from the Revolution to the Civil War, with Particular Regard to Federal Relations* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1902); Paul Leland Haworth, *The Hayes-Tilden Disputed Presidential Election of 1876* (Cleveland: Berrow's Biography Co., 1906); Holland Thompson, *From the Cotton Field to the Cotton Mill: A Study of the Industrial Transition in North Carolina* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1906); Milledge L. Bonham, *The British Consuls in the Confederacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911); Benjamin B. Kendrick, *The Journal of the Joint Committee of Fifteen on Reconstruction, 39th Congress, 1865-1867* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914); W. W. Pierson, *Texas vs. White* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1919); Thomas S. Barclay, *Liberal Republican Movement in Missouri, 1865-1871* (Columbia, Missouri: State Historical Society of Missouri Press, 1926); Mary Scrugham, *Force or Consent as the Basis of the American Government* (Lexington, Kentucky: Daughters of the Confederacy Publication, 1924).

⁷James W. Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901); Edwin C. Woolley, *Reconstruction in Georgia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1901); Walter Lynwood Fleming, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1905); J. G. deRoulhac Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Presses of Edward Broughton Printing Co., 1906); Charles William Ramsdell, *Reconstruction in Texas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1910); William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1913); C. Mildred Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia: Political and Economic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1915). Thomas S. Staples' *Reconstruction in Arkansas* was completed in 1923 published after Dunning's death in 1922. Thomas S. Staples, *Reconstruction in Arkansas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923).

Published in 1901, Garner's *Reconstruction in Mississippi* was the first of the studies analyzing the processes and results of reconstruction in individual states. The primary purpose of his work, noted Garner, was to "give a detailed study of reconstruction in Mississippi with reference to its political, military, economic, educational, and legal phases." Garner argued that his intention was not to write from a "Southern point of view," or any other "point of view." Because the events recorded in his book occurred before he was born, and "not one of them is recent enough to come within reach of his memory," Garner wrote that he was not "handicapped by any prejudices founded on personal observation or experiences." It was the "province of the historian to *relate* and not to *judge*," Garner concluded, and the time had come when the history of Reconstruction could best be written by a southerner, for "it was the Southerners who best understand the problems which the reconstructionists undertook to solve."⁸

Woolley's slender volume of 110 pages, *The Reconstruction of Georgia*, was published in 1901. In

⁸Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), vii, viii.

his work, Woolley recorded neither introduction, authorial intention for the work, nor a table of contents. The book consisted of political, economic, and legal analyses of Georgia's restoration to the Union during Presidential Reconstruction and Congressional Reconstruction, and concluded with an analysis of the Georgia state government as it stood in 1871.⁹

Walter Lynwood Fleming was determined to correct the accounts of the South's post-bellum troubles written "thro' prejudiced accounts written in Mass. or Ohio."¹⁰ He was insistent that an understanding of Alabama's internal problems in wartime was requisite to an appreciation of the course of restoration. Therefore, for his dissertation *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama*, Fleming expanded his investigation from the Reconstruction era to include analysis the war period, as well as further study to build a foundational understanding of the social, economic, and political conditions of ante-bellum Alabama. This, he felt, was a requisite for an appreciation of the effect of the Civil War on pre-war institutions.¹¹

⁹Woolley, *The Reconstruction of Georgia*.

¹⁰Fleming quoted in Stephenson, *The South Lives in History*, 93.

¹¹Fleming, vii.

His dissertation was far more expansive than any accepted by a U. S. department of history, including that at Johns Hopkins, before 1900. In seeking "to emphasize the social and economic problems in the general situation," Fleming was the first Dunning scholar to include in his dissertation an area that was neglected by predecessors and colleagues. In addition to a sketch of politics, Fleming devoted half of the eight-hundred-page dissertation to industrial, social, religious, and educational history. Anxious to have both sides of controversial issues represented, he presented documentary evidence from radicals and their descendants as well as from conservatives. Examination of his footnotes indicates his reliance not only upon extensive use of documents and manuscripts but also upon oral history and written correspondence of contemporaries of the period.¹²

¹²Ibid., vii, viii; In his preface to *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama*, Fleming revealed his intention to write his history from a Southern viewpoint. He did not state an intention of remaining unbiased, only that he would look at both sides of the questions. Dunning did not remain mum concerning Fleming's dissertation. In a letter to Bancroft Dunning remarked: There is Southern bias in Fleming's history. While it may not be the final and ideal history, I think it very important indeed to have it systematically represented. There are people in the South who thought and felt as Fleming represents all people to have thought and felt. . . .he has presented one element of the situation. Bancroft Papers, 16 March 1907.

For Fleming, the separation of the races within the state, "the division of the state into "white" counties and "black" counties," had had from the beginning the strongest influence on the history of its people: "the problems of the white and black in the Black Belt are not always the problems of the whites and blacks of the white counties." He therefore inserted maps into the text to "assist in making clear this point." Fleming cautioned his readers against a quick judgment of his untraditional analysis of Reconstruction and its focus on race relations: "Perhaps it may be thought that undue space is devoted to the history of the negro during War and Reconstruction, but after all the negro, whether passive or active, was the central figure of the period."¹³

In 1906, J. G. deRoulhac Hamilton submitted to Dunning his doctoral dissertation called *Reconstruction in North Carolina*. He expanded the dissertation from

¹³Fleming, vii. In the preface to *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama*, Fleming stated his intention to write his history from a Southern viewpoint. He did not state an intention of remaining unbiased, only that he would look at both sides of the questions. Dunning did not remain mum concerning Fleming's dissertation. In a letter to Bancroft Dunning remarked: There is Southern bias in Fleming's history. While it may not be the final and ideal history, I think it very important indeed to have it systematically represented. There are people in the South who thought and felt as Fleming represents all people to have thought and felt. . . .he has presented one element of the situation. Bancroft Papers, 16 March 1907.

six chapters to seventeen and published it as a monograph in 1914. The history Hamilton presented in his dissertation began with an examination of North Carolina during secession and ended with an analysis of the 1868 state convention as it completed the state's Reconstruction. Hamilton noted that discovery of new material prompted the addition of chapters and enabled him to examine such topics as the Freedman's Bureau, education, and the Ku Klux movement. His steadily continuing investigation expanded to encompass the entire Reconstruction period until its close in 1876. In his prefatory remarks, Hamilton stated that he "sought throughout the work to divest himself of any prejudice in his treatment of a period which. . .has been the cause of so much later bitterness, prejudice, and sectional misunderstanding." Hamilton professed "he has held no thesis," and he echoed Garner's contention that it was his intention "to relate rather than interpret." Hamilton further noted the presence of "one great obstacle," which he described as the "marked disinclination of many of the actors in the period to discuss at all the matters therein involved." Because many Republicans were reluctant to assist him, explained

Hamilton, much material bearing on the truth of disputed questions seemed to derive from one side only.¹⁴

In 1910, Columbia University Press printed Texan Charles William Ramsdell's dissertation, *Reconstruction in Texas*, Ramsdell's only serious venture into Reconstruction history. Primarily a political and constitutional history, the work lacked the breadth of Fleming's study with its extensive analysis of the antebellum south. Although it included only perfunctory treatment of social, economic, and labor issues, Ramsdell concluded that the most serious problem that the war had forced upon the people of the South was the dilemma of race relations. Ramsdell noted that among the difficulties a historian might have in narrating the process of Reconstruction in any of the southern states was that "one is naturally drawn into a sympathetic attitude toward the people whose social and political system was being 'reconstructed'." But, commented Ramsdell, "it is equally necessary to keep in mind the great and pressing problems that confronted the national government and the forces that determined its

¹⁴Hamilton, v, vi.

policies. . .the author has been careful to keep it in a corner of his mind, and has often found it a valuable corrective."¹⁵

The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida by William Watson Davis appeared in 1913. Davis produced a 747 page dissertation that began with a lengthy study of Florida's ante-bellum period and ended with the Hayes-Tilden election in which Florida played a controversial role in 1876. In the preface, Davis equated utilitarian historians with those described in the seventeenth century by French philosopher Michael de Montaigne as "middle sort of historians. . .they will chew our meat for us. . .they pass judgment and consequently twist history to suit their fancy." Davis declared that his monograph had a simple objective: to present the course of political events in Florida through a limited period, to show how national policies affected local politics there, to supplement in a small way what is already well known concerning the history of the nation at large." Davis would accomplish his end by "supplementing as much as possible scientific use of documents by conversations with some of the men and women who personally

¹⁵Ramsdell, 7.

experienced the Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida."¹⁶

C. Mildred Thompson wrote *Reconstruction in Georgia: Economic, Social, Political, 1865-1872* in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctor of philosophy degree in political science at Columbia. The Atlanta native received her B.A. from Vassar College, and trained at Columbia to earn the M.A. and Ph.D. Thompson was the only woman among her fellow scholars, often called the "Dunning men," to prepare a state study for Dunning.¹⁷

Thompson's treatment of the Reconstruction process in Georgia surpassed Woolley's earlier, cursory effort. She informed her readers of the wide-ranging sources used in her research, and of her intention to avoid in her work "anything of bias or inaccuracy or limited vision." Thompson wrote that emancipation "was the basic fact of reconstruction." *Reconstruction in Georgia*

¹⁶Davis, vii, viii, ix.

¹⁷According to Dunning, Burgess refused to let women take classes at Columbia. Dunning concentrated on Reconstruction and was very interested in those wishing to work in the field. In Jan 1897, Dunning assured Bancroft, "in two years, coed will be installed in the university. Burgess goes down in defeat, but with colors flying." Thompson received her M.A. in 1907. Bancroft Papers, 26 February 1892, 7 May 1895, 3 May 1896, 23 January 1897; William A. Dunning, *Truth in History and Other Essays*, with an introduction by J. G. deRouhac Hamilton, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), xix.

can be understood only by seeing, in the first place, what were the effects of the war on the state—how population, white and black, was altered; to what extent a war economy injured the great agricultural and commercial interests and developed or transformed industrial enterprise; what were the resources of the state, its debit and its credit; and in what political temper the people of Georgia met the new business of statehood in 1865.¹⁸

In the South, Thompson wrote, the "climate was the only factor of production untouched by war and reconstruction." She concluded that political results of Reconstruction were the least important, and that the industrial revolution of the reconstruction period was "almost wholly confined to agriculture." It was the race problem that was "one of the greatest problems which reconstruction aroused and bequeathed to a later generation."¹⁹

In the North, studies proliferated that endeavored to analyze and describe what was known by various terms such "race problem," "Negro problem," and "Southern problem." Each term referred to inherent difficulties in the relationship between two races that neither did nor could live alone. Since the Civil War, the North had identified itself as the model for the characteristic

¹⁸Thompson, 13.

¹⁹All quotes, Ibid., 398, 399.

United States; southerners saw themselves, and were viewed by their northern neighbors, as set apart by their industry, traditions, and history, a unit within a unit. Many southern writers expressed their problems in the forms of novels, and many of such works assumed an extreme anti-Negro view. Perhaps the most malevolent of those authors who sought to throw responsibility for all of the South's problems upon the blacks was the clergyman Thomas Dixon, Jr. His three novels, *The Leopard's Spots* (1902), *The Clansman* (1905), *The Traitor* (1907) were highlights of Dixon's career. He attempted to persuade his fellow southerners that the North was intensely hostile to the South, that the blacks were intent on disgracing the whites, and that the only solution to the problem was extermination of the black race. Northern historians and experts in fields of economics and the law produced significant scholarly studies and stunning legal responses to the antagonism between the races.²⁰

In 1896, Justice Henry Billings Brown delivered the opinion of the court in the case of *Plessy*

²⁰Thomas Dixon, Jr. *The Leopard's Spots*. (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1902); Dixon, *The Clansman*. (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1903); Dixon, *The Traitor*. (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1907); Hart, 2, 10, 150.

v. Ferguson, a United States Supreme Court decision that was greeted with indifference. The court ruled against the one-eighth black Homer Plessy, voting to uphold the essential features of Louisiana's Separate Car Law. Addressing Plessy's appeal to the Fourteenth Amendment, Brown evoked precedent in the *Slaughterhouse Cases* in which a distinction was made between state and national citizenship. He contended that accepted practice allowed for legislation separating the races socially without infringing on the political rights of the blacks. He thus separated social from political equality, and ruled that social differences between the races had roots "in the nature of things." Brown cited as his primary example the 1849 *Roberts v. City of Boston* case decided by Herman Melville's father-in-law, Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme court Lemuel Shaw. Shaw had concluded that segregation in the schools did not violate the Massachusetts' constitutional guarantee of equality before the law.²¹

²¹*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537; *Slaughterhouse Cases*, 16, Wallace 36; *Roberts v. City of Boston*. 59 Mass. 198; Charles. A. Lofgren, *The Plessy Case* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3; C. Vann Woodward, "The Case of the Louisiana Traveler," in John A. Garraty, ed. *Quarrels That Have Shaped the Constitution*. Rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 169; Brook Thomas, ed., *Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1997), 23; Eric J. Sundquist, "Mark Twain and Homer Plessy" *Representations* 0,24, Special Issue: America Reconstructed,

Fredrick L. Hoffman's exhaustive statistical analysis prepared for the Prudential Life Insurance Company in 1896, addressed social concerns as leaders strove for progress and an upward movement in the quality of civilization. Using an array of quantitative research, Hoffman concluded, "the presence of the colored population is a serious hindrance to the economic progress of the white race."²²

In his annual report for Board of Trustees of the Carnegie Institution in 1915, University of Chicago historian John Franklin Jameson outlined his plans for documenting the history of the Negro in the United States. He described his project as a "task of great importance, relating to the history of at least a tenth of our population, and bearing ultimately on one of the greatest problems of American life." In a letter to the

1840-1940 (Autumn 1988), 103 106, 107, 108; Lofgren, *The Plessy Case*, 5, 8; Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 244. America's press met the *Plessy* decision with apathy. In fact, the decision remained nearly invisible long after 1896. Although in 1921, black historian Carter G. Woodson identified it as a case that had substantially qualified the Negro's citizenship, prominent Harvard legal historian Charles Warren neglected it in his pioneering work *The Supreme Court in Modern History* in 1922. In 1926, in a revised edition, Warren mentioned *Plessy* in a footnote, along with twenty-four other cases involving Negro rights in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As late as 1948, Henry Steele Commager omitted *Plessy* from *Documents of American History*, first published in 1934. Thus, it may be surmised that within its historical period *Plessy* was not especially controversial. Thomas, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 31, 32; Lofgren, "Interpreting the Fourteenth Amendment," 37-40.

²²Hoffman, 329.

president of the Carnegie board, Robert S. Woodward, Jameson relayed his misgivings about objections to his project, "because there are some persons who would prefer that the negro should not be mentioned in print." The Carnegie Institution, however, responded favorably to Jameson's project, noting that "no governmental commission, either federal or state, is, for well-known reasons, likely to undertake the scientific documentation of this portion of our history."²³

In 1910, Harvard president historian Albert Bushness Hart supplemented research for his book *The Southern South*, by traveling to the South, attempting to gain knowledge of Southern conditions "through various journeys and points of contact with the Southern people." Professor and historian William Garrott Brown, also of Harvard, completed extensive study of the South in order to write *The Lower South in American History*. In it he argued, "the main thing is not what to do for the negro, but what to do for the white man living among

²³John Franklin Jameson, "Letter to Robert S. Woodward, 24 November 1915," in *Jameson Correspondence: An Historian's World: Selections from the Correspondence of John Franklin Jameson*, Elizabeth Donnan and Leo F. Stock, eds. (Philadelphia: The American Philosophic Society, 1956), 186, 187.)

negroes. . . .That, certainly, is the Southerners' point of view, and it is not unreasonable."²⁴

When his students joined in preparing a collection of essays in honor of his presidency of the American Historical Association, Dunning wrote a note of thanks:

To the Authors, all and singular, of
Studies in Southern History and Politics,
Heartfelt greeting:

I have only now finished reading the beautiful volume prepared by your labor. I have read and pondered every word in the book, including the title page and the preface. Leaving out of consideration for the moment these latter features, and judging from the point of view of scientific history and politics, I must say that the contents of the book have amazed and delighted me. I really did not suppose that in this year of our Lord so interesting a variety of topics and so fresh and solid a treatment of them were possible in the field that you have covered. I had a subconscious impression that I was pretty familiar with the field in a general way, but I do not think there is one of your essays from which I have not derived chastisement and correction as to facts and valuable suggestion as to point of view and interpretation. If the reading public will profit as much as I have from the Studies, your need of approbation from your fellow-citizens will be rich indeed. Very likely, however, there will not be an adequate recognition of your work at the present time. But a definitive interpretation of the Old South and its extinction, as they appeared to your generation, will be sought by thousands of students in the future; and you have the satisfaction of knowing that your volume will stand through the ages as such an interpretation—as the dominant judgment of American historical scholarship in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

²⁴William Garrott Brown, *The Lower South in American History* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1903), 250, 251.

