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by Ryan P. Semmes

In late 1869, less than a year into his first term as president of the United States, Ulysses S. Grant sat down at his desk in the Executive Mansion and wrote a memorandum that he titled "Reasons why San Domingo should be annexed to the United States." This memorandum, whether or not Grant sent it to anyone, encapsulated Grant's vision of Reconstruction, his ideas about the American economy, and his strategy for United States foreign policy. Grant's memorandum stated that "San Domingo is the gate to the Caribbean Sea . . . destined at no distant day to be the line of transit of half the commerce of the world." Important to Grant, too was the economic consequence of the acquisition of the island, with its thousands of acres of fertile land and its location at the nexus of world trade in the western hemisphere.

Grant also noted that the social tensions between African Americans and whites made annexation all the more relevant. "The present difficulty in bringing all parts of the United States to a happy unity and love of country grows out of a prejudice to color," Grant wrote. "The prejudice is a senseless one, but it exists. The colored man cannot be spared until his place is supplied, but with a refuge like San Domingo his worth here would soon be discovered, and he would soon receive such recognition as to induce him to stay." For Grant, the annexation of Santo Domingo meant a safe haven for African Americans free from the prejudices of whites, a place where they could prosper and enjoy the rights of American citizenship and prove to unenlightened whites that they had every right to be considered Americans.

Grant understood the importance of supporting African Americans in their quest for equal rights, much as he understood the need to eradicate slavery not only in the United States, but throughout the hemisphere. In his memorandum, Grant specifically argued that the

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importation of tropical goods into the United States supported slave labor. "San Domingo in the hands of the United States," Grant argued, "would make slave labor unprofitable and would soon extinguish that hated system of enforced labor." In 1869, he noted that the United States continued to receive the vast majority of its imports from Brazil and Cuba, two slave holding societies supported by European powers. "Get San Domingo and this will all be changed," he wrote.[1] The annexation of Santo Domingo would mean cheaper acquisition of tropical products, such as sugar and coffee, for the American public, thus saving millions of dollars.

Grant next discussed the influence of the British in the Caribbean. "The coasting trade of the United States," Grant wrote, "has now to pass through forign [sic] waters. In case of war between England and the United States, New York and New Orleans would be as much severed as would be New York and Calais, France." Without an American presence in the Caribbean, he said, the United States would lose the region and its southern and eastern coastlines to British naval power. He also used the memorandum to stress the importance of the Monroe Doctrine, noting that Santo Domingo was a weak nation in need of protection, and Santo Domingo was also free of tropical diseases. Annexation was "a step towards claring [sic] all European flags from this Continent." He finally asked a question of the members of Congress, "Can any one [sic] favor rejecting so valuable a gift who voted $7,200,000 for the icebergs of Alasca [sic]?"[2]

The Santo Domingo memorandum, which was crafted by Grant with small edits by either his personal secretary or his Secretary of State Hamilton Fish, encapsulated Ulysses S. Grant's entire Reconstruction agenda in one short document. The president intended to continue the lesson of the Civil War and eradicate the institution of slavery from the Western Hemisphere. In order to do so, the United States had to enforce the Monroe Doctrine even if that meant the threat of war. The annexation of Caribbean territory would enable the United States to prosecute a naval war against European foes while, at the same time, establishing economic connections that would sever American commerce from the slave economies of Brazil and Cuba. An allied interest to all of these was the inclusion of the Dominican people into

[1] John Y. Simon, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant: Volume 20: November 1, 1869-October 31, 1870* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), 74-76.

[2] Ibid.

the American republican experiment and the development of Santo Domingo as a safe haven for African Americans who confronted the racial prejudices of American whites in both the South and the North. Annexing Santo Domingo was the key to the success of the Grant Administration and the key to the success of Reconstruction. Grant looked to members of Congress to support such an effort, including a new member of the United States Senate who understood fully the effects of Reconstruction on African Americans across the South.

