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Reconstruction as a Pure Bourgeois Revolution

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Abstract
The years between 1865 and 1877, which form the period in American history known as Reconstruction, compose a sort of coda to the traumatic opera of the American Civil War of 1861–65. Reconstruction embraces the twelve years of active effort to rebuild the American Union, though in some sense (because Reconstruction had no official starting or ending date) aspects of it spluttered on well into the 1890s. I use the word spluttered deliberately, because Reconstruction is also the ugly duckling of American history in the eyes of many American historians, and something the public considers vaguely awful if it thinks of it at all. Absent from Reconstruction are the conflict and the personalities that make the Civil War so colorful; it also lacks the climactic battles and dissipates into a confusing and wearisome tale of lost opportunities, squalid victories, and embarrassing defeats. It was, proclaimed one veteran of the Army of Northern Virginia, "not peace established in power, but captured in shame; not throned on high by willing witnesses, but pinned to the earth by imperial steel—the peace of the bayonet." In many cases, especially for those who regard Reconstruction as an unrelieved misery, almost the worst thing that can be said about someone is that they were prominent in Reconstruction.

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The years between 1865 and 1877, which form the period in American history known as Reconstruction, compose a sort of coda to the traumatic opera of the American Civil War of 1861–65. Reconstruction embraces the twelve years of active effort to rebuild the American Union, though in some sense (because Reconstruction had no official starting or ending date) aspects of it spluttered on well into the 1890s. I use the word *spluttered* deliberately, because Reconstruction is also the ugly duckling of American history in the eyes of many American historians, and something the public considers vaguely awful if it thinks of it at all. Absent from Reconstruction are the conflict and the personalities that make the Civil War so colorful; it also lacks the climactic battles and dissipates into a confusing and wearisome tale of lost opportunities, squalid victories, and embarrassing defeats. It was, proclaimed one veteran of the Army of Northern Virginia, "not peace established in power, but captured in shame; not throned on high by willing witnesses, but pinned to the earth by imperial steel—the peace of the bayonet."[1] In many cases, especially for those who regard Reconstruction as an unrelieved misery, almost the worst thing that can be said about someone is that they were prominent in Reconstruction.

One reason why Reconstruction has proven difficult to evaluate is that no convenient measuring stick for the success or failure of postwar reconstructions existed then or now. It may be helpful, as a cure for that vagueness, to describe three general standards conventionally used to describe and evaluate Reconstruction. One such device is what we may call *Lincolnian Reconstruction*. Abraham Lincoln was never at ease in using the word *reconstruction*—he qualified it with add-ons like "what is called reconstruction" or "a plan of reconstruction (as the phrase goes)"—and preferred to speak of the "re-inauguration

1. "Address of Private Leigh Robinson" (November 1, 1877), in *Army of Northern Virginia Memorial Volume*, edited by J. W. Jones (Richmond: J. W. Randolph and English, 1880), 180, 188.

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of the national authority" or the need to "re-inaugurate loyal state governments."[2] The moment the war ended and his "war powers" expired, Lincoln's logic dictated that the rebel states should simply resume their old place and old functions in the Union without let or hindrance, only requiring the abandonment of slavery.

And if that really was the only goal of Reconstruction, then we should have to say that even in Lincoln's absence, it was a clear-cut success. The secessionist regimes in the Southern states were finally deposed, new federally supervised Unionist regimes were put in their place, and one-by-one the rebel states were restored to the Union—which is to say, they sent representatives and senators to Congress, and acknowledged federal laws passed by Congress and the federal military and civilian institutions that implemented them. Take it a point further: if the Civil War's purpose was to reestablish a federal Union—a genuinely federal Union in which neither the states nor the federal government claimed exclusive sovereignty but shared it in a federal system—then Reconstruction should be as much a source of national self-admiration as the Civil War long has been. In fact, the next half-century proved to be something of a golden age of constitutional state rights, with states taking up the political initiative in terms of civic reform, women's rights, and public education long before the federal government ever noticed them.[3]

But that, of course, is not the way Reconstruction has been taught to most of us—that is, when it has been taught at all. For decades, both the hell-no partisans of the Lost Cause and turn-of-the-century Southern Progressives maintained that Reconstruction, once Lincoln was removed, became a nightmare inflicted on them by a psychotically vengeful coterie of Radical Republican demagogues in Congress led by Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, and Ben Wade. This we may call *Radical Reconstruction*, and it depicts the era as a kind of Vichy occupation, partly a draconian direct rule by scheming and unscrupulous conquerors, and partly an unstable domination by Southern turncoats.[4] At best it was (in the highly influential work of

2. "Last Public Address," April 11, 1865, Roy P. Basler et al., eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 8:400, 405.