I am quite aware that at this point you will each be decked with a smile—the smile that won't come off—as you realize the preposterousness of my effort to hand you a detached and objective evaluation of your work. For I have read, as I said above, the inscription and the preface of the volume. I may add, without shame, that they the parts of the Studies that I have read and pondered most. Nor has my reading of them been always unaccompanied by dimness in the eyes and grippings in the throat. Till I learned that this volume was projected I certainly had no faintest idea that I was destined to receive the supreme honor that a teacher can receive from his students. Even now I could easily prove, if the task would not be so ungracious, that I have not deserved it. I was indeed aware that fate was favoring Columbia and its Department of History with a most earnest, inspiring and generally attractive body of students, to assist whom was pedagogic joy. It has been the keenest pleasure to see this estimate confirmed by your assumption of influential positions in the educational system of our country. You are all teachers now, and you will hand on the torch to a generation that I shall not know. It is unlikely that any of you, however much more deserving of it, will be favored with so exceptional a body of students as it has been my fortune to teach. That occurs, in the nature of things, but once in many generations. Yet I can find nothing more devoutly to pray for than that this unlikely thing may happen, and moreover that each of you may in the fullness of time receive from those whom you have served such recognition as you have been kind enough to give me.

With feelings that my poor power of speech is quite inadequate to express, let me sign myself, as ever,

Devotedly yours,
Wm. A. Dunning²⁵

The Dunning school gave voice to the South.

Dunning's students were the first generation of southern

²⁵Dunning, *Truth in Essays*, xxi, xxii.

scholars academically trained in historical methodology, inquiry, and documentary research to interpret the developments of the Civil War and Reconstruction as an expression of people who had inherited the traditions of that section of the nation. These historians were the first professionals to write southern history. They contributed to the expansion of knowledge and appreciation of conditions faced by the people of the South bringing needed balance to the intellectual atmosphere of early twentieth-century America.

CHAPTER 6

DUNNING'S RECONSTRUCTION

Because Dunning viewed the people of the United States as "one of the most thoroughly political communities known to history," his emphasis on a value-free empirical history eliminated a European-American interpretive system and treated the politics of the American Civil War in the stream of European political ideas beginning with those of ancient and medieval times and coming to the modern era. He sought on the one hand, to keep political thought separate from moral or ethical theory, and on the other to keep political thought from being separated from political happenings, because he believed that ideas in the absence of political events were merely abstract and therefore fictitious knowledge.¹

In Dunning's estimation, the second half of the nineteenth century had as the controlling issues of its

¹Dunning, *A History of Political Theories: Ancient and Mediaeval*, xviii, xxii, xxiii, xxiv; Alfin, 5, 7, 17, 18.

politics, both theoretical and practical, nationalism and socialism. It was the period of Bismark and Lincoln, of Karl Marx, and his ideological opposite, Herbert Spencer. In the early decades of the century, world politics had centered on the issues of individual rights, natural rights, and written constitutions. Strenuous struggle had secured the constitutional liberty of the individual. This liberty was now "subordinated to the demand for national unity in governmental organization and for majority rule in economic organization."²

The idea of nationality as a normal and natural criterion of political organization and independence was not new. Overwhelmingly defensive in character and application, the sense of national independence and constitutional government was seen by nineteenth-century thinkers as the sum of what was just and natural in the aspirations of a people. But, according to Dunning, the events of the 1860s "revealed a new and widely different aspect" of the doctrine of nationality: "national unity" had replaced the time-honored "consent of the governed"

²²Dunning, "The Fundamental Conceptions of Nineteenth-Century Politics," in *Truth in History and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 60, 67, 70, 71, 72, 73.

as the justifying principle of sovereign dominion. And as nationalism passed from defense to aggression, "its chief end came to be. . .the subjection of every people to its appropriate domestic rule." Nationalism gained overwhelming importance not only in Bismark's work in Europe, but also from the "terrific struggle through which the principle was maintained in the United States."³ Political science "caught the full infection of the Darwinian spirit that ruled in the physical world," argued Dunning, as the conception of nationality, once based on myths of long-standing national solidarity and achievement, with institutions assumed to be characteristic of certain peoples, now regarded the "state" as merely a stage in endless evolutionary transformations.⁴

In this intellectual atmosphere, the objective elements in the concept of nationality became obscured. As a corollary, Dunning argued, the importance of the theory of the popular will increased with the growth of democratic ideals in areas of social and political

³Ibid., 71.

⁴Dunning, *History of Political Theories, From Rousseau to Spencer* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 335, 336; Dunning, *The British Empire and the United States* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), 253. For Dunning's analysis of the American Civil War within international relations, specifically relative to Great Britain see, "The American Civil War and Its Effects," 199-265.

ideas. In the United States, use of the plebiscite in adopting the terms of the readjustment of the vanquished and victorious sections indicated deference to the principle of popular will. The form, however, was "illusory." According to Dunning, the "substantial factor in the reconstruction was the military power of the North. The elections in the unconquered states were under the direction and control of the army of the United States, enforcing rules prescribed by the conqueror as to who should vote."⁵

Dunning's major work in the field of political philosophy followed French historian Paul Janet's in his 1855 *Histoire de la Science Politique dans ses Rapports à la Morale*, and William Graham's *English Political Philosophy*, written in 1899. Dunning rejected Janet's survey as not strictly within the "science" of politics because of its comprehensive inclusion of all political theories including ethical doctrine. Dunning charged that ethical theories became the overshadowing feature of Janet's interpretation, and stated the intention of his own work: "with the utmost admiration and respect for Janet's interpretation of political theory in its

⁵Dunning, *History of Political Theories, From Rousseau to Spencer*, 336, 337.

relation to ethical theory, [the present history is intended] to present rather an interpretation of the development of political theory in its relation to political fact."⁶ Dunning shared Graham's rejection of the deductive method and embrace of the new historical method. Graham viewed this inductive historical method to be a "powerful auxiliary resource in political science," valuable to the historian for the understanding that "all questions of political institution and forms of government are relative to time, place, and circumstance."⁷

In *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction*, and *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*, Dunning carefully considered constitutional implications and rendered a close analysis of the legislative and political history of the period, emphasizing the profound problems of statecraft that had to be solved

⁶Dunning, *History of Political Theories* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902), xxiv, xxv.

⁷William Graham, *English Political Philosophy* (New York: Lenox Hill Pub. & Dist. Co., 1899), xxiii. Paul Janet, *Histoire de la Science Politique dans ses Rapports à la Morale* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique de Ladrange, 1855); Dunning, "Truth in History," 216; Dunning, *History of Political Theories, Ancient and Medieval* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902), xxii, xxiii, xxiv; Demetrio Castro Alfin, "La Historia De Las Ideas Políticas. Contenidos Y Métodos," *Universidad Pública de Navarra W P num.* 168 (1999), 5, 7, 17, 18.

between 1865 and 1870."⁸ In *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*, Dunning noted his intention to adopt a broad national viewpoint "in the progress of the American nation." In writing history, noted Dunning: "the moral and dramatic values must not have greater weight. . . than they have had in its making. . . .our narrative. . . will be found, I trust to present in something like their true relations the facts and forces which, manifested chiefly in the politics of the North and West, transformed the nation from what it was in 1865 to what it was in 1877."⁹

Dunning began with the proposition that by the third summer (1863) of America's Civil War, the military result of the war became a question of time. The question of war powers in the general government for the suppression of insurrection had been definitely settled, and the political and legal results began, gradually, to assume greatest priority. With the success of northern arms assured, a distinct definition of the rights of states under the new situation became the matter of first importance. Dunning argued that the "working out

⁸ Dunning, *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction*, and *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*, xx.

⁹ Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*, 2.

of such a definition was from the legal standpoint the main problem of Reconstruction." Furthermore, he asserted, "inextricably involved in this leading legal question was an even more troublesome practical difficulty: What was, and what should be, the civil and political status of the Southern blacks?"¹⁰

Neither of the great political parties considered the direct question of national or state supremacy in their platforms in 1860. The traditions of American democracy, however, were squarely on the side of a strictly limited central government. The "accepted narcotic" for calming nervousness caused by threats against states rights had been the "soothing formula: 'Each government is sovereign within its sphere'." In December 1860, South Carolina asserted that its "sphere" included the right to dissolve the Union. This assertion "called for some decisive action in spherical delineation."¹¹

Upon assumption of office, President Abraham Lincoln, like James Buchanan before him, announced his intention to preserve the *status quo*. Nevertheless, in his inaugural address, Lincoln significantly omitted one

¹⁰ *Essays*, 63, 64.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

feature of the former president's theory: the "right to coerce a state." To be sure, the question of the relative force of federal and state action, when in conflict, had been persistently avoided, and the Supreme Court had maintained a fixed line of precedent on the double sovereignty basis. Lincoln's omission was especially conspicuous in view of the importance ascribed to the search for such a federal prerogative by President Buchanan. But once in office, Lincoln "planted himself unequivocally on the theory of national sovereignty." After hostilities began, "the contempt of the President for the state-sovereignty doctrine assumed a decidedly aggressive form."¹²

Defining "sovereignty" as a "political community without a political superior," Lincoln skillfully blended abstract constitutional assumptions to reach his position of national supremacy. In his first July 4th message to Congress, Lincoln made his position clear. He claimed that "the states have their *status* in the Union, and they have no other legal Status The Union is older than any of the states, and, in fact, created them as states." The passion for territorial

¹² Ibid., 4, 11.

expansion, favoring the extension of the boundaries to the Pacific, combined with popular Union sentiment, and citizens clamored for the maintenance of the integrity of the domain. Hence, when the formal declaration of intention of war came to a vote, the resolution, in effect, declared that the war forced upon the country by the disunionists of the South was:

not waged in any spirit of oppression, or for any purpose of conquest or subjugation, or purpose of overthrowing or interfering with the right or established institutions of those [Southern] states, but to defend and maintain the supremacy of the constitution, and to preserve the Union. . . .

Unquestionably, as Dunning saw it, whatever the defects of the theory, it did not lack clearness and consistency: the nation was sovereign, the states were local organizations subordinate to the nation, and the federal legislature positioned itself for the struggle squarely upon the President's doctrine.¹³

At the fall of Fort Sumter, the government found itself in unprecedented circumstances. Obligated to regard the uprising of the South as a simple insurrection, Lincoln had only the Whiskey Rebellion in Washington's administration as a parallel case, and its

¹³Ibid., 13, 14.

significance paled in comparison. "The idea of a government limited by the written instructions of a past generation," grew dim in the smoke of battle, and from the very beginning, wrote Dunning, "a system of original construction of the constitution had to be employed to meet the varied occasions for executive as well as legislative action." Furthermore, long before the war had ended, the "principles thus evolved had become so numerous and so far-reaching in their application, as to entirely overshadow the most cherished doctrines of the old system." ¹⁴

From the outset, Lincoln's government held the necessity of preserving the nation to be the basis of its war power. The application of war power was limited not by the clear expressions of the organic law, but merely by the "forbearance of a distracted people." "Mortal peril of a conscious nationality" not the "necessity" of individual liberty sanctioned exigent action. The constitutional implications were clear:

For a third time in a hundred years, the conviction of a fact beat down the obstacles of established forms. The revolution of 1776 secured liberty; that of 1789 secured federal union; and that of 1861-1867 secured national unity. In each

¹⁴ Ibid., 14, 15, 19.

case traditional principles were felt to be incompatible with existing facts, and the old gave way to the new. The question presented to the administration by the commencement of hostilities was: Has this government the power to preserve its authority over all its territory? The answer of the old school of constitutional lawyers was: "Yes, so far as it is conferred by the constitution and the laws"; but the answer we derive from the actual conduct of the war is "Yes" without qualification.¹⁵

Immediately after the fall of Sumter, according to Dunning, the assertion of the doctrine began. Upon the resort to the war power, the principal of delegated powers ceased to have great importance to the restraint of government action concerning the rights of liberty and life. The principle of separation and balance of power in the three branches of the federal government was lost. An impotent judiciary, in its role as a restraint upon the legislative and executive branches, became an "unconsidered trifle," and civil law went by the boards. The national government, therefore, escaped all restrictions upon itself and centralization was the order of the day.¹⁶

The circumstances connected with the origin of the war, including the rejection of the Crittenden resolutions by the Republicans in Congress, rendered the

¹⁵ Ibid., 14, 15, 16.

¹⁶ Ibid., 15, 16, 37, 56, 57, 58, 60.

government's attitude toward slavery the most delicate of the President's problems. With considerable abruptness, Lincoln repressed initiatives of his generals to apply a policy of emancipation, and reserved to himself, as commander-in-chief, the exclusive exercise of power in connection with the subject. Abolition sentiment rapidly gained strength in the North and with it the idea that the situation demanded the removal of the slavery question from politics. Lincoln eventually fused the war power capabilities he held as commander-in chief with the idea of general emancipation by military authority. The Emancipation Proclamation, pronounced Lincoln in 1863, was a "necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion" as "warranted by the constitution upon military necessity."¹⁷

"American chauvinists had boasted long and loudly of the superior stability of the written constitution," Dunning wrote, yet a "great national crisis quickly revealed that it was no more secure against the forces of public passion than the less artificial structures with which it had been so favorably compared." The

¹⁷ Ibid., 49, 50, 51, 52, 53. See pages 7 and 8 for Dunning's full analysis of the Crittenden resolutions concerning the attempt to substitute a resolution to the slavery question for the constitutional question of state sovereignty.

effort to exercise an alleged right had failed. "If the right of a state as an organized community to sever its political relations with other communities does not exist, there can be no claim of sovereignty for a state," for, "if political sovereignty means anything, it includes the attribute of self-determination as to its status in respect to other sovereignties." The failure of secession removed a fertile source of confusion at the basis of the American system. Under the existing circumstances, the territorial unity of the nation was held to outweigh all other considerations. With the destruction of the Confederate armies, the doctrine of state sovereignty perished, and our constitutional law ceased to be concerned with that dogma.¹⁸

Dunning argued that if a survey of the country had been taken in April and May of 1865, it would have revealed social, economic, and political conditions vastly different than those which characterized the 1860 Union. Specifically, the questions which engaged the attention of both the central and state governments when Andrew Johnson assumed office were, in fact, widely

¹⁸ Ibid., 59, 60, 62, 63.

different from those at the core of discussion in the last peaceful days of the Buchanan administration. Northerners assumed that the Union had been preserved, for the transformations wrought north of the Mason's and Dixon's line were not immediately present to the eye, they were veiled, Dunning said, by an external conformity to old customs and ideals. But in the border states, and the ravaged territory of the Confederacy, "the ancient social structure lay in obvious and irremediable ruin." Therefore, argued Dunning, "only in a very narrow sense, then, was it true that the Union had been preserved. The territorial integrity of the nation had been maintained, but this was practically all." Moreover, concluded Dunning, after the termination of hostilities, the initial steps in readjustment were guided by the widespread northern belief that the old Union had been maintained. The final steps in Reconstruction, however, "revealed with unmistakable clearness the truth of the southern view that a new Union had been created."¹⁹

With the return of peace in 1865, attitudes of Americans revealed that neither harmony nor the

¹⁹ William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1907), 4, 5.

probability of harmony between the sections existed than had been present at the inception and during the progress of the hostilities. The "passionate demand" for Union of the people of the North, had been realized; the "bitterest forebodings" of the people of the South, had come to pass—"they were subjugated to an alien power." In such ineradicable divergence of opinion, Dunning believed, lay the key to the problems of Reconstruction.²⁰

Dunning argued that the national problems in May, 1865, centered on post-war conditions not only in the conquered region of the South, but also in the two other strongly differentiated sections of the country: the free states of the North and the border slave states. For the North, the requirement was to get rid of the military regime as rapidly as possible. Nearly a million men were to be restored to civilian life; the War Department, with the multifarious responsibilities of supplying the troops with food, clothing and equipment, must be curtailed; and the administration of civil justice which had been diverted by the suspension of *habeas corpus* and imposition of martial law must be

²⁰Dunning, *Reconstruction*, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

restored. From the opening of the oil fields of Pennsylvania and the mines of Nevada arose what was, perhaps, the greatest of the non-political problems which occupied thoughtful men of 1865: that of establishing railway connection between the Mississippi valley and the Pacific coast. Dunning argued that the construction of the Pacific Railway was "destined to be the core of some of the most intricate entanglements of both politics and administration throughout the period of Reconstruction." As for the border states, where sentiment was so much divided in respect to the war, Dunning asserted that the conflict assumed a "fratricidal character." Bitterness and hatred engendered by the loss of life and property affected all areas of social life, including churches and schools, as well as the ordinary relations of business. In addition to the feelings which separated Confederate and Union sympathizers, the Unionist majority was divided into two intensely hostile factions over the abolition of slavery. The final dimension in the complex animosities of faction and dissension was the presence of the United States military authority in the border states.²¹

²¹Ibid, 3-7.