Around the time Grant was crafting his memorandum, the Mississippi legislature was attempting to rejoin the Union. An election was held within the legislature to fill the two seats in the United States Senate, left vacant when Mississippians Jefferson Davis and Albert Gallatin Brown had resigned their posts as a result of the state's secession. Now controlled by Republicans and under the administration of the United States government, the Mississippi legislature selected a newcomer to take one of its seats in the upper chamber of Congress. This man was Hiram R. Revels, the first African American to hold a seat in the United States Congress. Revels was seated on February 23, 1870, and quickly began work to help President Grant and the Republican party put forth an agenda to establish economic stability, civil rights for African Americans, and the concept of free labor for free men. As Grant's foreign policy agenda made its way to Congress, particularly his proposed annexation of Santo Domingo, Revels found himself at odds with some of his most ardent supporters in the Senate. Grant and Revels were thwarted in their desire for Santo Domingo annexation, but not before they were able to articulate its importance to the Senate and to sway some of the most important leaders in both the Congress and the African American community.[3] The two men came from entirely different backgrounds and experiences, yet in important ways they were shaped by their experiences in and with the state of Mississippi.

Ulysses S. Grant was born in Point Pleasant, Ohio, on April 27, 1822, to parents Jesse Root and Hannah Simpson Grant. The oldest of six children, Ulysses was officially christened Hiram Ulysses Grant, and thereby saddled with the unfortunate initials H.U.G. Grant attended the United States Military Academy at West Point where

[3] Robert L. Jenkins, "Black Voices in Reconstruction: The Senate Careers of Hiram R. Revels and Blanche K. Bruce" (Master's Thesis, Mississippi State University, 1975), 44-66.

a clerical error listed him as Ulysses S. Grant, a name the young man fully adopted soon into his tenure as a cadet. Ulysses shed the name Hiram from then on, leading to a number of nicknames such as Uncle Sam Grant, United States Grant, and most famously, Unconditional Surrender Grant. Ulysses would go on to serve admirably in the Mexican-American War before his resignation from the Army following problems with depression and alcohol. He spent the late 1850s attempting to work as a farmer and salesman before he settled for a job in his father's leather goods store working for his younger brother. Secession and war brought new opportunities for Ulysses as he was given a commission as a colonel in the Twenty-first Illinois Regiment. Soon after, he rose through the ranks, capturing three Confederate armies at Fort Donelson, Vicksburg, and finally, at Appomattox Courthouse. This swift change of fortune sent Grant's fame into the stratosphere, and he soon became the most famous man in the United States. Following the murder of President Lincoln and the disastrous tenure of President Andrew Johnson, Republican Party leaders talked Grant into running for president. A political novice, Grant accepted the Republican nomination to the presidency in 1868 and won election handily.[4]

As an African American, Hiram Revels had a somewhat different beginning. He was born free in September 1827 in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where he received a formal education. Revels later entered a Quaker seminary in Indiana before being ordained as a minister of the AME church. He pastored African American congregations in Maryland prior to the Civil War and then served as a chaplain in the United States Army, particularly with African American regiments under Ulysses S. Grant during the siege of Vicksburg. Revels moved to Natchez, Mississippi, where he began a career as the pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in that community. He parlayed his pastoral activities in Natchez into a position on the city's board of aldermen before finally being elected to the state senate. In the Mississippi legislature, his fellow Republicans, black and white, overwhelmingly elected him to the United States Senate. Revels's

[4] Two recent studies provide excellent insight into the early life of Ulysses S. Grant. Ronald C. White's *American Ulysses: A Life of Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: Random House, 2016) and Ron Chernow's *Grant* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017).

entrance into the United States Senate was hotly contested, but not overtly based on his race, rather on whether or not the Mississippi legislature's vote was legitimate since it had occurred prior to Mississippi's re-admittance to the Union. In the end, the United States Senate supported him, and by late February 1870 he was a sitting member of that body.[5]

In March 1869 when Ulysses S. Grant had entered the White House, Hiram Revels, with his short terms in city and state politics, had a much more impressive political resume than did the commanding general of the Union Army. Yet Grant began governing with the same energy that he had demonstrated in pursuing Confederates in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Virginia. One of the most important decisions he made was to select as his secretary of state, his political patron, Elihu B. Washburne, as a reward for his support of Grant during the Civil War. Washburne served as secretary of state for only eleven days before becoming Minister to France, a post he would hold for the remainder of Grant's presidency. This appointment allowed Grant ultimately to choose Hamilton Fish, the former governor of New York and United States senator as secretary of state. He did so even though Fish implored Grant to choose someone else for the position. Grant refused, having already sent the nomination to the Senate. Fish reluctantly accepted the position. This nomination would prove to be the best decision Grant made, as Fish ably served the entirety of Grant's presidency in the senior cabinet post.[6]