3. Louis P. Masur, *Lincoln's Last Speech: Wartime Reconstruction and the Crisis of Reunion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 7, 69–70; Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion: A New History of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 4, 396–97.

4. Hans L. Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans: Lincoln's Vanguard for Racial Justice* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 21.

the then-reigning prince of Reconstruction historians, William A. Dunning, and his Columbia University graduate students J. G. Hamilton, Walter L. Fleming, and Francis Simkins) a gigantic example of radical *hubris*. At its worst it was described by Woodrow Wilson, who had grown up in the South during Reconstruction, as a carnival of racial misrule:

> The first practical result of reconstruction under the acts of 1867 was the disfranchisement, for several weary years, of the better whites, and the consequent giving over of the southern governments into the hands of the negroes. . . . They were but children still; and unscrupulous men, carpetbaggers, men not come to be citizens, but come upon an expedition of profit . . . came out of the North to use the negroes as tools for their own selfish ends; and succeeded, to the utmost fulfillment of their dreams. Negro majorities for a little while filled the southern legislatures; . . . the states were misgoverned and looted in their name; and a few men, not of their number, not really of their interest, went away with the gains. They were left to carry the discredit and reap the consequences of ruin, when at last the whites who were real citizens got control again.[5]

Judged by the Dunning standard, Reconstruction was temporarily successful but for all the wrong reasons; and when it was overthrown in 1877, it was to be judged a failure we could all remember as a road never again to be taken in American life.

Criticism of the Dunning school—and with it, the dominance of Southern voices in the interpretation of Reconstruction—offered its first major challenge in the 1930s, beginning with the attacks launched at the Dunningites by William Edward Burghardt Du Bois in *Black Reconstruction* (1935) and James S. Allen (the nom de plume of Sol Auerbach) in *Reconstruction: The Battle for Democracy* (1937). This, in a broad sense, we may call *Revisionist Reconstruction*. The Dunning school, Du Bois protested, had succeeded in making every "child in the street" believe that "the history of the United States from 1866 to 1876 is something of which the nation ought to be ashamed." Reconstruction might not have been a proud achievement but, Du Bois objected,

5. William A. Dunning, *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction and Related Topics* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), 384–85; Bernard A. Weisberger, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography," *Journal of Southern History* 25 (November 1959), 428, 446; Woodrow Wilson, "The Reconstruction of the Southern States," *Atlantic Monthly* 87 (January 1901), 11.

Reconstruction actually set an example "to democratic government and the labor movement today." Allen agreed: "The destruction of the slave power was the basis for real national unity and the further development of capitalism, which would produce conditions most favorable for the growth of the labor movement." The Dunningites thought that Radical Reconstruction was something to be deplored, and cheered when it failed; the revisionists agreed that it failed, but wept. Southern blacks (in Du Bois's phrase) "went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back into slavery."[6]

Unhappily, neither Du Bois nor Allen possessed a broad platform on which to rally a countermovement; and they certainly had no academic platform in the universities. It would not be until the 1960s, after the emergence of the civil rights movement as a "second Reconstruction," that the idols of the Dunning school really began to fall. John Hope Franklin's *Reconstruction after the Civil War* (1961) and Kenneth Stampp's *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865–77* (1965) started the tipping over, to be followed by John and LaWanda Cox, Richard Current, Allen W. Trelease, and finally Eric Foner, with his massive *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (1988).[7]

* * *

Noble as their intentions were, the revisionists had their foibles, too. Both Du Bois and Allen were writing from self-consciously Marxist frameworks that forbade any other understanding of Reconstruction but through class and revolution, with race sometimes deployed as a surrogate for class. Reconstruction thus became the moment when working-class black and white citizens together had an opportunity to create a new economic and political order in the South, only to have it yanked away by a nervous white Northern bourgeoisie who preferred making peace with the defeated Confederates to licensing a genuinely radical, biracial workers' movement.

6. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, edited by David Levering Lewis (1935; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 717; James S. Allen, *Reconstruction: The Battle for Democracy, 1865–1876* (New York, 1937), 28.

7. Howard K. Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," *American Historical Review* 45 (July 1940), 824; Richard O. Curry, "The Civil War and Reconstruction, 1861–1877: A Critical Overview of Recent Trends and Interpretations," *Civil War History* 20 (September 1974), 215–38; Michael Perman, "Accepting Defeat: Historians and Reconstruction," and Herman Belz, "The New Orthodoxy in Reconstruction Historiography," in *Reviews in American History* 1 (March 1973), 106–13, and 14 (March 1986), 83–90, respectively.