Unlike state sovereignty, a principle antecedent to and above the Constitution, Dunning explained states rights as a subfield under the theory of national sovereignty and determined by the Constitution itself. Due to the natural reaction caused by the pressure of its peril during rebellion, the general government assumed some of the most widely recognized attributes of state authority. With the firm re-establishment of the national authority in the rebellious communities, the need for a distinct definition of state rights presented itself as a vital political issue, and a matter of first importance.²²

The President and the Congress were unable to agree upon either fundamental principles of a theory or details of a practical measure with which to treat the great problems now plainly confronting the nation. First, the leaders of the federal government sought ways to restore political rights to people in regions that were now totally in the possession of the national military forces. In Dunning's view, they framed the question precisely: "Had the rebellious communities any rights as states under the constitution?"²³

²²Ibid., 62, 63, 64.

²³Dunning, *Essays*, 63, 64, 65.

The Supreme Court first enunciated its view with respect to the war in the Prize Cases, decided in 1862. The high court was unanimous in its judgment as to the nature of the conflict recognizing the war as a "military assertion of the authority of the general government over the inhabitants of certain states and districts." It declared: "Congress cannot declare war against a state or any number of states, by virtue of the Constitution." It appeared, therefore, that the judiciary never indicated that it doubted the constitutional existence of the states. Although circumstances had caused their relationship to the federal government to be disarranged, the former conditions would, nevertheless, recommence with the correction of the disturbance.²⁴

A review of its designative acts revealed the view of the executive department. In his inaugural address, President Lincoln had declared his firm conviction that the Union could not be broken by any claimed ordinance of secession. Reaffirmed in his first message to Congress and in his Non-intercourse Proclamation of 16 August 1861, Lincoln's view that it was not the states,

²⁴Ibid., 71, 72. *The Prize Cases*. 2 Black, 668.

but their inhabitants who were in a state of insurrection against the United States, remained constant. Lincoln based the measures of restoration which he proposed in 1863 upon this essential element. The executive department was thus "fully committed to the idea that the corporate existence of the seceding states was not interrupted by the war." True to the position which he assumed at the outbreak of the war, Lincoln had not receded from this point of view at the time of his death.²⁵

In reviewing the position of the legislature in relation to this question, Dunning argued that in the War Act of 13 July 1861, in which Congress provided for the recognition of the existence of a state of war, a similar result could be found. The act "empowered the President to declare intercourse suspended with the inhabitants of certain enumerated districts, and gave no intimation that the states, as such were concerned." Congress was in agreement with the president, concluded Dunning, in denying that the state was capable of

²⁵ Dunning, *Essays*, 65, 66, 67, 76, 77. A full explanation of Lincoln's plan of reconstruction is included in Dunning's treatment of the executive department's stand on the status of the states.

destruction by any "unconstitutional organizations of
its inhabitants."²⁶

²⁶Ibid., 65-77.

CHAPTER 7

DUNNING AND THE NEGRO

The whole question of the status of the Negroes, however, was in hopeless confusion. Due mainly to the provisions of the Emancipation Proclamation, a tremendous number of freedmen had become dependent upon the national government. The care of the dependents became, from the start, a matter of considerable importance. The government systematized this matter by the establishment of the Freedman's Bureau. Part of the War Department, the act of 3 March 1865 limited the bureau's existence to the duration of the rebellion and for one year thereafter. Congress created the Bureau to manage all issues relating to refugees and freedmen in the region under military control.¹

Less than a month after the passage of the Freedman's Bureau Bill, the Confederacy fell. With its fall, the whole South came under the dominion of the armies of the United States. All slaves in that region

¹Ibid., 73, 74.

became *de facto* free, and the unsettled question of when they would rise to a position of legal equality with their former masters became a matter of the first importance. Regardless of their rights at this point, "the authority to which they looked for a guarantee of those rights divided the Negroes distinctly from the other race." Consequently, the status of the blacks seems to have been essentially that of "wards of the national government, with rights totally undetermined."²

Dunning argued that a reorganized state jurisdiction was meant to regulate the affairs of the restored commonwealths. But a bureau of indefinite jurisdiction in the United States Department of War had "control of all subjects relating to refugees and freedmen from the rebel states." Dunning argued that during the summer of 1865, the organization's influence became promptly apparent. In the South, its agents assumed a "conspicuous place in the work of social readjustment, and in the North, the reports of its activities contributed much to shape public opinion on the serious political issues which were pending."³

²Dunning, *Essays*, 73, 74, 75.

³*Ibid.*, 73-75.

Andrew Johnson followed the plan of his predecessor closely. Although he issued successive orders for particular localities to lift blockades, suspend prohibitions against commercial transactions, and revoke the suspension of *habeas corpus*, the state of war proclaimed in 1861 and 1862 by Lincoln was still in effect. It was not until 20 August 1866 that civil governments regained full exercise of their functions when Johnson declared "complete restoration of peace, order, tranquility, and civil authority throughout the United States." With the work of reorganization complete, representatives and senators from the rebel states waited to be admitted to the Thirty-ninth Congress on 18 December. The Thirteenth Amendment was in force; among those ratifying were the formerly rebellious states. But in Congress, elements of opposition to the President's policy thrived: Radical Republicans had established, as an essential doctrine, that the necessary corollary of emancipation was enfranchisement of the freemen.⁴

Pending formulation of a definite policy for the readmission of the states, Dunning noted, "an effective

⁴ Dunning, *Essays*, 80, 82, 83.

appeal to northern sentiment was made by giving all possible prominence to the question as to the apportionment of representatives." With the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, the constitutional provision which had excluded two-fifths of the slaves from the population by which the number of Congressional Representatives for a state was determined became of no effect. This would therefore, entitle each of the former slave states to an increase of members. The readjustment of the basis of apportionment became a central topic from the opening of the 1866 congressional session. "That the result of the war should be an accession of influence in congress to the South," Dunning wrote, "was a proposition which few northerners could contemplate with equanimity."⁵

In the issue of increased apportionment for the South "the radicals were gratified to find . . . an effective justification for postponing the readmission of the southern states." The breach that was forming between the executive and legislative branches of government had more effect on the politicians, both members and non-members of Congress. The many Northern

⁵Dunning, *Reconstruction*, 53, 54.

voters were more deeply moved by the attitude of the new southern legislatures toward the freedmen. Northerners saw the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment as the initiation of a "grateful and permanent relief from the African in politics." Indignation and anger were therefore widely manifested, argued Dunning, when the "radicals not only asserted, but were able to present plausible proofs of their assertion, that the southern legislatures, even while ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment, were enacting laws which preserved the substance though avoiding the name of slavery."⁶

No harmony of views could be reached between the executive and legislative branches. Led by Pennsylvania Congressman and Radical Republican Thaddeus Stevens, the Congress asserted itself against the President, declaring that it would not admit the newly restored states. Congress formed the Reconstruction Committee of Fifteen to inquire into the condition of the rebel states, and to investigate their title to representation, thus asserting their right to a decisive voice in the matter. Through this measure they deferred the main issue—the recognition of the southern

⁶Ibid, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 59.

governments—until an agreement could be reached on the matter of the status and rights the freedmen. A series of measures followed, the first among them was a bill to extend the life of the Freedman's Bureau bill.⁷

"Designed to continue for an indefinite period the protection of the freedmen by the Federal military power," the bill enlarged both the duration and territorial extent of the powers of the Bureau. Johnson vetoed the bill on constitutional grounds, protesting strongly against the idea that Congress could exclude states from representation. Dunning argued that Johnson also objected to the expansion of the Freedmen's Bureau because it was, according to Senator Trumbull, a war measure. Johnson was insistent that the rebellion was at an end. This formalized the breach between the executive and legislative branches. A formal "declaration of war" upon the president's policy followed in the form of a concurrent resolution declaring that no senator or congressman from any of the insurrectionary states should be admitted without a declaration from Congress that such state was entitled to representation. The Civil Rights Bill, passed over

⁷Ibid., 59, 85, 86, 87.

the President's veto on 6 April 1866, made irreparable the breach between the President and Congress.⁸

The passage of the Thirteenth Amendment nationalized Civil rights. In the broadest of terms, "it was the practical application of what had heretofore been in the United States a mere theory, the idea of 'equality' as an essential principle of 'liberty'." According to Dunning, "this construction also [involved] a definite recognition of the national government as the protector of individuals against state oppression." Moreover, argued Dunning, "the special conception of citizenship which the history of our institutions had developed was discarded, and the broad principle of public law was adopted in its stead."⁹

From the intense opposition to the Civil Rights Bill arose the movement to incorporate its principles into the Constitution. The two great constitutional questions at the end of war were: first, did states exist in insurrectionary districts; and secondly, what was relation of those states to U. S.? As to the status of the states, Congress discussed five theories: the Southern theory, the Presidential theory, the theory of

⁸ Dunning, *Reconstruction*, 59, 60, 63, 64; Dunning, *Essays*, 87-90.

⁹ Dunning, *Essays*, 94, 95, 98.

forfeited rights, the conquered province theory, and the theory of state suicide. Congress therefore needed to formulate a theory of state status as the basis for its scheme of state reconstruction as it struggled with the executive. The President held that Congress had no power to deprive a state of any right in penalty for the crimes of the people of the state. However, it was that power, supported by a great many of the Northern people, which Congress determined to exercise as it proceeded with its plan of Reconstruction.¹⁰

After rejection of the Fourteenth Amendment by the ten unrestored southern states and the overwhelming defeat of Johnson's supporters in the Congressional elections of 1866, Congress moved from the forfeited-rights theory and took the stance "[h]enceforth the will of the nation is asserted without reference to that of the state." The process of military Reconstruction, which was to follow, closely adhered to the lines of the theory of state suicide held by Senator Charles Sumner.¹¹

As evidence mounted that "Southern whites would not consent to the admission of the blacks to the polls," a

¹⁰Ibid., 99, 100, 112. See 99-112, for in-depth discussion of the five theories discussed in Congress as to the status of the states.

¹¹Dunning, *Essays*, 120-122.

converse reaction appeared in the North as "the hot campaign in the fall elections of 1866 resulted very favorably to the friends of Negro suffrage." Subsequently, the "radicals now devoted their energies to the task of making the black vote the basis of Reconstruction." This involved the necessity for Congress to create a new political people, while subordinating the old. Dunning argued that the practical triumph of the Sumner state suicide theory lay in this fact. The law which inaugurated the Reconstruction act of 2 March 1867, over the President's veto, declared "no legal state governments existed in ten states of the Union, and no adequate protection for life or property."¹²

In the Reconstruction Acts of 2 March and 23 March 1867, Congress set the basis upon which it would finally carry through the process of Reconstruction. The chief end of the Reconstruction Acts was purely political. They were enacted to give the Negro the ballot in the ten Southern states which had rejected the proposed Fourteenth Amendment. "In short, full enfranchisement of the blacks and disfranchisement of the leading whites

¹²Ibid., 123.

were required as conditions precedent to the enjoyment of the rights of a state." That establishment of military government was necessary to the enforcement of the acts was primarily due to the fact that the "introduction of negro suffrage was possible only by the strong hand."¹³

In the process of radical reorganization in the South, wrote Dunning, the military commanders had two duties: registration, including administering the iron clad oath, and election, including assuring, in each state, that registered voters could express their will about whether a constitutional convention should be held and choice of delegates to such convention. The number of delegates would be fixed by the 23 March Act, but the apportionment details were left to the commanders. The first impulse of the disfranchised leaders in the South, argued Dunning, "had been to throw all their influence against any participation by their followers in the reorganization of the states." "Refuse to register . . . have no concern in the establishment of black rule!", was the cry. When the generals assumed control of their respective districts in March, 1867,

¹³Dunning, *Essays*, 124, 176, 177, 123, 187; *Reconstruction*, 109.

military rule under the federal authority was probably the only species of government that could have maintained order; for the bitterness of the whites over Negro suffrage would have caused disturbances beyond the power of the civil officers to suppress. No disposition anywhere appeared, however, to resist the Federal military power, and a mere handful of troops was sufficient to sustain a far-reaching despotism."¹⁴

With the Reconstruction Acts, the Congress in essence enacted legislation requiring the new state governments to be "organized by a political people differing *in toto* from that which had formerly been recognized as the basis of the commonwealths." Dunning argued that the "leaders of the Southern whites were excluded from any part in the reconstruction; the freedmen were awarded the ballot, and were relied upon to accomplish the formation of state governments." Two questions arose relating to these acts: first, "by what authority did the national legislature direct the organization of new governments in the rebel states; second, by what authority did Congress prescribe the qualifications of electors for the operation?" The

¹⁴Dunning, *Essays*, 124, 176, 177, 123, 187; *Reconstruction*, 109.
155

answer to both was: by the authority of the guarantee clause of the Constitution declaring that the United States shall guarantee to every state in this Union a republican form of government.¹⁵

In the past, the term "guarantee" had been understood to express a corrective power rather than a creative one. Therefore, only by the total rejection of the old interpretation could the moderates derive from the Constitution the power for Congress to organize a state government. Dunning argued that the Constitution declared that the United States guaranteed to every state in the Union a republican form of government, and that framer James Madison had stated the clause precisely in *The Federalist*, number 43. "The authority extends no further than a guarantee of a republican form of government" James Madison wrote, "which supposes a pre-existing government of the form which is to be guaranteed." Practical application of the guarantee clause had been demanded in reference to the Dorr rebellion in Rhode Island. To the charge that the old charter organization was unrepublican, President Tyler had responded to Rhode Island's governor that "It will

¹⁵ Dunning, *Essays*, 130-133.

be my duty to respect that government which has been recognized as the existing government of the state through all time past." Dunning argued that in the end, the radical wing of the Republican Party held sway, with Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner declaring that "the whole history of the Negro in this country gave the lie to any claim that our state governments were or had been republican. . .color was in no sense a 'qualification' of electors." In summarizing Sumner's stance on the guarantee clause and republican government, Dunning concluded: The process of Reconstruction presented many situations which could be explained as readily by assuming a revolution to have occurred as by strained constructions of the constitution." "If a review were called of the Reconstruction Acts," he continued, "these precedents of political action may and probably will be regarded as much more consistent with the views of Sumner and Stevens."¹⁶

During the winter of 1867-68, the constitutional conventions determined by the first election came into session. By the middle of the next spring, most had fulfilled their function. Some members

¹⁶James Madison, "Number 43" in *The Federalist Papers* (New York: Penguin Book, 1961), 271-289; quoted in Dunning, *Essays*, 131; Dunning, *Essays*, 130-135.

of the conventions, in these circumstances, espoused radical social, economic, as well as political ideas. Southerners formerly of the Whig party moderated the predominately radical ideas of the conventions. However, no influence, regardless of how conservative, kept the many non-political questions involving the relations of the races in the background. Many debates were long and vehement on a variety of social propositions which ultimately failed of adoption in most of the states. The differences of opinion were most resolute upon the suffrage question. Upon the question of ratifying the framed Constitutions, party lines were clearly drawn, and "party feeling was intensified in bitterness by the consciousness that the issue was indisputably that of race domination."¹⁷

In Dunning's view, by the late winter and spring of 1868 the political parties had formed and consolidated, and the "political antithesis of the races was everywhere obvious." He argued that when Congress passed the Reconstruction Acts they "terminated abruptly and forever the political prospects of that moderate, anti-secessionist, Whiggish element of the whites which

¹⁷ Dunning, *Essays*, 193, 194, 195, 201.