With Hamilton Fish's support, Grant crafted a foreign policy that solidified the United States as the primary force in the western hemisphere. They settled Great Britain's *CSS Alabama* claims against the United States and agreed on calling for the eradication of slavery in both Cuba and Brazil. But, the two were not in agreement on the proposed annexation of Santo Domingo. Yet, once Grant decided upon annexation, Fish pushed the matter forward on behalf of his president.[7]

Abraham Lincoln's secretary of state, William Henry Seward, had believed that the nation had the potential to grow larger, so he pushed for the annexation of Alaska and tried to acquire territory in the Caribbean. However, no attempts, prior to Grant's, had been

[5] Robert L. Jenkins, "Black Voices in Reconstruction," 44-66.

[6] Allan Nevins, *Hamilton Fish: The Inner History of the Grant Administration* (New York: F. Ungar publishing Co., 1938): 112-115.

[7] Ibid, 249-278

made to include the non-white populations of proposed territories in the grand experiment of democracy. Annexing Santo Domingo, then, represented an anomaly in the narrative of American imperialism. From his earliest considerations of the scheme, Grant intended to allow citizenship for the people of Santo Domingo, with all the rights and privileges accorded by the United States Constitution. To not do so, he thought, would defy one of the most important lessons of the Civil War, the opportunity to provide equal protection to all men regardless of race.

In order to fulfill his hemispheric mission, Grant wanted to know more about the Dominicans' willingness to join the Union and whether they could then sustain themselves economically and politically. Secretary of State Hamilton Fish, though not a supporter of annexation, consented to sending a member of the State Department to speak to the Dominican government. Unfortunately, the man selected, Benjamin Hunt, became suddenly ill and, so, Grant sent Orville E. Babcock, his trusted assistant and former Civil War aide-de-camp. Though unhappy with Babcock's selection, Fish provided the young officer with a passport and instructions.[8] President Grant and Secretary Fish instructed Babcock, in mid-July 1869, to travel to the island to ascertain a range of basic information about the country, including the economic viability of the nation, the size of its military, and a copy of its constitution.

Fish also inquired about the "number of whites, pure Africans, of mulattoes, and of other mixtures of the African and Caucasian races; of Indians, and of the crosses between them and whites, and Africans, respectively," that is, any racial mixing between the groups. These instructions demonstrated Grant's and Fish's desire to fully understand both the racial makeup and the Dominican's viability to be included as a citizen of the United States of America.[9]

Babcock did not question the appropriateness of his selection to visit Santo Domingo. The State Department briefed him, and he understood that his was a fact-finding mission. He was also fully

[8] John Y. Simon, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant: Volume 21: November 1, 1870-May 31, 1871* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 53.

[9] Orville E. Babcock Collection, Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library, Mississippi State University. *Report of the Select Committee Appointed to Investigate the Memorial of Davis Hatch*, SR 234, June 1870, 189; Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1868* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), 36-37.

aware that he had no authority and possessed no treaty making powers. When he returned, Babcock believed that he had fulfilled his superiors' wishes: he provided the President and the Secretary of State with samples of natural resources and economic data. He also provided Grant and Fish with a memorandum from the Dominican government that spelled out its desire for annexation and statehood, its economic and military needs, and its interest in relations with the United States. A language barrier between Babcock and Dominican President Buenaventura Baez resulted in an embarrassing claim in the document, however that Babcock was "Aide-de-camp" to President Grant. This error, coupled with Grant's mistakenly reporting the memorandum to his cabinet as a "treaty," began a long process of political and diplomatic wrangling that resulted in a second visit by Babcock to Santo Domingo where an official treaty was finalized and presented to the United States Congress.[10]

Meanwhile, Hiram Revels joined Congress on February 23, 1870, after three days of Senate debate over the legitimacy of his claim to a Senate seat. Revels had arrived in Washington in late January, attending numerous dinners in his honor, including a reception hosted by President Grant at the Executive Mansion. He became the toast of the town for a short period of time but soon settled in to the drudgery of life in the Senate. Revels understood his position as a freshman senator meant, historically, a position of silence and inactivity, in deference to his more senior colleagues. However, he also understood the historic nature of his position as the first African American member of Congress and the responsibility he held in this position. He introduced a number of petitions on behalf of citizens, significantly, many of which were sent to him not just from Mississippi but from African Americans across the United States.[11]