It was, in other words, a bourgeois-democratic revolution, not unlike the uprisings of 1789 and 1848 in that it pitted a capitalist middle-class bourgeoisie against a slaveholding aristocracy, striking up alliances with peasants on the land and workers in the tenements to overthrow the rule of the planter elite. Alas, bourgeois revolutions frighten their own architects, who are themselves the owners of property—in this case, industrial property—and who quickly come to see that in empowering peasants and workers, they have created a Frankenstein monster that has no more respect for the bourgeoisie than it had for the aristocrats.[8] At that moment of self-realization, the bourgeoisie strain to stuff the revolutionary genie they have summoned—the peasants and urban proletariat—back into the lamp from which they had conjured it. "The bourgeoisie," wrote Vladimir Lenin, "strives to put an end to the bourgeois revolution halfway from its destination, when freedom has been only half won, by a deal with the old authorities and the landlords." They strive "to reach a tacit pact with the old landed aristocracy in order to preserve their power."[9] But the genie cannot be stuffed back; it is only stunned, and in time it will reawaken with renewed strength as the guide and leader of the socialist revolution and finish off industrial capitalism the way the bourgeoisie finished off the aristocrats. Du Bois in particular bears the impress of this notion of Reconstruction as a "bourgeois revolution,"

8. On the general concept of bourgeois revolutions, see Colin Jones, "Bourgeois Revolution Revivified: 1789 and Social Change," in Colin Lucas, ed., *Rewriting the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 69–118; David Lockwood, "War, the State, and the Bourgeois Revolution," *War and Society* 25 (October 2006), 53–78; and Shirley Gruner, "The Revolution of July 1830 and the Expression 'Bourgeoisie,'" *Historical Journal* 11 (1968), 462–71. For arguments over which specific events can qualify as bourgeois revolutions, see Lawrence Stone, "The Bourgeois Revolution of Seventeenth-Century England Revisited," *Past and Present* 109 (November 1985), 44–46 (on why the English Civil Wars do not); Stephen C. Topik, "Brazil's Bourgeois Revolution?" *Americas* 48 (October 1991), 270 (on why the overthrow of the Brazilian monarchy in 1889 does not); Jesús Cruz, "Notability and Revolution: Social Origins of the Political Elite in Liberal Spain, 1800 to 1853," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36 (January 1994), 99 (on why nineteenth-century Spain's liberals did not constitute a bourgeois revolution); and Tom Lewis, "Structures and Agents: The Concept of 'Bourgeois Revolution' in Spain," *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 3 (1999), 10 (on why nineteenth-century Spain's liberals *did* constitute a bourgeois revolution).

9. "Eric Foner's 'Reconstruction' at Twenty-Five," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14 (January 2015), 21; Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 1967), 112, 143; Vladimir Lenin, "The Agrarian Question and the Forces of the Revolution" (1907), in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 12:335; Jesús Cruz, "An Ambivalent Revolution: The Public and the Private in the Construction of Liberal Spain," *Journal of Social History* 30 (Autumn 1996), 6.

for in Du Bois's telling, Reconstruction's "vision of democracy across racial lines" was undone by a "counterrevolution of property."[10]

Critics of Marxist historiography have frequently rushed into the breaches opened by the English Civil Wars, the French Revolution, and of course the American Civil War with wholesale denials that these events were in any sense revolutionary, and indeed, many Marxist historians over time have glumly yielded to these protestations. And the American Civil War certainly offers good reasons for hesitating to cover the war and Reconstruction with a revolutionary draping. The first is that the Civil War was not revolutionary if discontinuity must be the fundamental evidence of revolution. Discontinuity was exactly what the Civil War had been waged to prevent. Moreover, the American bourgeoisie—which includes Lincoln, the Radical Republicans, and the rank and file of the Northern soldiery—did not actually represent much of what could be safely called industrial capitalism. The contest waged between 1861 and 1865 was between two versions of agrarianism, between the free-labor family farm and the slave-labor cotton plantation. According to the 1860 census, in the South 65 percent of its congressional districts were characterized economically by plantation agriculture, and in the North, 72 percent were predominantly rural, with only forty districts qualifying as industrial. Only in Rhode Island did workers in American factories amount to more than 20 percent of the population (although Massachusetts was a close second, at 19 percent); in the West, the numbers rarely topped 1 percent. Even then, fully half of American manufacturing in the 1860s was still powered by water rather than steam, and the number of workers one could expect to meet in a mill or factory hovered between eight and fourteen. Despite Jacob Riis's sensational depiction of industrial workers living in near labor-camp conditions, the plat of working-class housing in the post-1865 decades was the one-story and two-story cottage. Multifamily housing comprised only half the housing stock in Boston and Chicago; only 1 percent of the housing in Philadelphia accommodated six or more families. Not until the twentieth century would the United States begin to emerge as a genuinely industrial