Johnson's policy had brought to the front." According to Dunning, "the actuality of the new order, as expressed in the assumption of authority by the district commanders, reduced most of the whites to the impotence and apathy of despair." In the summer of 1868, he continued, the conservatives had little representation. "The most rasping feature of the new situation to the old white element of the South was the high predominance of northerners and negroes in all the positions of political power." Thus, for the states restored in 1868, ten of the fourteen United States senators, twenty of the thirty-five representatives, and four of the seven governors were men whose first acquaintances with their constituencies was made during or after the war.¹⁸

Despite the election of Ulysses S. Grant in November, 1868, which assured Republican control of the executive branch as well as that branch's cooperation with Congress, the fact that two unreconstructed states chose Democratic electors modified the exuberance of victory. Adding to a general change of attitude by the Republican Party toward black suffrage were certain indications of northern sentiment which gave Republican

¹⁸Dunning, *Reconstruction*, 113, 114, 119, 120.

leaders cause for concern. Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, and Kansas had refused to extend the ballot to the blacks, yet manifested total sympathy with Congressional Reconstruction. Moreover, military governments, the "fundamental conditions which afforded the only basis for Congressional maintenance of negro suffrage in the restored states, were regarded by a large majority of constitutional lawyers in both parties as of doubtful validity." Hence, the Fifteenth Amendment was sent to the legislatures and on 26 February 1869, it finally passed.¹⁹

The inability of the reconstructed governments to stand alone was discernable, if not clearly evident, during their first months of existence. In most of the states, disturbances which were the subject of vehement partisan dispute followed the withdrawal of military government. Conspicuous for some time in Tennessee after the withdrawal of military government from that state, the Ku Klux Klan "had begun to manifest its terrorizing features in various other states." Dunning argued "It was in connection with the elections that the disorders assumed the most serious character."²⁰

¹⁹Dunning, *Essays*, 225-228.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 228.

Thousands of respectable whites who viewed the Ku Klux outrages with horror turned with equal horror from the projects of the governments to quell the disturbances by means of a negro militia. According to Dunning a final and "terribly effective" obstacle to conservative political reformation was the national administration. With the full commitment of President Grant to the policy of the Enforcement Acts, the "civil, judicial, and military service of the United States in the South became gradually a mere adjunct of the radical state governments."²¹

The Reconstruction of the southern states as a demonstration of political and administrative capacity was "no less convincing than the subjugation of the Confederate armies as an evidence of military capacity." When Congress passed the first Reconstruction Act, the power of the national government to impose its will upon the rebel states, with absolutely no restriction as to its means, was assumed. As for the Ku Klux Klan, Dunning argued, "A map of the Ku-Klux operations which gave occasion for the enforcement acts does not touch the region of the great plantations and the black belts,

²¹Dunning, *Reconstruction*, 212,
161

where the aristocracy had their homes, but includes only the piedmont territory, where the poor white lived. "The Negroes," he wrote, "were disliked and feared almost in exact proportion to their manifestation of intelligence and capacity. What animated the whites was pride in their race as such and a dread, partly instinctive, partly rational, lest their institutions, traditions, and ideals were to be appropriated or submerged." He insisted that "[w]hether or not this feeling and spirit were abstractly preferable to those which animated the northern idealist who preached equality, the fact that such feeling and spirit were at work must be taken squarely into account by the historian."²²

Indictments under the Ku Klux Klan Act, never brought to trial, were used as a moderating influence on conservative enthusiasts in close districts; and it became a leading function of United States soldiers "to counteract by their presence any tendency of Negro interest in politics to wane." Dunning said that the increasing prominence of the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia helped the radical wing of the Republican Party, for the actions of the Ku Klux made necessary the return of the

²²Dunning, *Essays*, 228, 242, 244, 246, 247, 357; Dunning, *Reconstruction*, 212, 213.

military to Georgia. Thus, the ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments was assured, concluding the Reconstruction of Georgia and bringing Congressional Reconstruction to its completion.²³

The constitutional issues raised in connection with the relationship between the legislature and executive branch were indeed of interest; yet the efficient political means used to achieve Reconstruction would be, perhaps, of most interest to the historian. Indeed, argued Dunning, "The reconstruction of the southern states, by the process which we have followed here, is one of the most remarkable achievements in the history of government."²⁴

²³Dunning, *Essays*, 246, 247; Dunning, *Reconstruction*, 212, 213.

²⁴Dunning, *Essays*, 247-249.

CHAPTER 8

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF RECONSTRUCTION

At his death, the terms with which those both within and outside the halls of academia described William A. Dunning differed quite significantly from those used by today's historians. According to the *Columbia Alumni News*, the highly influential Columbia University professor was "one of the great authorities on American history and politics." One of the rare few "eminent in the world of thought, of intellectual distinction and of highest comradeship," Dunning "contributed to make Columbia what it is and should be," as his work would "serve to maintain a scholarship and culture essential in a time of ferment and general disruption threatening the most cherished conquests of civilized man—law and liberty." The *News* concluded, "Dr. Dunning's views of the past are so profound because of his ability to understand through sympathy the views, the opinions, and the passions of bygone eras." The *New York Times* obituary lauded as a "masterwork" Dunning's

three volume *History of Political Theories* for its use in the study curriculums of all American Universities and its role as the defining work of his scholarly career. Dunning was an expert on political theories, continued the *Times*, who became known outside academic circles when he appeared as an expert witness—expert in political theories—for Henry Ford in his libel suit against the *Chicago Tribune*. Only briefly mentioned by the *Times* were Dunning's two volumes on the history of Reconstruction. The report made reference neither to his influence on the training of the cadre of southern graduate students who passed through his Columbia seminar, later known as the Dunning school, nor to his racial views, nor to the possibility of his complicity in molding public opinion behind the disfranchisement of blacks, and institution of "Jim Crow" social restrictions. Yet for all his stellar achievements in the scholarly arena, Dunning's *Reconstruction* endures—not so much for what it concluded in 1905, but rather because it created fertile ground for an emerging group of scholars, products of a new age, seeking to revise the past to help explain their present.¹

¹*Columbia Alumni News* XIV, 1 (1922), 7; *New York Times*, 26

In order to identify Dunning's definition of the province of history and the historian's role in it, as well as his faithfulness in adhering to his own principles, it was essential to examine portions of Dunning's scholarship. Analysis of texts selected from a cross section of his work included his Presidential Address to the American Historical Association, "Truth in History," as well as other texts, including historiographical opinions Dunning expressed in an essay written for *Political Science Quarterly*, "The Political Theories of the German Idealists II." The study also included a comparative examination of Dunning's work according to the historical methodology of Leopold von

August 1922; Philip R. Muller, "Look Back Without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," *The Journal of American History* 61, 2 (September 1974), 325; Howard K. Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," *The American Historical Review* 45 (July 1940), 807-827; Bernard A. Weisberger, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction," *Journal of Southern History* 25, 4 (November 1959), 427-447; Vernon L. Wharton, "Reconstruction," in *Writing Southern History: Essays in Historiography in Honor of Fletcher M. Green*, eds., Arthur S. Link and Rembert W. Patrick (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 295-315; I. A. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America, 1900-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 65, 66; Alan D. Harper, "William A. Dunning: The Historian as Nemesis," *Civil War History* 10 (March 1964), 54-66; LaWanda Cox and John H. Cox, "Negro Suffrage and Republican Politics: The Problem of Motivation in Reconstruction Historiography," *The Journal of Southern History* 33, 3 (August 1967), 303-330. Eric Foner, "Reconstruction Revisited," *Reviews in American History* (December 1982), 82-100; John Harel Hosmer, "The Dunning School and Reconstruction According to Jim Crow," PhD dissertation, University of Arizona, 1983; Omayra Zaragoza Cruz, "'The World and Us': Toward a Post-Nationalist Articulation of Racial Consciousness, 1884-1937," PhD dissertation, University of California San Diego, 2004.

Ranke, G. W. F. Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Quentin Skinner, Kenneth M. Stampp, and Thomas Pressly.

Peter Novick argued that Charles Beard and Carl Becker first signaled the move away from the "noble dream" of objectivity in the years following World War I.² In 1913, however, Dunning was already questioning the validity of Leopold von Ranke's insistence on the relentless pursuit of the "fact" in its exact form and manner of happening.³ Although historians agree that in his presidential address Dunning was highly critical of James Harvey Robinson, the harbinger of the "new history," who had declared that "The present has hitherto been the willing victim of the past: the time has now come when it should turn on the past and exploit it in the interests of advance," analysts have overlooked Dunning's relativistic philosophy of history. Dunning signaled a stunning break from Leopold von Ranke's insistence on the interpretation of *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, and offered in its place a new theory, "We must recognize frankly",

²Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 259, 268-270.

³Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), 63, 64.

said Dunning, "that whatever a given age or people believes to be true is true for that age and that people."⁴

Dunning asserted that the Rankean "absorbing and relentless pursuit of the objective fact—of the thing that actually happened in exactly the form and manner of its happening," was a narrow materialistic view of history that tended to unduly limit regard for the influence of what men believed to be true, and therefore carried as a consequence the tendency to "greatly limit the scope of history."⁵ Dunning offered as a corrective his philosophy of the province of history and the historian:

The business of the historian. . . is to ascertain the scope and content of the ideas that constituted the culture of that period. Whether these ideas were true or were false, according to the standards of any other period, has nothing to do with the matter. That they were the ideas which underlay the activities of the men of this time, is all that concerns the work of the historian.⁶

⁴James Harvey Robinson from his 1912 book *The New History* quoted in Kraus, Michael, and Davis D. Joyce, *The Writing of American History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 252; William A. Dunning, "Truth in History," *American Historical Review* 19, 2 (January 1914): 228.

⁵Dunning, "Truth in History," 219.

⁶*Ibid.*, 228.

That Dunning was consistent in adhering to this philosophy is apparent not only in his written work, but also in relation to the work his students produced in his Columbia seminars. For example, Dunning was explicit in noting this philosophy in *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*,

What animated the whites was pride in their race as such and a dread, partly instinctive, partly rational, lest their institutions, traditions, and ideals were to be appropriated or submerged. Whether or not this feeling and spirit were abstractly preferable to those which animated the northern idealist who preached equality, the fact that such feeling and spirit were at work must be taken squarely into account by the historian.⁷

In the bibliography for *Reconstruction*, Dunning listed J. W. Garner's *Reconstruction in Mississippi* (1901) noting that the monograph dealt "chiefly with the legal and political movements, in a rigidly judicial spirit." Dunning also recommended as one of the monographs on Reconstruction in the South W. L. Fleming's book, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (1905). Dunning judged Fleming's contribution "the most comprehensive of the group," although he warned his readers that Fleming's presentation included "a great mass of social

⁷Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*, 213.

and economic as well as political facts, with a marked southern bias in their interpretation." Discussing a later Fleming work, *Documentary History of Reconstruction*, Dunning revealed his relativist philosophy in a letter to Fredrick Bancroft:

Fleming represents one point of view in the matter, and while it may not be the final and ideal history, I think it very important indeed to have it systematically represented. There are people in the South who thought and felt as Fleming represents all people to have thought and felt. Therefore he is doing good work to present one element of the situation.⁸

It is important to note, however, that Dunning was careful to separate theory of history from methodology. According to Dunning, the business of the historian was to "ascertain the scope and content of the ideas that constituted the culture of that period." His agreement with Ranke's insistence on the necessity of finding primary facts, "the student of history is confronted with problems concerning truth in all their diversity. . . .He must ascertain the objective realities,"⁹ put Dunning in the mainstream of the turn of the century "scientific" historians. Yet, Dunning was clear that he objected to Ranke's theory that all facts must include a

⁸Dunning to Bancroft, 16 May 1907, Bancroft Papers.

⁹Ibid., 218, 219.

picture which only gained meaning if the end of the focus was the nation: "Every serious student of history knows the thrill that comes with the discovery of an unknown or a forgotten fact," wrote Dunning, "but the 'reconstruction of history' is always in the mind of the investigator . . . and in the intoxication of an actual discovery of new truth, he very prone to foresee a reconstruction vastly greater than what actually takes place."¹⁰

Arguing against the teleological metahistory basic to Hegel's theory of progress—"To him [Hegel] the process of events is an unfolding of universal spirit (*Geist*)"—Dunning held that it was within the province of history to acknowledge the validity of a causal nexus between objective actualities in the sense of ideas moving human events.¹¹ Assuming that the "province of history is to ascertain and present in their causal sequence such phenomena of the past as exerted an unmistakable influence on the development of men in social and political life," Dunning summarized his philosophy of history:

¹⁰ Ibid., 219, 220.

¹¹ William A. Dunning, "The Political Theories of the German Idealists. II," *Political Science Quarterly* 28, 3 (September 1913), 492.

The study of history is justified by some as furnishing examples for present instruction, by others as merely enlightening us about present conditions by tracing them in their becoming. On either basis the student is under obligation to repress in all humility his scorn for the error that he finds in the beliefs of those with whom he is dealing. For his business is to present past occurrences in their causal sequence. Not this, that, or the other event by itself, but this as the cause of that, and the other as he effect of that. But unless he is ready to adopt in the extreme form the economic and sundryological interpretations and discard the human influence entirely, he must find in the beliefs of men a most powerful factor in the chain of causation.¹²

In the essay "The Fundamental Conceptions of Nineteenth-Century Politics," Dunning presented a succession of ideals and the political constructions that issued from them. He began the analysis with the claim that following the Napoleonic wars, the struggle between liberalism, epitomized by the dominant principles of equality, liberty, and democracy issuing from the French Revolution, and conservatism, identified by traditional monarchic and aristocratic values held dear by the Old Regime, marked in a general way a period in nineteenth-century politics. In their march through the century, the liberal ideas of liberty, equality, and democracy triumphed. Adhering to his stated presumption

¹²William A. Dunning, "Truth in History," 19.

of the existence of a causal nexus between ideas and human events Dunning wrote, "Assuming, then, that the struggle between liberalism and conservatism was the characteristic mark of the practical politics of the period extending to the middle of the century, let us now consider what were the principles of political science that were involved in the struggle and its result."¹³

Ideas of liberty and equality proceeding from Rousseau were formulated in the Declaration of Rights of Man and consisted of a set of rights defined and bestowed by nature upon all of humanity. Nature, interpreted by reason—regardless of the skeptic's question, "whose reason?"—continued to be the ultimate basis of the liberal creed, particularly in the search for civil and political rights. With the appearance of the written constitution the state declared itself to be the replacement of nature as the designated bestower of liberty. The advent of the written constitution as a political instrument whose power mandated an obvious shift in authority represented to Dunning an evolution in liberal ideas.

¹³William A. Dunning, "The Fundamental Conceptions of Nineteenth-Century Politics," in *Truth in History and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 61, 62, 63.

To liberals of every shade in this period, the indispensable token and guarantee of the liberty which they sought was a body of law which should to some extent control and determine the power and procedure of the persons who exercised political authority. . . .Through it the political ideals and characteristic principals of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries have been crystallized and put into form for permanent exhibition.¹⁴

It may be argued that Dunning did not convincingly establish the nexus between the idea of liberty and the establishment of the written constitution. Yet, he did effectively demonstrate that the representative government provided for in constitutionalism represented the existence of a compromise between conservative elitist tendencies and liberal democratic tendencies,

Liberties were indeed guaranteed to the man and the citizen, but rarely the sweeping immunities that had figured in the Declaration of the Rights of Man. A representative legislature was in every case provided for, but rarely so organized as to interfere with the ancient domination of the aristocratic classes, or endowed with such power as to insure the development of the more popular institutions.¹⁵

Dunning's remarks regarding the establishment and use of the written constitution were contrary to the prevailing idea of the day which accorded to them utmost veneration. Of the written constitution he wrote, "in

¹⁴Ibid., 66, 70.

¹⁵Ibid., 69.

its true character it was found to be not an indispensable feature of every sound political system, but merely an ingenious expedient for facilitating the transition from one system to another."¹⁶

In his analysis Dunning concluded that nineteenth-century constitutionalism had failed. His description of the causality of the ideological struggle and the resultant political outcomes connected ideas with resulting events, yet it lacked the Hegelian tendency to represent the period as one taking its place in the stream of a World History (*weltgeschichte*) on the move toward perfection of the state and state life:

By now we have come to know the abstract characteristics of the nature of the Spirit, the means it uses to realize its Idea, and the form that it takes in the complete realization of its existence: the State. What remains to be considered is the *course of World History*. . . .a progress to something better, something more perfect.¹⁷

Dunning's empirical analysis of nineteenth-century constitutionalism was consistent with his general rejection of German idealism outlined in his essay written for the *Political Science Quarterly*:

¹⁶Dunning, "The Fundamental Conceptions of Nineteenth-Century Politics," 70.