In his first speech before the Senate, a luxury not afforded to other less experienced legislators, Revels spoke out against legislation that

[10] For the best analysis of Babcock's mission to Santo Domingo see: Charles W. Calhoun, *The Presidency of Ulysses S. Grant* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 205-228; Most accounts tend to reflect the version of the mission as seen in Nevins's *Hamilton Fish*. Like Nevins, Ron Chernow places significant emphasis on the recollections of former Cabinet member Jacob Cox in his book, *Grant*. Calhoun, however, rightly shows that Cox's recollections were inaccurate and based on his personal animosity toward Grant. Cox's recollection that Grant sent Babcock to Santo Domingo without the knowledge of Hamilton Fish is not born out by the evidence, which shows handwritten instructions given to Babcock by Fish. Chernow's relying on Cox and Nevins is unfortunate.

[11] Robert L. Jenkins, "Black Voices in Reconstruction," 61-67.

would have allowed Georgia to rejoin the Union but would have meant the dissolution of an African American majority state legislature. Revels also used the speech to lay out his vision for a post-Civil War America. African Americans, he wrote, "appeal to you and to me, to see that they receive that protection which alone will enable them to pursue their daily avocations with success, and enjoy the liberties of citizenship on the same footing with their white neighbors and friends." The senator from Mississippi lamented the fact that whites were unwilling to accept the rights of African Americans, noting, "if a certain class of the South had accepted in good faith the benevolent overtures which were offered to them . . . today would not find our land still harassed with feuds and contentions."[12]

It was during the same time of Revels's first weeks in the Senate that the Grant administration had submitted the official treaty for the proposed annexation of Santo Domingo. Grant's plan for annexation was doomed as soon as he sent the treaty to Congress because he failed to consult with Charles Sumner, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and former leader of the abolitionist movement. In a meeting that defied presidential protocol, Grant had walked from the Executive Mansion to the home of Senator Sumner, where he discussed the annexation treaty with the senator and a few reporters. Grant left this meeting with the understanding that Sumner, as a loyal Republican, would support the treaty. Yet Sumner believed that he had made no such promise. When the president entered into negotiations without consulting the powerful chairman, he unknowingly made an enemy out of the senator. The annexation treaty was the beginning of a long, drawn-out feud between Sumner and Grant that resulted in the removal of the senator from his committee chairmanship and the defeat of the president's treaty.[13]

Sumner especially objected to Babcock's memorandum from September, as well as Babcock portraying himself as Grant's "Aide-de-Camp" and the provision indicating that Grant would use his influence to achieve annexation. According to a Sumner acquaintance, the senator "became the enemy of the whole scheme," because he "did not believe that the President of the United States should be made a

[12] *New York Times,* March 17, 1870.

[13] Charles Callan Tansill, *The United States and Santo Domingo, 1798-1873* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1938), 383-389; See also, David Donald, *Charles Sumner* (New York: De Capo Press, 1996), Part II, 435.

lobbyist to bring about annexation." These objections were supposedly made directly to Babcock who had brought the memorandum and treaties to the senator on behalf of the president. Soon after Sumner, and his ally Carl Schurz, began a systematic attack on the treaty, its negotiation, and the character of the men involved in the scheme, particularly Orville Babcock.[14]

Though he was a strong proponent of the integration of the United States Senate, Sumner had very little to offer in the debate over Revels's gaining his seat. When his fellow Senator, George Vickers of Maryland, cited the Dred Scott decision as a reason to question Revels's qualifications as a citizen, Sumner argued that the Supreme Court decision was "to be remembered only as a warning and a shame."[15] Revels sought advice and input from Sumner throughout the first months of his term, especially prior to his initial speech on the Georgia Bill. "I think that I will deliver my speech on tomorrow," he wrote, "unless you advise me not to do so . . . I will be pleased to have you fix the hour when tonight, I shall at your house, put my manuscript in your hand for criticism."[16] Revels's speech was widely covered in the press, and many dignitaries were in the gallery to witness it, yet it was not enough to thwart the readmission of Georgia to the Union. Revels's speech had, though, articulated his philosophy as a Republican and as a representative of African Americans across the United States. Clearly, Revels and Sumner generally supported the same causes, whether Civil Rights legislation or interstate commerce. Yet, the subject of the annexation of Santo Domingo was one in which they took diverging positions.