10. Armistead L. Robinson, "Beyond the Realm of Social Consensus: New Meanings of Reconstruction for American History," *Journal of American History* 68 (September 1981), 279; Andrew Zimmerman, "Marxism, the Popular Front, and the American Civil War," in *The World the Civil War Made*, edited by Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 308; Friedrich Engels to Karl Marx, November 15, 1862, in Robin Blackburn, *An Unfinished Revolution: Karl Marx and Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Verso, 2011), 201; Neil Davidson, "The American Civil War Considered as a Bourgeois Revolution," *Historical Materialism* 19 (December 2011), 45–91; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 580.

power and, with it, an economy clearly demarcated by class and class conflict. Even then, most Americans lived in towns of twenty-five hundred or less well into the twentieth century.[11]

But a second and greater problem lies in the actual history of Reconstruction as a conventional bourgeois revolution, because there is no evidence that the victorious Republicans who essayed to build a bourgeois South in the ruins of the old plantation order ever panicked at the prospect of empowering blacks or poor whites, or betrayed them by establishing a self-protecting alliance with the quondam aristocrats. Nor did the freedpeople experience Marxist alienation; they endured bourgeois frustration at their exclusion from property ownership and political power, and that was how they articulated it. So we must say that Reconstruction was indeed a bourgeois revolution, but it was a *pure* one—a self-contained revolutionary event outside both Marxist and counter-Marxist theory. It failed not because it sold out but because it was crushed by the resurgent political power of a bloodied but unbowed aristocracy.[12]

* * *

Reconstruction, when it has been the object of serious attention, has long been seen as a political event, a racial crisis moment, or a bizarre social and economic entr'acte between the Civil War and the Gilded Age. But it has only rarely been spoken of in ideological or intellectual terms; not even Foner's massive *Reconstruction* gives the intellectual history of Reconstruction more than passing notice.[13] But Reconstruction was the test of an ideology in ways that would overshadow all these other methodologies if we were not so inclined to embarrassment over the nature of that ideology. The great Republican goal of abolishing slavery was not seen by Republicans, as we are tempted to see

11. James Huston, *The British Gentry, the Southern Planter, and the Northern Family Farmer: Agriculture and Sectional Antagonism in North America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 75, 22–31, and *Calculating the Value of the Union: Slavery, Property Rights, and the Economic Origins of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 75–76; David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862–1872* (New York: Knopf, 1967), 4–5, 8; Robert J. Gordon, *The Rise and Fall of American Growth: The U.S. Standard of Living since the Civil War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016), 97, 102–5.

12. Neil Davidson, "The American Civil War Considered as a Bourgeois Revolution," and John Ashworth, "Towards a Bourgeois Revolution? Explaining the American Civil War," *Historical Materialism* 19 (January 2011), 45–91, 195–203.

13. Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 156. This stands in contrast to his virtuoso treatment of the ideology of prewar Republicanism, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

it, as a crusade to right a racial injustice; abolishing slavery was not, to them, much of a racial question at all but rather an economic one. "I see National glory in the future such as the past has never seen," rejoiced Benjamin Brown French, and not just because slavery "forever abolished" a racial caste system, but because the South would soon be "thriving under Free labor & Free rule! No more Cotton lords, but plenty of Cotton Commons, and all the land pouring out its productions & becoming immensely rich!" The Union "represents the principles of free labor," declared William Cullen Bryant, and only when "the victory of the Northern society of free labor over the landed monopoly of the Southern aristocracy" was complete would the war be over.

> The United States is truly the land—the very paradise of labor. . . . Even capital, which in Europe controls labor, here becomes subordinate to and serves labor. It is the free and intelligent labor of the country that creates the Administration or the Government. . . . Whatever may be said against the doings and intrigues of the politicians, yet it is the highest honor of the system of government of the United States that Free labor—that is to say, the equal right of all men to the pursuit of happiness—has been recognized as the first natural and inalienable right.[14]

It took a long time for the importance of the free-labor ideology to work its way back to the front of Civil War historiography, and in truth it still enjoys only the most tenuous of holds in that literature. In the most basic sense, *free labor* was simply shorthand for liberal economic democracy. It was the Enlightenment's school of economics, and like the Enlightenment, it predicted that "democratic, bourgeois freedom and the supremacy of economics would one day lead to the salvation of all mankind." Free labor found its ablest expositors in the "Manchester School" in Great Britain; Alexis de Tocqueville, François Guizot, and Edouard Laboulaye in France; Johan Jacoby and John Prince Smith in the German states; and the Whig party in the United States. Among free labor's fundamental tenets were the encouragement of small-scale manufacturing, especially through government-sponsored "internal improvements" in the form of canals, highways, and railroads; economic mobility, with constant movement