¹⁷G. W. F. Hegel *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), 57.

With benumbing legerdemain the philosopher makes the commonplace facts of familiar history fit themselves nicely at the word into the categories and relations of his logic, and shows us mankind through all the ages marching steadily but unconsciously along Hegelian lines toward the Germanic perfection of the nineteenth century.¹⁸

In this evaluation he also distanced himself from Nietzsche's idea of history as a "triplicity of relations": monumental history, antiquarian history, and finally a critical history.¹⁹ First, in the rejection "monumental history," there is no evidence that his work imitates the greatness from the past. Dunning neither held up individuals for hero worship, nor did he represent ideas, institutions, or documents as worthy of being put on pedestals for future view.

Dunning made a clean sweep in his rejection of the two other forms of history acceptable to Nietzsche. Despite references to the German idea of the "state of becoming," he disagreed with Nietzsche's insistence that "becoming" was dependent on condemnation of the past,

¹⁸ William A. Dunning, "The Political Theories of the German Idealists. II," 492.

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1980), 15, 16.

and therefore intrinsic to "critical history."²⁰ By holding true to his earlier admonition to historians that they embrace humility and hold no "contempt for the centuries" Dunning in this essay, indeed, displayed no critical judgment of the nineteenth century.²¹ Finally, in what may be interpreted as a show of disdain for "antiquarian history," Dunning suggested a possible use for written constitutions:

Political antiquarians are thus enabled to study the past at their ease; lawyers can wrangle and construe and assert—sometimes with real belief at the basis of their assertion—that in the articles and sections and phrases and words of the document are to be seen the essence of the state.²²

Divesting the idea of "Nationality" of vestigial Hegelian grandeur, Dunning defined nationality not as a step in the march toward freedom and the perfectibility of mankind, but rather as the "normal and natural criterion of political organization and independence." Nationality was by no means new to this period, but, according to Dunning, "it now gained overwhelming importance from the practical work of Bismarck and

²⁰Ibid., 21.

²¹Dunning, "Truth in History," 16, 18.

²²Both quotes in this paragraph are taken from Dunning, "The Fundamental Conceptions of Nineteenth-Century Politics," 70.

Cavour in Europe and from the terrific struggle through which the principle was maintained in the United States." This observation could be understood within the context of that Rankean equalizer of the ages, "every epoch is equidistant from God," yet, it lacked even a hint of the echo of Ranke's insistence on the historical importance of the greatness of the nation-state.²³

In his examination, Dunning continued to refuse to represent the era of nineteenth-century nationalism in the general terms of a philosophy of history which would represent the nineteenth century as the culmination, climax, and summary of progress. Disconnecting from a goal-oriented, teleological explanation, he modified the idea of "nationality" to that of "nineteenth-century idea of nationality," and demonstrated how nationalism was superseded by ideas other than those integral to the idea of internal perfection. The new idea of imperialism demonstrated that constitutionalism and nationalism were superseded by a new controlling dogma in world politics, the idea of external dominion.²⁴ In making it crystal clear to his readers that the function

²³Ibid., 71.

²⁴Ibid., 73, 77.

of his essay was not in justifying or proclaiming the blessings brought by Aryan civilization to advance the underdeveloped world by the modern imperialism, but "in merely setting forth the succession of ideals and leading principles that has characterized the past century," Dunning was able to ask questions of history without either placing it within a Hegelian universal pattern, adhering to the Nietzsche philosophy that all history is for the utility of the present, or extracting the answers for the purpose of applying them for the moral use of either the present or the future.²⁵

Upon examination of his theory and approach to historical writing, and analysis of portions of his work, it is clear that Dunning typified the era's effort to define and understand the political machinations of nations. Dunning was interested in the causality of ideas and theories and the effect they had on political structures at a time not too far removed from the violent restructuring of ancient European governments. It is also possible to argue that Dunning represented a pivotal turn in historiography, and that he was perhaps

²⁵Ibid., 79.

the first to call upon historians to examine the past on its own terms, without contempt.

CHAPTER 9

CONTEMPT FOR THE CENTURIES: FROM METHODOLOGY TO MYTHOLOGY

Dunning's scholarship was highly influential among his contemporaries, with his three-volume *A History of Political Theories* standard reading in the nation's classrooms during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Today, Dunning's prolific work in European and intellectual history is, for the most part, forgotten or ignored. However, modern scholars of United States history know Dunning well for his two volumes on the history of the Reconstruction era, and many still regard *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* to be the best account of the constitutional and legislative history indispensable to the understanding of the period. Yet beginning in the 1960s historians focused on Dunning's "thesis" of Reconstruction and made it the object of serious challenge. For example, Alan D. Harper identified the Dunning Reconstruction account as a work with a "particularly sinister flavor," written by an essentially unprincipled historian, and motivated by

political goals and racial ideology.¹ Others shrilly charged that his account of Reconstruction was responsible for the "dark and bloody ground" landscaping Reconstruction historiography. A great number of historians have chosen to analyze Dunning primarily within the framework of racial beliefs. Since his critics have repeated the charge of racism so often and in so many different contexts, the term "racist" has become Dunning's epigrammatic fate.²

Intellectual historian Quentin Skinner warned that very frequently a "mythology of doctrines" arises when twentieth-century historians become "set" in their approach to the ideas of a writer. Some sense of the defining characteristics of the discipline to which the given writer may be said to have contributed will bring an unconscious paradigm to their analysis of the work of the classic writer. This constitutes a level of abstraction at which historical interpretation can lapse

¹Harper, "William A. Dunning: The Historian as Nemesis," 61.

²William A. Dunning, *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897); William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1907); *New York Times*, 26 August 1922;; Weisberger, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography,"; Philip R. Muller "Look Back Without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning." *The Journal of American History* 61, 2 September 1974): 325-338.

into mythology. The dilemma, argued Skinner, was the existence of the observer's mental set, or what he calls a priority of paradigms:

The perpetual danger, in our attempts to enlarge our historical understanding, is thus that our expectations about what someone must be saying or doing will themselves determine that we understand the agent to be doing something which he would not—or even could not—himself have accepted as an account of what he was doing.³

Thus, a classic writer may be "discovered" to have a certain view and the myth perpetuated. The author under examination is "first classified according to a certain model to which he is then in effect expected to aspire." Those under the influence of the paradigm will be intent on finding everywhere the expected theme, in the attempt to uncover a coherent moral philosophy. Consequent analysis of that author becomes not a description of his ideas, but one of abstractions. The author, himself, however will know nothing of this historiography, said Skinner, nor of the lessons that were to have been drawn of it. In light of the possibility that a myth of doctrines exists concerning Dunning's work in United

³Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, ed. James Tully (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 43, 31. For in-depth discussion please see chapter 2, pages 29-67.

States history, we must ask the Skinnerian question, "would Dunning recognize himself in the discussions current to Reconstruction historiography?"⁴

In the effort to reach an answer, therefore, analysis of Dunning's U. S. History texts must include the possibility that two critical aspects of modern historical interpretation suggested by Skinner exist: first, that a basic paradigm for investigation has been conceived as the elaboration of Dunning's doctrines on the theme of race, and secondly, that historians have succumbed to the constant temptation to find a "message" which can be abstracted from it and be therefore more readily communicated. Because many modern historians consider Dunning's Reconstruction history an essentially malevolent endeavor by a racist, the admonition of Skinner to ask whether the classic writer under analysis would recognize himself in the discussion of the present day historian is a legitimate one. Do Dunning's accounts of Reconstruction differ from his other causal accounts of constitutional and political history, and in effect, attempt to make a point of discriminating against blacks? Or, upon examination of selected

⁴Ibid., 39, 40.

portions of text in U. S. History, does Dunning analyze his subject matter in a similar manner as in the work previously examined above?

With the stated intention of filling a perceived need for an accessible constitutional and political history of the Civil War and Reconstruction period in U. S. history, Dunning recounted the constitutional issues and the legislative solutions taken by the three sections of U. S. government. His doctoral dissertation, published in 1885 as *The Constitution of the United States in Civil War and Reconstruction, 1860-1867* became the basis for the volume, *Essays on The Civil War and Reconstruction*, published in 1897. He stated his intention in Prefatory Note:

As to the Reconstruction, the term is to most people merely a synonym for bad government, and conveys no idea of the profound problems of statecraft that had to be solved between 1865 and 1870. The essays collected in the following pages have been written with reference to this situation. If in any degree they shall have contributed, either through statement, implications, or even omission, to throw light on the actual history of the time with which they deal, the end of the collection will have been attained.⁵

⁵William A. Dunning, *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897), vii, viii.

Here, Dunning again demonstrated the preeminence of political analysis in historical study and writing. His announced goal, "to throw light on the actual history of the time," reflected the seriousness of the "scientific" approach to scholarship common among nineteenth-century historians, as well as perhaps an early Dunning belief in the interpretation of Ranke's objective of letting the facts "show it how it happened," a belief that he had obviously discarded by the time of his 1913 presidential address to the American Historical Association, "Truth in History."

The following texts are indicative of Dunning's analyses of legislative procedures undertaken by the Congress to restore order to the post-war South. In *Essays*, he gave an account of the acts of 2 March and 23 March 1867, which outlined the Congressional process of Reconstruction which was finally carried through:

The chief end of the Reconstruction Acts was purely political. They were enacted for the purpose of giving the Negro the ballot in the ten Southern states which had rejected the proposed Fourteenth Amendment. Their whole operation, therefore, must be regarded as incidental to this object. That the establishment of military government was a feature of the system they embodied, was due primarily to the fact that the introduction of Negro suffrage was

possible only by the strong hand.⁶

The text from *Essays* suggested a causal explanation of the reason for the Reconstruction Acts, "they were enacted for the purpose of giving the Negro the ballot in the Southern states which had rejected the Fourteenth Amendment." Dunning explained the military intervention in terms of cause and effect noting that the presence of troops in the South arose from the prevailing reluctance to give the blacks the franchise, "That the establishment of military government was a feature of the system they embodied, was due primarily to the fact that the introduction of Negro suffrage was possible only by the strong hand."

In *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*, the volume written in 1907 for inclusion in "American Nation Series," Dunning recounted the climax of Radical Reconstruction:

There was, however, even among the Republicans, a great reluctance to transfer the general control of the suffrage from the states to the central government. The party chiefs were, moreover, strongly opposed to any abstract dogmatizing about the right to vote. Doctrinaires, ready with propositions for leveling up, or down, to their ideals, would have guaranteed the suffrage to every

⁶Dunning, *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction*, 138.

citizen of mature years and sound mind. It was plausibly argued that the right of intelligent white women to vote was as worthy an object of a constitutional guarantee as the right of ignorant and degraded black men. Of more practical importance was the prediction that, unless intelligence and property qualifications were prohibited, they would be employed by the southern states to disfranchise the blacks. Partly under the influence of this suggestion, the Senate, at one stage of the discussion actually adopted a form prohibiting discrimination by any state on account of "race, color, nativity, property, education, or religious creed (*Congressional Globe*, 40 Cong., 3 Sess., 1035, 1040)." But in the end no consideration was allowed to interfere with the single immediate end in view—the creation of a constitutional mandate under which the national government might maintain Negro suffrage against the hostile procedures by the states. The Fifteenth Amendment, in the form in which it now stands in the Constitution, was finally passed on February 26, 1869, and duly sent to the states.⁷

As an even-handed account of the Congressional argumentation, Dunning's account did not gloss over the existence of the attitudes of hostile Southern whites which made enactment of the Fifteenth Amendment necessary. Writing of the need for a federal mandate, Dunning included the arguments made during all stages in the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, which gave a federal right to blacks for the vote. This text did not veer from political analysis, and included documentation of the proceedings. The account was unemotional, and it

⁷Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*, 175, 176.

can be argued that it lacked racial dimension. Moreover, this Dunning analysis reflected the causality recognizable in the earlier examination of his "Truth in History" essay, and was evident, as well, in the chronicling of the succession of political ideals and structures of the nineteenth century in the essay, "The Fundamental Conceptions of Nineteenth-Century Politics."

By deconstructing his work, contemporary historians have created a new paradigm which marks Dunning as the mountebank of Reconstruction historiography. Consider, for example, the article by Thomas J. Pressly that heralded the publication in 1965 of Kenneth M. Stampp's hallmark of revisionist history, *Era of Reconstruction*. Pressly's comparative essay analyzed the text of Stampp's *Era* and the text of Dunning's 1897 *Essays* according to the pattern that has become "home" to recent historians of the Reconstruction era. In the search for coherence in Dunning's "thesis," this paradigm was replete with analyses based on abstractions that substituted for the discernible relationship present in Dunning's diverse scholarship, the current of institutional development in the historical profession,

and the standards and morals those of his time found acceptable.⁸

First, Pressly rejected context as an indispensable framework needed to identify what the conventionally recognized meanings would be, in Dunning's society. Contextual framework would illuminate the necessary conditions for Dunning's audience's understanding of the author's parlance, including his words, expressions, and intentions. In removing total context as the ultimate framework for analysis, Pressly based his attempts to understand the meaning of Dunning's work on text alone as the key to its own meaning. Thus, Pressly was left to interpret Dunning in the context of his [Pressly's] own time, that is, to talk about what he did not know in terms of what he did know. Such preconditions forced Pressly to bring to bear some of his own expectations about what Dunning was saying as he set the paradigm for analysis. For Dunning's insistence that dwelling on Freedman's Bureau and the Civil Rights Bills would historians astray from the "great issue of internal politics. . .the breach between Congress and Johnson rather than the various steps in the governmental

⁸Thomas J. Pressly, "Racial Attitudes, Scholarship, and Reconstruction: A Review Essay," *The Journal of Southern History* 32, 1 (Feb. 1966), 88-93.

development in the South,"⁹ Pressly substituted this:
"The issues of Dunning's day ('questions which have been raised by our lately established relations with other races') provided him with a base perspective, which he accepted as axiomatic and from which he confidently disapproved of Radical Reconstruction."¹⁰ Dunning was "misled as a scholar by the ideological convictions of his time," and therefore, argued Pressly, "it would seem that. . . it affected adversely his scholarship concerning Negroes, 'scalawags', and other individuals and topics in Reconstruction."¹¹ Secondly, in severing the connections of Dunning's accounts of U.S. History from his total body of works, Pressly's analysis removed from the realm of analytical possibility the ability to understand and compare Dunning's objectives as a historian and political theorist and the historical methodology he employed in his work in U. S. history. Dunning became a racist, and a metaphor for the lowest caliber of historical scholarship who, according to Pressley, would have been a better historian "had he cautioned himself that since he was convinced of racial inequality, he should check with great care those

⁹Dunning to Bancroft, 5 September 1898, Bancroft Papers.

¹⁰Pressly, 91.

¹¹Ibid., 92.

findings about Negroes and 'scalawags' which fitted so neatly into his belief." ¹²

Considering Dunning's intellectual context, it is neither logical nor a correct assessment of Dunning's work to say that he failed to do something unless Dunning himself expressed the intention to perform such an action. In addition, Pressly's separation of Dunning's analysis of the Reconstruction from his analysis of the constitutional and political aspects of the Civil War precluded the possibility of understanding the text of Dunning's Reconstruction history according to the historian's authorial intention. Dunning stated that his intention in writing a history of the Civil War was to provide "the constitutional and political history of the Civil War," and that his account of Reconstruction was written to "convey the profound problems of statecraft that had to be solved between 1865 and 1870."¹³ For Dunning's intention, Pressly substituted this analysis: the ideology of Dunning's day informed his historical account of Reconstruction, it "exalted 'stability' and practical recognition of racial inequality as desirable touchstones for

¹²Pressly, 92, 93.

¹³Dunning, *Essays*, xix, xx.

evaluating Reconstruction." This paradigm has enabled historians of the late twentieth and twenty first century to equate the contemporary understanding of race and racial matters with the conception of race and race relations held by those at the turn of the century. By ascribing a universal meaning to such terms as "racial inequality" and "race relations," the historian infuses them with a timeless and continued relevance. At such a level of abstraction, it becomes possible for the scholar to deny to the past its uniqueness, and to condemn it as immoral.