At this same time, Ulysses S. Grant attempted to gain support from a constituency of like-minded Republicans who would support the annexation. It is unclear whether or not he showed his memorandum to these senators, yet it is clear that Grant expected Republicans to support his plan. Sumner's committee rejected the treaty by a vote of 5 to 2, however, prompting the president to go to the Capitol to stump for his treaty. Grant's presence in the Capitol caused a stir

[14] Tansill, 389.

[15] Charles Sumner, *The Works of Charles Sumner: Volume XIII* (Boston, MA: Lee and Shepard, 1880), 337; See also: David Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 427; and Philip Dray, *Capitol Men: The Epic Story of Reconstruction Through the Lives of the First Black Congressmen* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2008), 71.

[16] Quoted in Allan Nevins, *Hamilton Fish*, 294.

among members of Congress, most notably Sumner himself, who complained bitterly to Secretary Fish about the President's "invasion of turf he considered his own."[17] During the debates over the treaty, annexation proponent and Grant ally Senator Oliver P. Morton of Indiana presented goods and materials which Babcock had brought back from the island nation including hemp products and large blocks of salt. Curious senators proceeded to lick a salt block causing quite a stir when Revels joined racist Democrat Garrett Davis of Kentucky to simultaneously taste the block.[18]

Sumner's growing distrust of the annexation proposition seemed incongruous to his lifelong support of African Americans and his support of the Republican Party. Yet his personal dislike of Grant and Grant's personal dislike of Sumner led to a showdown on the Senate floor in which the old Bay Stater unleashed his greatest weapon, his oratory skills, against his president. In a series of speeches, Sumner railed against Grant and the treaty, questioned Grant's motives in annexing Santo Domingo, charged Grant with attempting to steal the entire island, including Haiti, mocked Grant's grammar, and uncharacteristically disparaged the intelligence of African Americans. About a month after the swearing in of Senator Revels, Sumner delivered a speech arguing that Grant was acting like a despotic monarch, "all this has been done by kingly prerogative alone, without the authority of an act of Congress." Sumner accused Grant of acts of terrorism against the sovereign people of Santo Domingo, arguing that the president had spent little time worrying about African Americans in the southern states, while he allowed the rise of the Ku Klux Klan focusing instead on annexation. "I insist that the Presidential scheme, which installs the Ku-Klux on the coasts of St. Domingo," Sumner charged, "and which at the same time insults the African race in the Black Republic, shall be represented. I speak now of that Ku-Klux of which the President is the declared head, and I speak for the African race, whom the President has trampled down."[19] This leader of the Senate and a member of the Republican party was charging the President of the United States with attempting to establish a Ku Klux Klan in the Caribbean with himself at the head! This charge was a stinging rebuke of the president's policy, one that brought derision

[17] Calhoun, *The Presidency of Ulysses S. Grant*, 236.

[18] David Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 443.

[19] Knoxville *Daily Chronicle*, March 28, 1870.

from Sumner's Republican colleagues.

Revels was particularly disturbed by Sumner's speech. In a letter he sent to the Massachusetts Senator two days after this fiery speech, the former pastor argued that the annexation of Santo Domingo was one of Christian magnanimity, viewing:

> the question from a Christian standpoint, that is, whether it is not the duty of our powerful, wealthy, and Christian nation, regardless of the trouble and expense which may attend it, to extend the institutions or various means of enlightenment and intellectual, moral and religious elevation with which God has blessed us, to the inhabitants of that Republic, and whether this cannot be done more effectively by annexation than in any other way.[20]

For Revels, the blessing of American liberty, republican ideals, and Christian civilization were best exported to the Caribbean by the United States through the annexation of Santo Domingo to the United States. Revels saw the moral and social reasons for annexation along with the strategic and economic reasons and, as such, he defied his friendship with Sumner and voted for the treaty.