14. "Diary entry for July 8, 1863," in Benjamin Brown French, *Witness to the Young Republic: A Yankee's Journal, 1828–1870*, edited by Donald B. Cole and John Joseph McDonough (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), 426; *The Preservation of the Union, a National Economic Necessity* (New York: W. C. Bryant, 1863), 5–6; W. W. Broom, *Great and Grave Question for American Politicians, with a Topic for America's Statesmen* (New York: C. S. Westcott, 1865), 65.

up the ladder of classes; and the practice of a constellation of bourgeois virtues—thrift, prudence, industry, religious faith, temperance, rationality, nationalism—that together would dignify "the enterprising mechanic, who raises himself by his ingenious labors from the dust and turmoil of his workshop, to an abode of ease and elegance" and "the industrious tradesman, whose patient frugality enables him at last to accumulate enough to forego the duties of the counter and indulge a well-earned leisure."[15]

In the eyes of the free-labor bourgeoisie, the mistake of the South had been to allow the thousand-bale planters to turn the Enlightenment clock backward to medieval serfdom, in much the same way the Congress of Vienna had turned back the political clock to the ancien régime. "Who knows," asked the *New-York Tribune*, "but we may see revived [in the South] the feudal tenures—maiden-right, wardship, baronial robberies, the seizure of white children for the market, military service, and the horrible hardships of villenage which men have fondly deemed forever abolished" as the logical corollaries of slavery. In the South, the ruling class of "monarchists and aristocrats" had shunned government-sponsored improvements, cultivated a cultural style based on braggadocio, and held poor white citizens and black slaves in the grip of a permanent and oppressive hierarchy. "There labor has been degraded, the laborer left untaught . . . thus converting half the Union into a charnel house of despotism, without a free religion, free speech, free press or free schools."[16]

The Civil War, however, had swept this "despotism" away, and then cleared the path for the introduction into the South of a New England–style "high type" of culture: "the cultivated valley, the peaceful village, the church, the school-house, and thronging cities." James

15. György Lukács, "The Changing Function of Historical Materialism," in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1967), 225; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 11–39; Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 152–78; Michael S. Green, *Freedom, Union, and Power: Lincoln and His Party during the Civil War* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 30–57; "The Labor Crisis," *North American Review* 105 (July 1867), 178, 181, 183, 185, 197; Gruner, "The Revolution of July 1830 and the Expression 'Bourgeoisie,'" 462.

16. "The Slave-Holding Utopia," *New-York Daily Tribune*, October 6, 1862; "Our Country's Future," *Chicago Tribune*, September 28, 1864; *Proofs for Workingman of the Monarchic and Aristocratic Designs of the Southern Conspirators and their Northern Allies* (n.p., 1864), 1; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 179; Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865–1901* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 6–8, 22–26.

Lawrence Orr, South Carolina's first Reconstruction governor, sighed to Northern journalist Sidney Andrews that he was "tired of South Carolina as she was. . . . I covet for her the material prosperity of New England. I would have her acres teem with life and vigor and industry and intelligence, as do those of Massachusetts." The South "under the old system" was "adverse to manufacturing and commercial enterprises," but now, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* predicted, the "tide of free labor" that would rush into the conquered Confederacy "will be incalculable." They meant that literally: "the only certain road to Union-izing the South is, to plant in it colonies of Northern men" to displace the plantation owners. Then, at last, "under the mighty spur of equal competition that so quickens every impulse and faculty, and brings all the energies into play," the South's "worn-out plantations will become thriving farms, its mines and inexhaustible water-powers will call into play the incessant demand and supply of vigorous industry and active capital.[17]

Frederick Douglass envisioned a "reconstruction such as will protect loyal men, black and white, in their persons," but one which will also "cause Northern industry, Northern capital, and Northern civilization to flow into the South, and make a man from New England as much at home in Carolina as elsewhere in the Republic." In John Greenleaf Whittier's vision, Reconstruction would

The cruel lie of caste refute,
Old forms remould, and substitute
For Slavery's lash the freeman's will,
For blind routine, wise-handed skill;
A school-house plant on every hill,
Stretching in radiate nerve-lines thence
The quick wires of intelligence;
Till North and South together brought
Shall own the same electric thought,
In peace a common flag salute,
And, side by side in labor's free
And unresentful rivalry,
Harvest the fields wherein they fought.