Stamp's conclusion "if it was worth four years of civil war to save the Union, it was worth a few years of radical reconstruction to give the American Negro the ultimate promise of equal civil and political rights,"¹⁴ represented concrete proof of change in the substantive views of Reconstruction. It was, he said, a "step forward in historical progress." According to Pressly, Stamp's revision of Reconstruction history "will speak to the conviction of many individuals in the 1960s." As a desirable touchstone for evaluation of the ideal of achieving equality between whites and blacks, it offered

¹⁴Kenneth M. Stamp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 215.

"intellectual reinforcement and encouragement to opponents of racial discrimination."¹⁵

Pressly's analysis of Dunning's methodological interpretation, based only on chosen selections extracted from the text of *Essays* indicates the presence of a preconceived, "set" approach by the reviewer. In eliminating as the essential aim the quest to understand Dunning's utterances as to the intention of his work, Pressly based his attempt to extract meaning according to the self-sufficiency of the text. This methodology laid the foundation of a new paradigm for determining the conduct, quality, and methodology of Dunning's historical investigation and his work in U. S. History based on the ideological convictions of Stamp's day, "ultimate promise of equal civil and political rights for the American Negro." In presuming that Dunning was somehow concerned with current problems, Pressly committed a methodological fallacy. Likewise, contemporary historians are in error when demanding from Dunning's history a solution to immediate problems. Thus, a created abstract mythology has distorted not

¹⁵All quotations found in Thomas J. Pressly, "Racial Attitudes, Scholarship, and Reconstruction: A Review Essay," *The Journal of Southern History*, 32, 1 (Feb., 1966), 88, 89, 90, 91, 92.

only Dunning's scholarship, but also his accounts of Reconstruction history, as historians remain intent upon interpreting them in the context of the concerns of the present.

CHAPTER 10

POINT OF DEPARTURE: MEANINGFULNESS AND THE FRAMEWORK OF CONTEXT

In the century that has passed since Dunning published his studies of the Reconstruction period, historians have demonstrated a profession unwillingness to "put the book back on the shelf and be done with it."¹ Rather than a subject of declining interest, the importance of what Dunning wrote about Reconstruction grows with the passage of time. Contemporary historians agree neither upon the soundness of his scholarship, the scrupulousness of his research, nor the rigorousness of his adherence to the "scientific" historical method; and the terms most used to describe Dunning and his work are starkly different from any used until well after Dunning's death in 1922. The differences are significant and represent an evolution of scholarly interest in Dunning's work. The suggestion of some professional historians that Dunning stands alone as *the* historian of that complex period, amid others

¹Muller, 338.

preoccupied with Dunning as a "racist" and progenitor of the racist "Dunning school," provide justification for positioning Dunning as the point of departure for Reconstruction historiography.²

When Dunning called the three-volume *History of Political Theories* his "epoch-making contribution to history," he shared the *New York Times* estimation of what constituted his most important work. From 1898 on, Dunning concentrated on this project unless compelled to accept more commercially profitable writing jobs. In ignoring Dunning's contribution to the writing of American history as well as failing to acknowledge his influence on his many graduate students at Columbia, the newspaper may not have been entirely myopic or mistaken. For it is only with the passage of time that Dunning's work on Reconstruction has assumed increasing importance. Changing scholarly reactions and subsequent judgment of his contribution to United States history are illustrative of the new paradigm whose essential feature is that of racial politics. From the second

²David Donald, "The Introduction to the Torchbook Edition," in *Essays on Civil War and Reconstruction*, William A. Dunning (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965), xvi; Alan D. Harper, "William A. Dunning: The Historian as Nemesis," *Civil War History* X (March 1964): 54, 55, 65.

half of the twentieth century, many analysts have discarded context as the framework for an understanding Dunning and his audience, and on the basis of textual autonomy have chosen to approach Dunning's thesis of Reconstruction with a set of preconceived notions, in their search for a coherent view of the author's system. Only a repositioning of perspective in the analysis of Dunning's work would provide a renewed angle from which twenty first century historians could secure a fresh look at Dunning, and do so without judgment, finding room for his historical accounts while at the same time leaving his reputation intact.³

³Dunning quoted in Philip Muller, "Look Back Without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," 327, 325, 326; 4 May 1905, 25 June 1913, Fredric Bancroft Papers; Dunning wrote to Bancroft of his feelings toward his volumes of Reconstruction history on several occasions. Upon completion of the essay "Process of Reconstruction," was "a stupid lot of dry law." In a later correspondence, he remarked that that the essays "are so far in the past my interest in them has gone the way of all flesh. They haven't excited a word of important recognition anywhere—which is a proper enough fate, and they have gone to library shelves to get dusty with the rest of the accumulation of ages." Dunning to Bancroft, 4 September 1897, 28 April 1898, Bancroft Papers; To Bancroft he remarked expressed his lack of interest and poor estimation of *Reconstruction*, "Reconstruction is progressing according to schedule. But it is poor stuff—I fear, though Hart may never find out." Dunning remarked to Bancroft of his numerous doubts about *Reconstruction*, including Hart's insistence on a small volume, and deadline for publication "Getting near the end of the "exasperating little work for Hart. It's all very unsatisfactory, but I rejoice at the approaching conclusion." Dunning could not get to see the Trumbull Papers. He later lamented: "can't get to the Hamilton Fish diaries—no time—volume must get to press." Dunning to Bancroft 30 July 1905, 14 March 1907, 24 March 1906, 7 January 1907, 16 June 1907, Bancroft Papers.

Leonard Krieger argued that the nineteenth century scholars produced the first divergence between the philosophy of history and historiography. The nineteenth-century philosophy of history illustrated the various concepts of historical coherence which theretofore had formed the foundation for what its adherents considered the implicit truth of historical practice. Kreiger noted that the mutual aversion of philosophers of history and historical practitioners, still prominent today, found its beginnings in the nineteenth century. Practicing empirical historians specialized in factual history and rejected August Comte's basic law which he described as the "theory of the natural progress of human society." Because the cherished conquests of civilized man were law and liberty, the practice of history lay in what Charles A. Beard called the "dry husks of military, political and diplomatic events."⁴

John Higham argued that both in content and method, the impersonal character of scientific history subordinated individuals to institution. With the goal

⁴ Fredric R. Coudert, *Columbia Alumni News*, Dunning Papers (Columbiana Library, Columbia University); Leonard Krieger, *Time's Reasons*, 52, 53, 65; Charles A. Beard and Alfred Vagts, "Currents of Thought in Historiography," *The American Historical Review* 44, 3 (April 1937), 482.

of replacing the waywardness and subjectivity of romanticism with a sense of uniform processes, the scientific historian sought to subject caprice and passion to objective law. It was in this climate, at the dawn of the twentieth century, that Dunning combined the history of ancient, medieval, and modern European political ideas with his interests in the politics of the American Civil War and Reconstruction. His two published volumes were entirely different in tone, content, and scope. Dunning never consolidated, or attempted to synthesize his two conceptual frameworks.⁵

Nine years before the publication of Dunning's *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction*, Senator John Wallace of Leon County, Florida, published a complete study of the Reconstruction period in his book entitled *Carpetbag Rule in Florida*. An African American Republican, Wallace was a member of the Florida legislature for twelve years. His account defended Florida's harsh Black Codes, and discredited the work of the Freedman's Bureau, calling the Bureau the "worst

⁵ John Higham, *History*, 95, 96, 167, 259; For Dunning's views see especially his *History of Political Theories from Luther to Montesquieu*. In the 1960s, Rembert Patrick synthesized Dunning's two conceptual frameworks in Rembert Patrick, *The Reconstruction of the Nation* (New York, 1967), Philip R. Muller, "Look Back Without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," footnote, 334.

curse of the race," and claiming that the Bureau officials provoked a "deadly hostility" between native whites and blacks. Wallace detailed the greed, corruption and criminality of carpetbaggers, while having nothing but praise for the native southern whites. Myriad writers have cited Wallace's account despite questions surrounding its authenticity. Vernon L. Wharton argued that there were suggestions that Wallace's book was a forgery and that Wallace was a tool of powerful Democratic leader, William D. Bloxam. Wallace had been employed by Bloxam immediately after the close of the Civil War, and apparently remained associated with him through the years.⁶

Independently wealthy industrialist James Ford Rhodes was among the last of the generation of non-professional historians who published major works of American history just as professional historians were appearing on the scene. Writing from a northern point of view, Rhodes was nonetheless a national historian who made a conscious effort to overcome sectional prejudice.

⁶John Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida: The Inside Workings of the Reconstruction of Civil Government in Florida after the Close of the Civil War* (Jacksonville: Da Costa Printing and Publishing House, 1888); Vernon L. Wharton, "Reconstruction," in *Writing Southern History: Essays in Historiography in Honor of Fletcher M. Green*, eds. Arthur S. Link and Rembert W. Patrick (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 298, 299.

Dunning, however, with the well-established reputation as an impartial authority on the Civil War and Reconstruction periods, remained aloof from the northern bias. An effort to divest his writing of sectional bias, his approach represented a new departure from much of the history that had been seen "through the spectacles of Radicals," and revised the formerly contrived partisan accounts of the glorifiers of the Grand Old Party.⁷

At the beginning of the twentieth century, two political studies of the Reconstruction period joined Dunning's 1898 *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction*. In 1903, Allen Caperton Braxton, a scholarly lawyer from western Virginia, prepared a treatise for presentation to the state bar association of Virginia, entitled, *The Fifteenth Amendment: an Account of its Enactment*. Later published in volume form, it represented the earliest study of the origins of the Fifteenth Amendment. Braxton argued that suffrage for the black male was chiefly the result of politics, "until the political exigencies of the

⁷Richard Hofstadter, "The Department of History," 215; Wendell H. Stephenson, "A Half Century of Southern Historical Scholarship," 18, 20; John Higham, *History*, 70, 150, 151, 167; Alan D. Harper, "William A. Dunning: Historian as Nemesis," 65, 66.

Reconstruction arose, unrestricted manhood suffrage for negroes was neither accepted, nor seriously considered, by the people, or leading men, of any State or party." The 1934 reprint is still cited. In 1909, the second study of the Fifteenth Amendment appeared. The book had for its title, *Legislative and Judicial History of the Fifteenth Amendment*, and in it John Mabry Mathews of the Political Science Department at the Johns Hopkins University argued, "The germ of the Fifteenth Amendment is contained in one of the plans considered by the Joint Committee on Reconstruction to remedy the alleged disparity in representative strength between North and South resulting from the emancipation of the negroes." For more than half a century, the slim volume would remain a standard, historical account.⁸

Dunning, however, remained the most influential scholar on the subject of Reconstruction, and the period's acknowledged master. In *Essays* he stressed awareness of constitutional issues in the relationship of the state governments to the national government,

⁸LaWanda and John H. Cox, "Negro Suffrage and Republican Politics: The Problem of Motivation in Reconstruction Historiography," 303, 306; A. Caperton Braxton, *The Fifteenth Amendment: An Account of its Enactment* (Lynchburg, Va., n.d.; reprint, Lynchburg: J. P. Bell, 1934), 1. John Mabry Mathews, *Legislative and Political History of the Fifteenth Amendment* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1909; reprint, New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2001), 11.

while the second book, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877* emphasized a national point of view in its analysis of the period. For three decades, until the post-World War II years, a consensus of historians believed that few scholars had dealt with the constitutional questions, or with the questions about Republican motivation for the legislative actions of the federal government during Reconstruction, as fairly as had Dunning.⁹

When *Essays* was published in late 1897, Dunning remarked, "They haven't elicited a word of important recognition anywhere—which is a proper enough fate, and they have gone to library shelves to get dusty with the rest of the accumulation of ages." He was mistaken. Forthcoming reviews showed that the volume was well received. William MacDonald of the *Nation* declared the book, especially the first two chapters, worthy "to be

⁹Cox, "Negro Suffrage and Republican Politics: The Problem of Motivation in Historiography," 306, 308; Wendell H. Stephenson, "A Half Century of Southern Historical Scholarship," 21; Higham, *History*, 167; Dunning's correspondence to Fredric Bancroft leaves little doubt that Dunning's primary objective in the well researched *Essays* was to document what he considered the basic problem of Reconstruction: "the great issue of internal politics." He warned Bancroft that "he goes astray in dwelling on the Freedman's Bureau and the Civil Rights Bills. . .the real issue is the breach between Congress and Johnson." Further, he criticized Adam's history of the period saying one paragraph was weak: "The little sophistry of bringing in the matter of miscegenation where race conservation hasn't any relation to the general subject." Dunning to Bancroft, 11 August 1897, 4 September 1897, 5 September 1898, 24 March 1906, Bancroft Papers.

praised as a notable contribution to our constitutional history." The reviewer praised Dunning's focus: "Professor Dunning is sparing of comment or reflection outside of the strict limits of his subject, nor does he allow himself to be drawn aside by the many interesting points naturally suggested by his discussion." Moreover, said the *Nation*, "Professor Dunning's essays, although intending nothing beyond a discussion of certain important topics, have nevertheless, a distinct and appreciable unity, and form a valuable and welcome contribution to the history of the United States since 1861."¹⁰

Fredrick W. Moore reviewed *Essays* for the *American Historical Review*, remarking that the "Civil War had produced a rank and rapid growth of constitutional interpretations." In reference to Dunning's analysis, Moore agreed with Dunning that the inequality of the states "remained as the alive and unsettled question from the Reconstruction period, awaiting either Congress or the Court to eliminate the situation of unconstitutionally unequal conditions in the ten reconstructing states prohibited from narrowing the

¹⁰Dunning to Bancroft, 28 April 1898, Bancroft Papers; *Nation*, 21 July 1898.

electorate on any ground." Moore's was a mixed review of *Essays*, however, and concluded, "to the teacher and the student his work will afford valuable and timely help in the further study of the period. To the general reader he will prove interesting, unless the very narrowness of his constitutional point of view should disappoint."¹¹

For the most part, reviewers in 1908 met the appearance of *Reconstruction Political and Economic, 1865-1877* with enthusiastic praise. Historian E. Benjamin Andrews, President of Brown University, described the volume as one of "extraordinary excellence." He considered "particularly valuable . . . the account of the great court decisions touching reconstruction." Like the reviewer for the *Nation*, Andrews cited Dunning's judgment of men. Dunning's criticism of the Radical Republicans was extremely critical and caustic. He especially singled out Thaddeus Stevens for his "total lack of scruple as to means in the pursuit of a legislative end," and Sumner for his "exalted moral fervor and humanitarian idealism." Yet, in spite of the severity of Dunning's

¹¹ Fredrick W. Moore, "Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction and Related Topics," *The American Historical Review* 3, 4 (July 1898), 761, 761.

pronouncements, the reviewer gave a positive nod: "the careful accuracy of Professor Dunning's narrative, well fortified with references to the sources, forbids us to pronounce them hasty." Indeed, the only criticism from historian Andrews was about Dunning's failure to gather materials to "present from the inside the Southern whites' reaction; to show how their rise from the stupor of defeat and the menace of black rule was inspired." Such a portrayal, in a chapter or two, argued Andrews, would do much toward "displaying the historian's power would much enhance its value, already great and lasting." Indeed, echoed the *Nation*, the "pendulum had swung from the time when those who carried through the policy of reconstruction were saints or seers, and those who opposed it were fools or knaves."¹²

From within their contextual framework, historians address the prevailing concerns and interests as they select and organize their empirically discovered facts. The tendency of historical writing to reflect the climate of opinion of an age has given rise to an awareness of influences coming from outside the

¹²E. Benjamin Andrews, "The American Nation: A History. Reconstruction, Political and Economic (1865-1877). Volume XXIII," *The American Historical Review* 13, 2 (January 1908), 371-373; *Nation*, 2 January 1908.

historical profession itself. For example at the end of the nineteenth century such issues such as the emergence of constitutional governments, nationalist inclinations, and the emergence of a new imperialism were issues which contributed to the scholar's inclination to focus on the political and legal issues that dominated historical scholarship. This was apparent in Dunning's Reconstruction account as well as in the authoritative political histories of both Braxton and Mathews. Yet at a 1907 meeting of the American Historical Association dedicated to American constitutional history, Professor William MacDonald sounded a warning to his colleagues. MacDonald perceived danger in the emerging overemphasis on the economic and social aspects of American History. He feared it would lead to neglect of the role that law had played in shaping American development. His fears were well grounded. At the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in 1908, George Burton Adams echoed McDonald's concerns of the influences of a host of new interests and new groups of scholars with a hostile attitude toward traditional history. The new branches were described as uniformly and severely critical of the methods and purposes of the political

historian. Among the five new interests identified by Adams were the field of sociology which with "an aggressive and vigorous school of thought is seeking is an ultimate explanation of human history," and, what Adams called a group of "folk-psychologists . . . or a better name that has come into use, the social psychologist." Adams claimed their goal was a recrudescence of philosophy of history.¹³