Meanwhile, Sumner argued against a commission that Grant proposed sending to ascertain the annexation desires of the Dominican people. The speech, which became known as Sumner's Naboth's Vineyard speech as the senator likened Grant's annexation attempt to the biblical tale of King Ahab's coveting of the vineyard of the farmer Naboth, focused most of the Senator's derision on Grant's secretary Orville Babcock. He challenged Babcock's qualifications and argued that the young officer had been duped by supporters of the Dominican president. He also complained loudly about Grant's decision to lobby publicly on behalf of the treaty. Sumner parsed Grant's words in his annual message, focusing on the fact that Grant referred to the "island of San Domingo," arguing that the president was thus clearly signaling his desire to annex Haiti as well! "Nine times in this message," Sumner claimed, "the President has menaced the independence of the Haytien [sic] republic." He concluded his initial remarks with: "I protest against this legislation as another stage in a drama of

[20] Quoted in Charles W. Calhoun, *The Presidency of Ulysses S. Grant,* 238.

blood."[21] Despite Sumner's best efforts, the commission won approval and Sumner ally Frederick Douglass, the great abolitionist orator, was named its secretary. Upon their return the commission reported to Grant in favor of annexation. Douglass, like Revels, split with his former abolitionist ally and offered his support to the president. "If Mr. Sumner after [reading the commission's findings] shall persevere in his present policy," Douglass stated, "I shall consider his opposition fractious, and regard him as the worst foe the colored race has on this continent."[22]

The Santo Domingo treaty dominated most of the first two years of Grant's presidency, because the former general believed that the future of Reconstruction was at stake. The treaty was put to a vote in the Senate chamber after contentious floor debates, investigations into Babcock's mission to Santo Domingo, and the open feud between the president and Senator Sumner. Hiram Revels joined twenty-seven other senators who voted in favor of the treaty, while twenty-eight Senators voted against it. A tie vote of 28 to 28 fell well short of the required two-thirds majority for ratification of the treaty, thus the president's plan was dead.[23] Grant attempted to maintain good relations with Santo Domingo, and he authorized Fish to lease a port in that country, and he continued to seek support from allies to lobby for the idea of annexation. In a speech in St. Louis, Missouri, in January 1873, Frederick Douglass also continued to push for the annexation of the island nation. "What do we want with Santo Domingo?" Douglass asked his crowd, "we want them for men — for human beings to live in and be happy . . . it is not a nation . . . it is a small country with 150,000 people who are being degraded. Let us lift them up to our high standard of nationality."[24]

After serving his one-year term in the United States Senate, Hiram Revels returned to Mississippi to become the first president of Alcorn University of Mississippi (changed to Alcorn Agricultural

[21] Charles Sumner, "Naboth's Vineyard: Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner, of Massachusetts, on the Proposed Annexation of 'The Island of San Domingo,' December 21, 1870," (Washington: F. and J. Rives and George A. Bailey, 1870).

[22] *New York Times,* March 30, 1871, quoted in H. W. Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union: Ulysses Grant in War and Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 2012.), 462.

[23] Charles W. Calhoun, *The Presidency of Ulysses S. Grant,* 257.

[24] John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan, eds. *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews, Volume 4: 1864-80* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 354-355.

and Mechanical College in 1878), a land-grant institution founded for African Americans. Unfortunately for Revels, his experience as an educator was on par with his experience in politics. His tenure at Alcorn was riddled with problems and accusations of corruption. Consequently, Revels left the position at the college in 1873 and returned to the Mississippi legislature to serve out the term of the now deceased Secretary of State James Lynch. Having fulfilled Lynch's term, Revels returned to Alcorn later that year where he was dismissed from his position by his former United States Senate colleague and new Mississippi governor Adelbert Ames. Ames had opposed James L. Alcorn, namesake for the land grant college and a friend of Revels, in the election. Many saw Revels's firing as retribution for the former senator's support of Ames's opponent. The animosity between Ames and Revels boiled over the next year when, in 1875, the white Democrats attempted to wrest control of the state from the African American and Republican majority.[25]

Reconstruction in the South continued on, and violence toward African Americans began to rise as white former Confederates attempted to wrest control from Republican-dominated legislatures throughout the old Confederacy. Senator Sumner had charged that Grant had precipitated the rise of the Ku Klux Klan by focusing his attentions on Santo Domingo instead of the lives of African Americans across the South. In Mississippi, tensions came to a boil in the summer and autumn of 1875 when whites utilized intimidation and violence to keep African Americans from voting for Republicans. This Mississippi Plan, as it came to be known, led Grant to lament to the Mississippi Governor Ames, through his Attorney General Edwards Pierrepont, "I suggest that you take all lawful means, and all needed measures to preserve the peace by the force in your own State, and let the country see that the citizens of Miss[issippi] who are largely favorable to good order, and who are largely Republican, have the courage and manhood to fight for their rights and to destroy the bloody ruffians who murder the innocent and unoffending freedmen."[26] Grant's administration had interceded in a number of armed conflicts between whites and African Americans in Mississippi, and he felt that it was time for the governor

[25] Robert L. Jenkins, "Black Voices in Reconstruction," 88-90.