17. "The Work to Be Done at the South," *American Freedman* 1 (December 1866), 136; Sidney Andrews, *The South since the War: As Shown by Fourteen Weeks of Travel and Observation in Georgia and the Carolinas* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), 96; "Desperation and Colonization," *Continental Monthly* 1 (June 1862), 664–65; Samuel Osgood, "New Aspects of the American Mind," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 34 (May 1867), 795; "The Southern Industrial Prospect," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 52 (March 1876), 590.

The success of Reconstruction, argued Carl Schurz, could be measured accurately only when the South "shall have thus fulfilled social and political organization all those conditions which form the basis of free-labor society."[18]

Albert T. Morgan, who had been a student at Oberlin College at the war's beginning and served in the 2nd Wisconsin at Gettysburg, had a vision of Reconstruction as "a tide of thrifty emigrants and others with capital settling southward" and "within twenty-five years" making "the two million people of the Mississippi lowlands twenty millions, and in a century a hundred millions." Charles Woodward Stearns, who had followed John Brown to Kansas, resolved "during the war . . . that if it resulted in the abolition of Slavery," he would "go South, and do what we could, for the perfect development of the colored race. . . . First, their education and moral improvement; secondly, their right to vote; and thirdly, the making them the owners of the land they cultivate." Reconstruction offered a means of refashioning the entire labor system of the South, provided, wrote Albion Tourgée, that the South was "desouthernized and thoroughly nationalized."[19]

Tourgée was an example of how eager Northerners were to help this process along. Born in Ohio and educated in New York, Tourgée had served in the 105th Ohio, endured the sufferings of Libby Prison as a prisoner of war, and settled in Greensboro, North Carolina, at the end of the war to find relief in a warmer climate for a wound that had damaged his spine. He opened a law office and became president of a small wood-handle business, the Snow Turning Company, whose success left him "perfectly thunderstruck at the profits" as well as the good

18. Frederick Douglass, "Reconstruction," *Atlantic Monthly* 18 (December 1866), 764; John Greenleaf Whittier, "Snow-Bound," in *American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century,* volume 1: *Freneau to Whitman* (New York: Library of America, 1993), 488–89; Schurz, "The True Problem," *Atlantic Monthly* 19 (March 1867), 372–73; Mitchell Snay, "Freedom and Progress: The Dilemma of Southern Republican Thought during Radical Reconstruction," *American Nineteenth Century History* 5 (Spring 2004), 100–104.

19. Charles Woodward Stearns, *The Black Man of the South and the Rebels; or, The Characteristics of the Former, and the Recent Outrages of the Latter* (New York: American News, 1872), 27–28; Albert T. Morgan, *Yazoo; or, On the Picket Line of Freedom in the South* (Washington, D.C.: A. T. Morgan, 1884), 25; William C. Harris, "The Creed of the Carpetbaggers: The Case of Mississippi," *Journal of Southern History* 40 (May 1974), 202; Albion Tourgée, "Speech on Elective Franchise," February 22, 1868, in *Undaunted Radical: The Selected Writings and Speeches of Albion W. Tourgée*, edited by Mark Elliott and J. D. Smith (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 39; "All Should Labor," *Staunton Spectator*, December 26, 1865; K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 20–37.

wages paid to its largely black workforce. John Hay, who had been Lincoln's private secretary, was another example. He had been sent in 1864 to register Southerners willing to take the oath of allegiance, and came away sufficiently intrigued by Florida ("It is the only thing that smells of the Original Eden on the Continent") that he bought land to grow oranges near St. Augustine. Even Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, bought orange groves near Jacksonville, moved South, and created a free-labor colony around the village of Mandarin. "People came hither from the North," wrote a New Orleans contributor to *DeBow's Review*, "with the idea that they were coming to an El Dorado, where fortunes were to be gained in a day."[20]

Here was a bourgeois revolution—not, in the Marxist sense, a necessary footstool to the "real" proletarian revolution or the self-interested embrace of Southern grandees by terrified Northern bourgeoisie to keep black people and white working people at bay, but a pure bourgeois revolution, as an end in itself, as the triumph of liberal democracy, an Enlightenment counterrevolution against what the Northern middle classes feared might be the real wave of the future, the Romantic renascence of oligarchy and monarchy.