At the century's turn, in the great age of sociology, historians began using the ideas of a new generation of social theorists and sociologists. Clinical psychologists Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung deeply influenced the modern person's perception of himself and his society, and a new kind of political science arose that was deeply affected by these sociological and psychological influences. A wide-ranging debate about methods began in Germany and spread through the social sciences, as scholars questioned the basic connections between the social sciences and the

¹³Paul K. Conklin and Roland N. Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge: The History and Theory of History*, 86, 87; John Higham, *History*, 171; Andrew C. Mc Laughlin's, *The Confederation and the Constitution*, and William Mac Donald's, *Jacksonian Democracy*, were volumes included in Albert Bushnell Hart's, *The American Nation: A Series*, as was Dunning's *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*; George Burton Adams, "History and the Philosophy of History," *The American Historical Review* 14, 2 (January 1909), 221-236.

natural sciences. German historian J. G. Droysen in lectures of 1857-1883, anticipated the outlooks of Wilhelm Dilthey and Friedrich Meinecke. They argued for the need to free history from natural science, as well as mere philosophical speculation. Droysen saw the rise in natural science to be a danger for the development of historical studies, and his primary concern was to show that the views of Leopold von Ranke, on the theory of history, were not sufficient to place history on a "secure scholarly basis." Furthermore, contended Droysen, Ranke erred in believing that "history is primarily, almost exclusively, political history." In Droysen's view, the "exclusive emphasis on the critical method has dangerous consequences: the historian concentrates on political history and regards a marshalling of critically established facts in chronological order as the only legitimate form of historical presentation." Droysen spoke with contempt for those who recommended a "eunuchal objectivity" for the historian. He held that the road to the past began in the present. As an extension to this, the "progressive" school of American historians rebelled against "positivism." They criticized traditional

historians, charging that historical writing of the past had been the tool of some political purpose. These trends had the potential of reducing all to "hopeless subjectivism." The possibility of verification, upon which science rested, was at risk as was the status of history as a reasonably exact science.¹⁴

In essence, during the first two decades of the twentieth century, American historiography began its revolt primarily against the older German, Rankean school of "scientific" history. The critical, "scientific" methodology of von Ranke had had a powerful influence on American historiography in the nascent stages of professional development, especially at the graduate centers of Columbia University and the Johns Hopkins University. The revolt conspired against the political and constitutional subject matter of this

¹⁴Paul K. Conklin and Roland N. Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge: History and Theory of History*, 86, 87, 88, 109; Felix Gilbert, "The New Edition of Johann Gustav Droysen's *Historik*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44, 2 (April-June 1983) 329, 332, 334, 335; See also Calvin G. Rank, "Two Meanings of Historicism in the Writings of Dilthey, Troeltsch, and Meinecke," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25, 4 (October-December 1964), 503-518, and Dwight E. Lee and Robert N. Beck, "The Meaning of "Historicism," *The American Historical Review* 59, 3 (April 1954), 568-577.

school, as well as its championing of the ideals of "perfect objectivity."¹⁵

The "New History" represented the expanded horizons of combined European and American themes. James Harvey Robinson, the first professor of Modern European History at Columbia, spearheaded the movement. Dunning, whose scholarship was characterized by a neutral mode of analysis, reliance on empirical information, and rejection of John Burgess' comprehensive, universal paradigm including its emphasis on extrahistorical patterns, stimulated new research in political philosophy that was exemplified in the work his students Charles Edward Merriam and F. W. Coker. The European dimension, in the formative years of the New History before World War I, demanded a broader social and cultural base to emphasize a conjunction between Europe and America's past. Politics were not to be ignored, rather, "political events were mere externals." American historian Fredrick Jackson Turner argued that the American frontier was a more significant factor than politics in the development of American institutions, indeed, a unique American experience. Turner directed

¹⁵ Paul K. Conklin and Roland N. Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge: History and Theory of History*, 88, 89.

attention to broader social processes and economic factors. In response to this "revolt," Carl L. Becker and Charles A. Beard fell in line with Robinson and Turner. These "new historians" were marked by a strong reaction against political history. They emphasized social history, relevance, and, present-mindedness marked by a historical understanding committed to bringing progressive social and political change.¹⁶

The departure from historiographic tradition was significant and strong. These histories, perhaps for the first time, introduced to Americans the growing feeling of relativity and subjectivity in historical writing. However, the new historians moved beyond Dunning's relativist thought that informed his historical accounts and encouraged the historical exploration of his southern students:

The business of the historian who studies that century is to ascertain the scope and content of the ideas that constituted the culture of that period. Whether these ideas were true or were false, according to the standards of any other period, has nothing to do with the matter. That they were the ideas which underlay the activities of the men of this time, is all that concerns the work of the historian.¹⁷

¹⁶John Higham, *History*, 260-268; Leonard Krieger argued that Paul K. Conkin and Roland N. Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge: History and Theory of History*, 88, 89.

¹⁷Dunning, "Truth in History."

The new historians were intent upon developing a philosophy of history explicitly opposed to and free of the reigning values of empiricism. Their characteristic products and prime accomplishments were the textbook and the essay on historiography. Both were appropriate for their philosophy that claimed history as an instrument of social reform.¹⁸

In his 1950 Presidential address to the American Historical Association, Samuel Eliot Morison, described Charles A. Beard as "by all odds the most provocative of my predecessors." Morison charged that Beard wrote his first famous book, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (1913) with one specific intention, "apparently to break down that excessive respect for the Federal Constitution which he believed to be the main legal block to social justice." By 1935, Beard, in his essay, "That Noble Dream," declared that "objectivity" was dead, and with it, the scientific historian.¹⁹

¹⁸Paul K. Conklin and Roland N. Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge*, 88, 89, 90; John Higham, *History*, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267.

¹⁹Samuel Eliot Morison, "Faith of a Historian," *American Historical Review* 56, 2 (January 1951), 265; Charles A. Beard, "That Noble Dream," *The American Historical Review* 41, 1 (October 1935), 74-87; See also, Charles A. Beard, "Written History as an Act of Faith," *The American Historical Review* 39, 2 (January 1934), 219-231.

Since the thirties, commented historian Oscar Handlin, there had been a crisis in history that was the result not of the death of history, but of its "misappropriation." Historians had allowed their subject, to "slip into the hands of propagandists, politicians, dramatists, novelists, journalists, and social engineers." In the United States, Handlin argued, history had become a social science: one of a group of disciplines giving "professional form to the study of the life of man in society."²⁰

Despite the presence of a diversity of its doctrines, eugenics had provided a way to think of social problems in scientific terms. Analysis of academic journals spanning a fifty-year period, indicated that around the turn of the century the attention social scientists paid to the problems of race was quite low, reaching a high point between 1910 and 1914, when it was the subject of about 5% of the articles. In 1916's *Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History*, eugenicist Madison Grant, the key figure in the popularization of the ideas of Nordic supremacy in the United States, paid scant

²⁰Oscar Handlin, *Truth in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 7, 21.

attention to the "Negro Problem." Racial theorists in the 1920s focused only on the different white races, and viewed the passage of the Immigration Restriction Act as the solution to the problem of the influx of inferior races into the United States. In 1933, however, Grant lamented the effects of the increased migration of blacks to northern cities after World War I. In *Conquest of a Continent or the Expansion of Races in America*, Grant proclaimed, "The Negro problem must be taken vigorously in hand by the Whites without delay. States which have no laws preventing the intermarriage of white and black should adopt them."²¹

From this time forward, American scientists lost sight of different white races and focused exclusively on the "white" and "black" races. Anthropologist Franz Boas, however, announced that race mixing was the ultimate solution to the race conflict. He was joined by other scientists of the thirties in the abandonment of the notions of superiority and inferiority. As

²¹George W. Stocking, "American Social Scientists and Race Theory: 1890-1915," 595. Ethel Shanas, "The American Journal of Sociology through Fifty Years," *The American Journal of Sociology* 50, 6 (May 1945), 524. Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race or The Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916); Madison Grant, *The Conquest of Continent or the Expansion of Races in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), 288.

scientists had yet to find conclusive evidence of genetic mental differences between races, and no study had eliminated the differences due to environment, the development of social scientific thinking on race in the period was based on rejection of so-called "proofs" of racial mental differences. This development was largely a movement from certainty to doubt, and this growing doubt had its reflection in the elimination of race as an independent variable in social scientific thought. Consequently, most geneticists in the U. S. rejected studies of the 1910s and 1920s that had insisted on the maintenance of race purity. In embracing views that espoused race mixing or amalgamation they broke from the traditions of Social Darwinism, eugenics and the scientific racism which later flourished in Hitler's Germany. Anthropologists elevated the importance of environment by stressing the role of culture as the determinant of behavior. Racial antagonism came to be explained as a basically irrational attitude—a prejudice—unreflective of reality. Clear evidences of racial antagonism, for example race riots in more than twenty cities, and a revived Ku Klux Klan that terrorized the African American population in the 1920s

prompted efforts of liberal politicians and social scientists to work for social justice and democracy.²²

²²Jackson, 109, 117, 130, 147, 153, 158; Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Scribner's, 1916); George W. Stocking, "American Social Scientists and Race Theory: 1890-1915," 2, 3, 4, 5, 85, 86, 595.

CHAPTER 11

THE REALM OF MYTH: HISTORICAL NARRATIVE AS VERBAL FICTION

In February, 1939, Francis B. Simkins called for a revision of Reconstruction history. In an article written for the *Journal of Southern History* titled, "New Viewpoints of Southern History," Simkins proposed a number of changes. Declaring the main issue of the Reconstruction period to be the "great American race question" (like "Banquo's ghost, it will not go down"), Simkins called for a fairer analysis of Reconstruction's achievements. He admonished historians of the South to "adopt a more critical, creative, and tolerant attitude" in order that their "great civic obligation" might be discharged. The following year, Howard K. Beale joined Simkins in this theme. He commended young historians for their efforts in beginning to retell the story "in terms of the economic and social forces at work."¹

¹Francis B. Simkins, "New Viewpoints of Southern Reconstruction," *The Journal of Southern History* 5, 1 (February 1939), 49, 61; Howard K. Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," *The American Historical Review* 45, 4 (July 1940), 808;

Beale wrote that a much-needed revision came at the turn of the century that was mainly associated with the work of James Ford Rhodes and William A. Dunning and the "Dunning school." For many years, he argued, the writing of both northerners and southerners were dominated by bitter sectional feelings engendered by the Civil War. Men in the postwar decades were less concerned with a painstaking search for truth than with justifying their own positions. Few southerners wrote history, he argued, and northern historians "had long accepted the thesis of the Radical Republicans that Radicals had saved the union by their Reconstruction program, that their Democratic opponents were traitors, and that Andrew Johnson was a drunkard and an incompetent." Beale asserted that for the first time "meticulous and thorough research was carried on in an effort to determine the truth rather than to prove a thesis."²

Two versions of the Reconstruction story appeared that rendered an indelible imprint on the mind of the American public. First, as mentioned earlier, clergyman Thomas Dixon, Jr. offered three volumes of fiction, *The*

Bernard A. Weisberger, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography," 427; Vernon L. Wharton, "Reconstruction," 312.

²Howard K. Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," 807.

Leopard's Spots, *The Clansman*, and *The Traitor*. The trilogy quickly passed into the mythology of the contemporary literature. Borrowing from *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Clansman*, Dixon adapted the story into a play which opened in Richmond, Virginia to enthusiastic reviews. The play became the basis for the infamous D. W. Griffith film, *The Birth of a Nation*. In 1929, journalist Claude G. Bowers published, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution After Lincoln*. Bower's claimed his version of the Reconstruction epoch to be a historical account of the Reconstruction era based on the serious scholarship of the revisionists. His story, however, was violent and extreme. The work departed so radically from the old pro-Republican thesis that it became almost a "Democratic campaign document." *The Tragic Era* became a selection of the Literary Guild of America and a national best seller. Beale greeted the book with a negative indifference, commenting that the story was a "rather superficial but widely read study of the period." Beale argued that Dunning's were the influential ideas in the writing of Reconstruction history, yet his concluding comments signaled the turn in historiographical direction. Beale informed the

historical profession that just as surely as Dunning had "rendered a service a generation ago by careful researches into political sources and by writing with an attitude freed from the war animosities of their fathers. . . .so another new generation has begun to tell the story in terms of the economic and social forces at work and without the preconceptions that limited the earlier group."³

At the 1940 meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Simkins, in agreement with Beale, called for "new studies and a changed point of view." This new perspective would necessitate the inclusion of race consciousness in a "balanced appraisal" of Reconstruction while taking into consideration "other factors than political issues . . . that there should be a fuller understanding of the emotional and psychological causes of southern aversion to the experiment of the Negro in politics." Beale challenged

³Claude G. Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution After Lincoln* (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929); Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Leopard's Spots* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1902); Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Clansman* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1903); Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Traitor* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1907). Theodore Nester Weissbuch, "Literary and Historical Attitudes Toward Reconstruction Following the Civil War " (Ph. D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1964). See this dissertation for an excellent, in-depth treatment of this subject. Also see, F. Garvin Davenport, "Thomas Dixon's Mythology of Southern History."; Howard K. Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," 807, 808.

the historians to re-examine the period in terms of a "twofold revolutionary hypothesis," basically upon the issues of economics and class struggle. The call made by Simkins and Beale for basic new research failed to elicit meaningful response. Such research would have required reviewing materials that had generally been undisturbed since the time of the state studies done by the Dunning students. In the forties, the National Archives made manuscript records and a checklist of the Freedman's Bureau available. According to John and LaWanda Cox, this would provide "material for new departures in Reconstruction scholarship." In 1965, Vernon L. Wharton lamented that a review of American history textbooks, and recent essays as well, would reveal that most revisionist suggestions "are being adopted with, or without any further detailed research."⁴

At a "Round Table on Reconstruction" during the sixth annual meeting of the Association in 1941, Robert H. Woody of Duke University, Simkins, and others submitted brief papers discussing the "Revisionist's

⁴James W. Patton, "The Fifth annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association," *The Journal of Southern History* 6, 1 (February 1940), 82, 83; John H. Cox and LaWanda Cox, "Negro Suffrage and Republican Politics: The Problem of Motivation in Reconstruction Historiography," 312; Vernon L. Wharton, "Reconstruction," 297, 311, 312, 313.

View." It was reported that the "older histories of Reconstruction" written under the influence of the Dunning and the Johns Hopkins schools met with a cordial reception." The panel described these early scholars as "able historians" whose pattern of Reconstruction "is so well fixed in American historiography as to be susceptible to challenge only by an abundance of substantial evidence." During the discussion it was stated, "no reviewer in the *American Historical Review* found any serious fault with them because of the authors' racial prejudices."⁵

Among the revisionist literature discussed was that of African American historian W. E. B. Du Bois. In his extensive study, *Black Reconstruction from 1860-1880*, Du Bois stated that his intention was to "tell and interpret these twenty years of fateful history with especial reference to the efforts and experiences of the Negroes themselves."⁶ He charged that a "frontal attack, as interpreted by the leaders of national thought in 1870 came from the universities and particularly from

⁵Albert B. Moore, "The Sixth Annual Meeting of The Southern Historical Association," *The Journal of Southern History* 7, 1 (February 1941), 66-68.

⁶W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction from 1860-1880* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1962; reprint, New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1975), unnumbered page in front matter, To The Reader, (page citations are to the reprint edition).

Columbia and Johns Hopkins."⁷ The nation was ashamed, claimed Du Bois, and for that reason "the facts of American history have in the last half century been falsified."⁸ The Columbia studies varied "in their methods," remarked Du Bois. For example, he noted that the work by John W. Burgess was "frank and determined in his anti-Negro thought."⁹ He assessed Dunning's scholarship, "Dunning's own work is usually silent so far as the Negro is concerned,"¹⁰ and concluded that it was because a "growing group of young Southern students" had deeply influenced the "kindly and impressive professor," that he "began with them to rewrite the history of the nation." Du Bois considered the writings of the "distinguished authors," Walter L. Fleming and U. B. Phillips (two of Dunning's students), to be "openly and pure propaganda to discredit the Negro."¹¹ The controversy, concluded Woody and the panel of the Roundtable, revolved around the "attitudes toward race

⁷Ibid., 718.