[26] Edwards Pierrepont to Adelbert Ames, September 14, 1875, National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 60; see also John Y. Simon, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant: Volume 26: 1875* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 314.

and the people of the state to take control of the situation and protect the rights of the freedmen at the local level. Unfortunately, Ames was unable to prevent the violence, and the Democrats succeeded in winning a majority of the political offices in the state. Congressional investigations of Mississippi proved fruitless as one former member of the Senate provided evidence on behalf of the white Democrats. That former member was Hiram Revels.

The Grant administration's admonitions to Ames and the Mississippi government underscored the president's desire for the people of Mississippi to control their own political situation, but he must have been shocked when he received a letter from Hiram Revels in early November 1875 that seemed to advocate for the Democrats. In this letter which was widely published throughout the nation, Revels explained the situation in Mississippi to Grant and why he had chosen to not support Ames and his Republican colleagues in the election. Written from his home in Holly Springs, Mississippi, where he moved after losing his job at Alcorn, Revels began: "I will premise by saying that I am no politician . . . I never have sought political preferment, nor do I ask it now, but am engaged in my calling — the ministry — and feeling an earnest desire for the welfare of all the people, irrespective of race or color, I have deemed it advisable to submit to you . . . a few thoughts in regard to the political situation in this State." Revels charged that the Republicans in the state had misled African Americans who were "enslaved in mind by unprincipled adventurers, who," he argued, "caring nothing for country, were willing to stoop to anything, no matter how infamous, to secure power to themselves and perpetuate it." Revels charged that African Americans in Mississippi had realized that they were "being used as mere tools and . . . they determined, by casting their ballots against these unprincipled adventurers, to overthrow them" and in doing so were seeking to coalesce again as Republicans for the national election in 1876. Revels charged the Republican administration in the state, ostensibly Adelbert Ames, with being "notoriously corrupt and dishonest" and that "to defeat [them], at the late election men irrespective of race, color, or party affiliation, united and voted together against men known to be incompetent and dishonest." Revels claimed that "the great masses of the white people have abandoned their hostility toward the General Government and republican principles, and to-day accept as a fact that all men are born free and equal." Any animosity was not the fault of the people

of Mississippi, Revels argued. "The bitterness and hate created by the late civil strife has . . . been obliterated in this State, except in some localities, and would have long since been entirely obliterated were it not for some unprincipled men who would keep alive the bitterness of the past." According to Revels, the Republican administration, and not the racial animosity of white Democrats, was responsible for any bitterness in the state. Revels concluded his letter to the president by restating his love for the Republican Party but identifying that the party in Mississippi was being represented by "demagogues."[27]

Revels's assessment of the political situation in Mississippi was wholly inaccurate. If anything, white Mississippians' bitterness toward the Republican Party and the federal government was increasing exponentially. Historian Robert Jenkins has argued that "Revels's support of the Democrats was simply revenge against Ames and the rest of the Republican Party for having ousted him from his presidency at Alcorn."[28] Historian Julius E. Thompson argued that Revels sided with the Democrats in order to secure his old position at Alcorn from a friendly administration.[29] While both of these conclusions are certainly possible, since Revels was offered the presidency of Alcorn yet again by Democratic governor John Marshall Stone, Revels's letter was neither out of character nor out of line with his political ideology.