* * *

The principal obstacle to realizing this dream was the refusal of the defeated Southern planter class to admit that it had been defeated, for that class had by no means been swept away by the war. "They are beaten, they are cowed," warned Union quartermaster general Montgomery Meigs, but "they have been treated with trust[in]g condescension instead of the severity that justice & policy both demanded & they will revenge themselves for their defeat upon the North & upon every black in every mode which may be safe." Slavery might be gone, but "the masters, whose pride and honor are staked upon the claim that free labor must fail, combine to make it fail."[21] They,

20. Mark Elliott, *Color-Blind Justice: Albion Tourgée and the Quest for Racial Equality from the Civil War to Plessy v. Ferguson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 146; John Taliaferro, *All the Great Prizes: The Life of John Hay, from Lincoln to Roosevelt* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 67–68; Nancy Koester, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Spiritual Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 263–66, 279–82; Charles A. Pilsbury, "Farming in the South," *DeBow's Review* 5 (April 1868), 363.

21. Russell F. Weigley, *Quartermaster General of the Union Army: A Biography of M. C. Meigs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 336; W. M. Grosvenor, "The Rights of the Nation, and the Duty of Congress," *New Englander and Yale Review* 24 (October 1865), 756; Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861–1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 190, 197–98, 200.

too, had lived by a set of presuppositions, but one based on a general suspicion of bourgeois ambitions. Slave-owning promoted "a certain carelessness of wealth and easy profuseness in expenditure," complained Robert Dale Owen. "Habits of regulated industry are seldom found within the sphere of its influence,—its tendency being to substitute . . . indolent fashions of dependence and of luxurious self-indulgence." The "typical Southerner," feared a contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*, "possessed a . . . cast of character which was founded mainly on family, distinction, social culture, exemption from toil, and command over the lives and fortunes of his underlings."

> Careless of his own money, he was inclined to be careless in all pecuniary affairs, often running heavily into debt and showing habitual negligence in settling small accounts. . . . A reputation for gallantry and generosity became highly esteemed in the South. In consequence, many individuals in their efforts to attain it degenerated into bravoes and spendthrifts; the character of the fire-eater became almost as much admired as that of the gentleman. The passing of high words and blows, canings, cowhidings, and so on, all terminated by the drawing of knives and pistols . . . and duels, became every-day occurrences in the South.

"As long as slave labor existed," one South Carolinian admitted, "the habits and predilections of the whites were unfavorable to commerce and manufactures," and "free labor avoided the limits of the South."[22]

Not only the culture of the South but its physical circumstances as well stood in the path of *embourgeoisement*. The South owned only 12 percent of the nation's mills and factories, and employed as laborers in those establishments only 7 percent of its population. Cotton agriculture remained after 1865, as it had been before the war, the producer of the republic's single most valuable export commodity (some 32 percent of all exports as late as 1889). And no wonder: while commodity prices for wheat, corn, and coal had operated (except for the war years) within fairly narrow ranges, cotton was selling above all its prewar highs; in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas, cotton acreage and production expanded, employing a black labor force indistinguishable from that under slavery. Great Britain still bought 58 percent of the cotton it imported for textile manufacturing

22. Robert Dale Owen, *The Wrong of Slavery, the Right of Emancipation, and the Future of the African Race in the United States* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott, 1864), 116–17; "South Carolina Morals," *Atlantic Monthly* 39 (April 1877), 467–68, 470; Daniel Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States* (New York: Henry B. Price, 1860), 58; T. M. Logan, "The Southern Industrial Prospect," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 52 (March 1876), 590.

from the United States, and the percentage would continue to rise through 1876.[23]

Struggling to jump-start a New England–ized economy, émigré Northern bourgeois missionaries like Tourgée and Stearns borrowed a page from the old Whig strategy book and spent unprecedented amounts of money on what the Whig Party had once called "internal improvements"—especially railroads and public education. Railroads would bring markets into the cotton hinterlands, dazzling the poor white farmer with goods, freeing the black farmer from debt and tenancy, and opening access to markets for cash crops. They will "inspire the enterprise of the South with new vigor" and encourage "every sensible man" to "bend himself to the task of building up the new South instead of brooding over the glories of the lost cause." And education would ensure that "the child of the humblest citizen may, without expense, be carefully instructed in all common branches." So Alabama and Texas doubled their railroad mileage between 1866 and 1872; Arkansas, which counted only thirty-eight miles of railroad at the end of the war, had 258 by 1872. Elementary and secondary schools more than doubled in Mississippi, North and South Carolina, and Florida between 1870 and 1879; in Georgia they quadrupled.[24]

But the railroads were not, as it turned out, a charm. Construction costs fluctuated between $30,000 and $50,000 per mile, and new rail lines built on speculation folded as fast as they were finished. "The great majority of railroads," William Grosvenor reported in 1873, "yield less than ordinary interest on the investment, and very many . . . still barely pay running expenses and interest on bonds." In the Natchez district, six new railroad companies were established in the early 1870s; all of them failed. Georgia's state-owned railroad, the Western and Atlantic, plunged the state into a debt of $750,000 in two years. Similar problems dogged the effort to jump-start education. In Southern states where no public schooling systems had existed before the war, the construction and staffing costs were staggering. In Mississippi alone, 432 schoolhouses were built in just the 1871–72 fiscal year; the teaching staffs alone numbered forty-eight hundred,

