Repeatedly exaggerating, failing to confront opposing hypotheses or to weigh evidence explicitly, and much too willing to repeat Democratic charges of Republican corruption, incompetence, "Caesarism," and hypocrisy, McAfee fails to persuade. A refusal to subsidize Catholic schools, for instance, hardly resembles the widespread suspension of civil liberties in Otto von Bismark's Germany, and Republican praise for German educational accomplishments is not the same as a desire to adopt the Prussian state system. Dunningite or racist contemporary sources offer fragile support for a finding that "very little meaningful education occurred for blacks" in the Reconstruction South because of, "political corruption and gross incompetence" (p. 96), especially since McAfee does not openly consider the much more measured views of Eric Foner or other recent historians of Reconstruction. George F. Hoar's 1871 attempt to require states to set up systems of public education open to every child and to provide federal dollars to those state-based schemes does not deserve to be called a "centralizing creature," and the view that the bill threatened a takeover by "federal bureaucrats insistent on racial mixing in the public schools" is pure Democratic propaganda (pp. 106, 109). There is evidence of both opposition to and support for black education in the North in documents from which McAfee cites only the opposition (see, for example, Report of the Commissioner of Education (1873), pp. 80, 100, 245, 313–14; 1874), pp. 81–82). Misreading legal cases and blithely asserting that protective laws "made no difference" (p. 157) without openly contesting strongly opposing viewpoints (for example, my own Dead End: The Development of Nineteenth-Century Litigation on Racial Discrimination in Schools [1986]) undermines credibility. Contending that school integration was the most important issue in the 1874 congressional elections without making a systematic effort to compare its influence with that of the depression, corruption charges, and the anti-saloon crusade is unconvincing. And McAfee's conclusion that religion was "the unifying factor" in the "centralizing vision" that embodied the "Reconstruction spirit" (p. 210) is vitiated because he makes no explicit effort to weigh other factors: tariffs or gold, regional or war-induced loyalties, civil service or personalities, or, above all, race.

McAfee's is a tidy thesis that leaves out or ignores too much that does not fit.

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