As a member of the United States Senate, Revels had introduced numerous petitions on behalf of white southerners and even supported legislation that would allow for the reinstitution of political rights to former Confederates. His Christian faith led him to support Grant's annexation scheme and certainly could have guided him in dealings with white Mississippians. When Revels put forth legislation asking for magnanimity toward southern whites, Frederick Douglass surmised that Revels's having been born free colored his dealings with former Confederates. "He [Revels] is an amiable man, has always been free," Douglass wrote, "and has, perhaps, not a 'stripe' on his back to forget. Such men are apt to find it easy to forget stripes laid upon other men's backs and can as easily exhort them to forget them."[30]

A picture of consistency, thus appears when Revels's record

[27] John Y. Simon, ed., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant: Volume 26*, 320-321.

[28] Robert L. Jenkins, "Black Voices in Reconstruction," 93.

[29] Julius E. Thompson, "Hiram R. Revels, 1827-1901: A Biography," (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 1973), 155.

[30] *New National Era*, December 22, 1870.

in Congress is compared to his decision in 1875 to join Democrats against the Republicans in Mississippi. He supported Grant and his annexation in order to bring Christianity and civilization to the people of Santo Domingo and to further the Republican Party's agenda in the Caribbean. He supported the plight of African Americans across the country when they were being denied their liberty and he did the same for former Confederates who were being cut out of the political process. If he truly felt that the Ames administration was corrupt and needlessly engendering bitterness among the white population of Mississippi, why would Revels not have supported peaceful coexistence among the races and the ouster of men whom he described as demagogues? In the end, though, Mississippi whites began to curtail the rights of African Americans, and incidents of violence and intimidation against blacks continued to rise across the south.

Revels's support of the Democrats against the Republican government was a blow to Grant's efforts across the South in the final days of his presidency. Rampant violence and intimidation occurred so frequently that Grant grew impatient with the Republican administrations that failed at curtailing the violence. As Grant noted to his Attorney General Edwards Pierrepont, "the whole public are tired out with these annual, autumnal outbreaks in the South."[31] In the final year of his presidency, Grant was unable to convince his cabinet that the lives of the freedmen mattered. As historian William McFeely put it: "by the summer of 1876 there was no one around the White House who gave a damn about black people."[32]

Grant worried about the plight of African Americans, having lost the chance at annexing Santo Domingo and seemingly lost Revels to the influence of Democrats in Mississippi. In his final annual message to Congress Grant lamented the lost opportunity in Santo Domingo. Echoing his memorandum written in his first year, Grant noted the economic and strategic benefits of the "island nation," but he also reiterated the social benefits of annexation. The violence which he envisioned in 1869 against African Americans had come true. "In cases of great oppression and cruelty, such as has been practiced upon them in many places within the last eleven years" he argued, "whole communities would have sought refuge in Santo Domingo. I

[31] John Y. Simon, ed., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant: Volume 26*, 312.

[32] William McFeely, *Grant: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1982), 439.

do not suppose the whole race would have gone . . . but the possession of the territory would have left the negro 'Master of the Situation, by enabling him to demand his rights at home on pain of finding them elsewhere [sic]."[33]

The end of Grant's presidency meant the end of Reconstruction, and with that, the end of the promise of civil rights for African Americans. Grant left office and set out upon a three-year tour of the world, returning in 1880 with the hopes of being nominated for a third term as the Republican nominee, only to lose the nomination to James A. Garfield of Ohio. Grant would go on to lose his entire fortune, begin working on his masterful memoir, and battle with mouth cancer until he finally died in the summer of 1885. Hiram Revels returned to his position as president of Alcorn A & M College, where he remained until 1882. He then returned to Holly Springs, Mississippi, where he continued as a minister until his death in 1901.

These two men, the two Hirams, were pushed into the political sphere soon after the end of the Civil War. Though both were political novices, both shared a vision of a reconstructed America that sought to put the rights of African Americans in the forefront. For Hiram Revels, this meant that the promise of liberty was to be protected for all freedmen, but not at the expense of former white Confederates. For Hiram Ulysses Grant, the annexation of Santo Domingo was the epitome of his Reconstruction policy. It would provide the United States with a much needed economic and military foothold in the Caribbean while, at the same time, providing a place for African Americans to escape the violence and prejudices that would inevitably occur in the years following the Civil War. Both men enjoyed national prominence at the same moment, and both sought to achieve results on behalf of African Americans. Unfortunately, neither of these two Hirams saw their dreams of true equality come to fruition, not in Mississippi nor in the entire nation.

[33] John Y. Simon, ed., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, Volume 28: November 1, 1876-September 30, 1878* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 69.