Black and Tan Constitution

by William C. Harris, 2006

The Black and Tan Constitution was a derisive label used by many white Democrats to characterize the North Carolina Constitution of 1868. The term referred to the individuals who were believed to have a primary influence on the framing of the constitution—recently arrived northern whites ("carpetbaggers"), southern white Unionists ("scalawags"), and blacks who were thought to be mainly of mixed blood. Conservative Democrats throughout the South applied the epithet to other state constitutions drafted at Republican conventions during Reconstruction.

Although labeled "black and tan" by opponents, the Constitution of 1868 was a progressive document for its time, providing for a number of important changes. For example, it gave all male adults, including blacks, the right to vote and extended some nonpolitical rights to women. Voters were to elect state executive officers, judges, and county officials, and all property and taxation requirements for holding office and apportioning seats in the State Senate were eliminated. The governor's term of office was extended from two to four years, and separate public school systems for both blacks and whites were established.

Ratified by a vote of 93,086 to 74,016, the 1868 constitution was frequently amended and remained the state's fundamental law until 1971.

References:


Subjects:
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Reconstruction (1865-1876)
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