⁸Ibid., 711.

⁹Ibid., 718.

¹⁰Ibid., 718, 719.

¹¹Moore, "The Sixth Annual Meeting of The Southern Historical Association," 66-68.

questions . . . linked with which is the whole problem of social classes and their economic interests."¹²

This intellectual discussion among historians in the 1930s and 1940s, including the idea of a "revolt" against the way of thinking represented in early twentieth century scientific historians found its way into the historiography of the Reconstruction era. Successful exploitation of social history resulted in its supplanting of traditional political history as the nodal point of the field. In the 1950s, the school desegregation crisis moved the "race question" into inescapable prominence.¹³

Nineteenth-century social scientists, citing biological and cultural criteria, generally applied the term "race" to such homogeneous cultural entities as national, linguistic, or religious groups. For Thomas Jefferson, the African occupied a link in the Great Chain of Being somewhere above the orangutan but substantially below the Caucasian. The immediate effect of Charles Darwin's work strengthened and confirmed the long-held ideas about black inferiority. But the

¹²Ibid., 66-68.

¹³Albert B. Moore, (February 1941), 66-68. John Higham, *History*, 260, 284; Bernard A. Weisberger, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography," 429.

scientific battles that raged in the 1910s and 1920s gave way to the arguments of the predominately psychologically oriented modern social scientists who rejected the eugenic emphasis on hereditary racial inferiority. Therefore, beginning in the 1940s concerns not with race but with race relations, the social, psychological, and cultural consequences of the co-existence of diverse racial groups came to the fore.¹⁴

The new science transformed American ideas. In a comprehensive study entitled "Social Science and Segregation before Brown," Herbert Hovenkamp argued that it was not until the 1940s that scientific racism began to disappear from American universities. Science, he asserted "responds to what is in the air—and in the 1950s and 1960s the air around the American Universities was filled with racial egalitarianism." Egalitarian values competed with the social values of segregation and race discrimination, and egalitarianism weighed more heavily on the scales. The Supreme Court responded to the radical transformation in the social sciences, accepting the new environmentalist paradigm. In 1948,

¹⁴George W. Stocking, "American Social Scientists and Race Theory: 1890-1915," 2, 3, 4, 5, 85, 86, 595; Ethel Shanas, "The American Journal of Sociology through Fifty Years," *The American Journal of Sociology* 50, 6 (May 1945), 524.

relying on arguments of cultural relativists, the Court, in *Shelley v. Kramer*, found for the plaintiffs based on a violation of the fourteenth amendment, and rejected racial discrimination in housing. In 1954, with *Brown v. Board of Education*, the court's commitment to racial egalitarianism became clear.¹⁵

The new paradigm was evident in historical writing in the 1950s. Rejecting the assumption of racial inferiority and cherishing the quest for racial equality, Carl N. Degler's 1959 interpretation, *Out of Our Past*, took a new revisionist position. With the blunt conclusion that the "tragedy of Reconstruction is that it failed," Degler rejected, in detail, the traditionally accepted Reconstruction history. John H. Cox and LaWanda Cox concurred with Degler arguing that the Fifteenth Amendment included the Negro within the "American Dream of equality and opportunity, [and] gave the United States distinction as being the first nation committed to the proposition that in a bi-racial society

¹⁵Herbert Hovenkamp, "Social Science and Segregation Before *Brown*," *Duke Law Journal* (June-September 1985), 653, 665, 666, 669, 671, 672. Hovenkamp argued that Science goes through rapid change. Science historians have written that the history of science was the history of "wrong ideas: that there is no quick and easy explanation, for the history of science is more complex than just analyzing the "internalizing" of "correct" social science. *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U. S. 1, 20 (1948); *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U. S. 483 (1954).

. . . human beings must have equal rights." Donald Sheehan believed "there would be an increasing repudiation of 'Dunning-ism'," in part because the "doctrine of Anglo-Saxon superiority, so respectable in the 1890s, has been relegated to the dustbin." With the growing sophistication in the historian's use of new evidence, moderate revisionism did not satisfy the students of the new generation influenced by the recent sociological, psychological, and anthropological analyses of man.¹⁶

Reconstruction received a definitive reevaluation during the "revolution of race relations" of the 1960s. Eric Foner argued that by placing the aspirations and activities of blacks at center stage in the drama of the South, modern revisionism "radically reinterpreted national Reconstruction politics." Dunning, "thrown in the dustbin" in 1959, now emerged, in the historiography of the 1960s as an anti-Negro historian, "chiefly concerned with vindicating the South and its racial policies since the Civil War." Dunning's viewpoint, argued historians, originated in the anti-Reconstruction

¹⁶Carl N. Degler quoted in John H. and LaWanda Cox, "Negro Suffrage and Republican Politics: The Problem of Motivation in Reconstruction Historiography," 312, 314; Vernon L. Wharton, "Reconstruction," 313, 314; Carl N. Degler, *Out of Our Past* (New York: 1959), 211, 217-228.

propaganda of southern Democrats after the war, and endured only because of its scholarly legitimacy. The idea that racial stereotypes dictated his analysis of the era gained momentum, the charge of "racist" became common as his treatment of the period was analyzed from within the framework of racial beliefs.¹⁷

Not to comment on the degree to which Dunning was a racist was to be of serious error. Alan D. Harper argued that it was Dunning's *a priori* assumptions, flowing from confidence in natural science and assertive science that had provided him with his conscious hypothesis for the study of Reconstruction. This not only spoiled his judgment, according to Harper, but also, led him to pass over material of great importance. The resulting prejudice turned Dunning's hand to the work of "Nemesis", as the potent force of his prejudice "entered the popular consciousness."¹⁸ Philip R. Muller noted that the charge "Dunning was a racist" became his "epigrammatic fate." Repeated often and in so many different contexts it has endured as his academic

¹⁷Vernon L. Wharton, "Reconstruction," 313; Eric Foner, "Reconstruction Revisited," *Reviews in American history* (December 1982): 82, 83; I. A. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America, 1900-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 65, 66; Higham, *History*, 168.

¹⁸Alan D. Harper, "William A. Dunning: The Historian as Nemesis," 55, 65, 66;

legacy, at once familiar to modern students and scholars of the Reconstruction era.¹⁹

Following a decline in revisionist writing during the latter half of the seventies, historians of the 1980s used Dunning's history if only as a point of departure, citing it as the interpretation to refute or marginalize. In 1881, August Meier argued that many historians used the interpretation of Reconstruction history argued by historians Charles A. Beard and C. Vann Woodward as their point of departure in their attempt to refute Dunning's validity. According to Meier, in their attempt at revision these modern historians had "stood Dunning on his head." The result, concluded Meier, was a "conflict of the most serious proportions," for even as they minimized the significance of economic motivations and interest groups they "returned to Dunning's emphasis on politics and race." Meier threw up his hands in despair, lamenting that "Historical fashion tends to move from one thing to

¹⁹Dunning to Bancroft, 25 June 1913, Bancroft Papers. Dunning's own thoughts about writing Reconstruction sharply contrasted with Harper's notion that Dunning wrote his history of Reconstruction according to the dictates of a conscious hypothesis. In 1913, during his preparations for writing *The British Empire and the United States*, Dunning commented to friend Bancroft, "Reconstruction is a trifle": "I could sail along writing of Reconstruction." But, he continued, work involving the English-speaking peoples and Anglo-American relations, "needs a working hypothesis."; Philip R. Muller, "Look back Without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," 337.

another without effective synthesis of the insights of one generation of historians with those that follow." In Meier's view, despite the availability of modern research techniques and the data that modern technology afforded the historian in research, the historical reality of Reconstruction historiography in 1981 still seemed so complex as to elude the historian's grasp.²⁰

Revisionism of the 1980s was characterized by the denigration of Dunning and the caliber of his scholarship. In 1983 John Harel Hosmer wrote that Dunning and his students were responsible for the institutionalization of the Jim Crow regulations. Hosmer charged that Dunning and the Dunning school used history to distort and fabricate factual information "in order to exonerate the existence of segregation and disfranchisement during their lifetime." According to Hosmer, the "major flaw in the writings of Dunning and his students lay not with their racial bias. . . .but with their use of disreputable scholarship to justify that bias." In 1995, Stetson Kennedy, in *Beyond Appomattox*, argued that Dunning superbly pieced together "all the components of the confederate version of

²⁰August Meier, "An Epitaph for the Writing of Reconstruction History?" *Reviews in American History* 9, 1 (March 1981): 82-87. 82-87; Eric Foner, "Reconstruction Revisited," 82.

Reconstruction" in order to propagate a "Big Lie," propaganda akin to the lies of Nazi Germany. According to Kennedy, this big lie, because it was systematically implanted in the nation's textbooks, was responsible for a rabid racial ideology that became the predominant thought in the United States.²¹

In the historiography of the twenty first century, Dunning remains an influential structuring force to the creation and reception—whether in support or opposition—of historical perspective. In 2003, Omayra Zaragosa Cruz portrayed her study, "'The World and Us': Toward a Post-Nationalist Articulation of Racial Consciousness, 1884-1937," as an example of an "internationally informed racial consciousness that opposes the expression of race as a purely domestic issue." Cruz argued that the establishment of the American Historical Association in 1884, and in particular, Dunning's account of Reconstruction history, marked the "beginnings of articulation of an apparatus, a system of connections that make post-nationalist racial consciousness a norm rather than an exception."

²¹John Harel Hosmer, "The Dunning School and Reconstruction According to Jim Crow," (Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 1983); Stetson Kennedy, *After Appomattox* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1995), 2, 4, 9;

According to Cruz, "Dunning maintains that the primary task of Reconstruction scholarship is to recognize that the restoration of the Union was not the outcome of the war." In Dunning's formulation of nationhood, said Cruz, Reconstruction was a racial project the events of which forced consolidation of the U. S. and rendered a national culture within a reconstructed nation that was "internationally racialized and aggressively racializing." Dunning, as a "temporal bookend," would historically situate the issues of race and nationhood in the "efforts to carve out a relationship to the past that creates a space for optimism in the midst of a threatening presence." Cruz concluded that she had "endeavored to explore the possibility of unthinking American History, with the ultimate goal of clearing a space. . .for U.S. culture to function as history."²² With these sentiments, Cruz's analysis heralded the arrival of Dunning and his scholarship to the juncture where the realm of myth meets the Yellow Brick Road.

²²Omayra Zaragoza Cruz, "'The World and Us': Toward a Post-Nationalist Articulation of Racial Consciousness, 1884-1937," (Ph.D. diss, (University of California, San Diego, 2003), 1, 2, 65, 85, 86, 102, 107, 187, 190.

CONCLUSION

Stripped of the intent of its author L. Frank Baum, the children's fairy tale *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was left to be understood only within a changing cultural construct. Linguistic analysts argue that those in different environments of changing historical, political and cultural contexts not only infuse the text of the story with meaningfulness, but also interpret and subject it to the concerns unique to their own time. Roland Barthes suggested that language in literature was merely a system of codes used to hide certain social, economic, or political forces and propagate a specific worldview or ideology.¹

Historian Hayden White argued that the similarities between a novel and a work of history were more significant than their differences. He was indifferent to empirical criteria, adhered to the notion of the

¹George Lakoff and Mark Turner, 6; Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

literary trope of metaphor, and insisted that history was preeminently a subsection of literature. For White, the only acceptable grounds upon which the historian should choose his historical perspective were those of the moral and aesthetic. White contended that historical narratives were manifestly verbal fictions. He conflated historical consciousness with myth and blurred the boundary that had long divided fiction from history. It then must not be surprising that the literary fate that has befallen Baum's Dorothy has made its interdisciplinary move into the discipline of History.

With their assessment of Dunning's scholarship the historical profession has adopted a new paradigm for the description of the scholar's Reconstruction accounts. Many modern commentators have rejected Dunning's authorial intention and the framework of context able to define it. By analyzing only selected portions of his work, and approaching that text from the perspective of contemporary moral imperatives, many have created historical nonsense. The logical consideration of much of this modern analysis is that it is unlikely that

Dunning could ever be brought to accept it as a correct description of what he had meant or written.

Historical studies should be studies of those things that genuine historical agents did think, could have thought, and intended to write. It is widely understood that fiction is written by intention. Notwithstanding the fashionable attitude among many historians, it is supposed that history does not simply consist of stories, and that even historical stories are supposed to be true. In a 1913 address to the members of the American Historical Association, Dunning argued that the realities of the past may never be apprehended "so long as the student of history stands contemplating in a stupor of admiration the reversals of ancient beliefs effected in our own age." Insisting that "contempt for those who lacked our light is the worst of equipments for understanding their deeds," Dunning declared to his listeners that "the student is under obligation to repress in all humility his scorn for the error that he finds in the beliefs of those with whom he

is dealing. For his business is to present past occurrences in their causal sequence."²

The twenty first century conception of Reconstruction is far indeed from the conception that was influential at the start of the twentieth. In the century that has passed since Dunning published his studies of the Reconstruction period, the importance of what Dunning wrote about Reconstruction grows with the passage of time. However, many contemporary historians describe Dunning and his work in very different terms from any used until well after Dunning's death in 1922. The differences are significant and represent an evolution of scholarly interest in Dunning's work. The suggestion of some professional historians that Dunning stands alone as *the* historian of that complex period, amid others preoccupied with Dunning as a "racist" and progenitor of the racist "Dunning school," provide justification for positioning Dunning as the point of departure for the study of the Reconstruction Era.³

²Dunning, "Truth in History," 222, 227, 229; Skinner, 49; Philip R. Muller, "Look Back Without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," 338.

³David Donald, "The Introduction to the Torchbook Edition," in *Essays on Civil War and Reconstruction*, William A. Dunning (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965), xvi; Alan D. Harper, "William A. Dunning: The Historian as Nemesis," *Civil War History* X (March 1964): 54, 55, 65.

William A. Dunning and his historical scholarship have receded into the realm of myth. Bernard Weisberger argued that academic historians have not met the challenge represented by the complexities of the Reconstruction era. Perhaps, he argued, this "dark and bloody ground" could be more readily understood, or at least more thoroughly unraveled, by the use of all the "well-worn roads."⁴ When confronting the questions posed by the complex Reconstruction era, contemporary historians must look back with respect for the scholars of the past. They must include the accounts of classic historians in what may not be the malice, but the mind of the past, as they heed Dunning's own call to "recognize frankly that whatever a given age or people believes to be true *is* true for that age and that people."⁵

Careful attendance to Dunning's historical context, contemporary audience, and authorial intent, will reposition the perspective on the analysis of Dunning's work. Removing Dunning from abstract analysis will

⁴Weisberger, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction History," 447; Dunning, "Truth in History," 222,227.

⁵Dunning stated that his purpose in writing *The British Empire and the United States* had been ". . .Nothing extenuate, Nor set down aught in malice. . ." in William A. Dunning, *The British Empire and the United States* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), vii; Dunning, "Truth in History," 222,227.

allow historians to arrive at an understanding of his work, and to view of the importance of the real Dunning, rather than the fabricated image found in the new paradigm constructed from a partial and even fragmented reading of his work. Taking Dunning on his own terms will restore a meaningful past: a fresh look at the intellectual and social realities of the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century will bring into bas-relief the tremendous advances the U. S. of twenty first century has made in reshaping social and political patterns. Taking the Reconstruction era on its own terms will impel historians to move beyond Dunning, and return in their research to revisit primary sources and documents as they work to clear the grisly ground of Reconstruction historiography for further fruitful examination.

APPENDIX

WILLIAM ARCHIBALD DUNNING¹

1857-1922

A. B., Columbia, 1881, A. M., 1884, Ph. D., 1885,
Ll. D., 1904; Litt. D., Dartmouth, 1916.

Instructor in Political Science and History, 1889-
1891, Adjunct Professor of History, 1896-1903,
Professor of History and Political Philosophy, 1903-
1904, Leiber Professor of History and Political
Philosophy, Columbia, 1904-1922.

Managing Editor of the *Political Science Quarterly*,
1894-1897, 1890-1903; President of the American
Historical Association, 1913; President of the
American Social Science Association, 1922;
Corresponding Member of the Massachusetts Historical
Society.

The following is a compilation of the works of William
A. Dunning.

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and Reconstruction, 1860-1867.* (Ph. D. diss.,
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