23. *The Tribune Almanac for 1874*, edited by J. F. Cleveland (New York: Tribune Association, 1874), 84; *Philadelphia Public Ledger Almanac* (Philadelphia: George W. Child, 1875), 11; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 14–15; *An American Almanac for 1878*, edited by A. R. Spofford (New York: American News Company, 1878), 278, 300; William J. Cooper, "The Cotton Crisis in the Antebellum South: Another Look," *Agricultural History* 49 (April 1975), 387–90.

24. Snay, "Freedom and Progress," 106–7; Cleveland, *The Tribune Almanac for 1873*, 25.

and the overall costs during the Mississippi system was just over a million dollars. These investments left Southern states mired in debt, Louisiana alone having $2.2 million in unfunded liability, tax receipts of only $4.3 million, and a budget deficit of $60,000. South Carolina was in even worse shape: it had $5.3 million in unfunded indebtedness and only $1.6 million in revenue.[25]

Despite the overall impoverishment imposed on the South by the war and the legal abolition of slavery, the patterns of economic production remained remarkably unchanged. In western Alabama's "black belt," 236 landowners possessed at least $10,000 in real estate in 1860 (with the median landholding amounting to sixteen hundred acres); 101 of those landowners were still in possession in 1870—which was about the same rate of persistence over time that had prevailed *before* the war. If anything, the patterns of landowning showed increases in the size of landholdings by the top 8 percent of planters in 1870, while the middle brackets actually showed a decline. In North Carolina's Union County, agricultural acreage not only increased in the post-Reconstruction years, but so did the number of cotton plantations of over one thousand acres; in Mississippi's Claiborne County, the number of landholdings in the 50-to-199-acre bracket jumped from 73 to 170. And it was noticeable that outside the principal cities, that great marker of bourgeois economics, the use of cash as a medium of exchange, entered only fitfully into Southern calculations. The New York Cash Store in Greenville, Alabama, advertised (despite its name) that "we will take in exchange for goods, country produce, particularly Eggs, Chickens, Bees Wax, Dry Hides, Peas, Corn Meal, and anything else that we can dispose of."[26]

Former slaveholders, thanks in large measure to the Johnson amnesties and the failure to break up Confederate property owning

25. Grosvenor, "The Railroads and the Farms," *Atlantic Monthly* 32 (November 1873), 608; J. B. Hodgskin, "Financial Condition of the United States," *North American Review* 104 (April 1869), 537; *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (Washington: National Center for Education Statistics, 1993), 42; Justin Behrend, *Reconstructing Democracy: Grassroots Black Politics in the Deep South after the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 125–28, 144; William Y. Thompson, "Robert Toombs and the Georgia Railroads," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 40 (March 1956), 56–57; Stuart Grayson Noble, *Forty Years of the Public Schools in Mississippi* (New York: Teacher's College, Columbia University, 1918), 34.

26. Steven Hahn, "Class and State in Postemancipation Societies: Southern Planters in Comparative Perspective," *American Historical Review* 95 (February 1990), 86; Wayne K. Durrill, "Producing Poverty: Local Government and Economic Development in a New South County, 1874–1884," *Journal of American History* 71 (March 1985), 778; Michael Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society: The Natchez District, 1860–80* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 87; Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 148.

or confiscate the land, were thus free to use cotton profits to maintain a version of the plantation system, closing off opportunities for the freedmen to acquire land and forcing them into peonage. "Slavery is abolished," agreed William Grosvenor, "but peonage, or some other form of forced labor, hardly less unjust or dangerous to the nation than slavery itself, is the natural result of the present condition of affairs at the South, the only solution to which the mind or inclination of the land-owner turns." Peonage, in turn, gave white Democrats the power to control black voting; and control of voting would spell both the end of Republican governments and a determination to keep free-labor economics at arm's length and "keep the negro in his condition of ignorance, that they may retain him as nearly as possible in his old state of slavery."[27] "The relation of master and slave no longer exists here," wrote one Mississippi valley planter, "but out of it has evolved that of patron and retainer," which was a far cry from "one purely of business" or "the ordinary relation of landlord and tenant or of employer and employee." Given the resilience of cotton as a commodity, free labor *had* to be suppressed to prevent labor shortages that would have driven the cost of production beyond control. Reconstruction Republicans might have found a way to undermine the re-creation of planter dominance if they could have recruited small-scale white farmers to their banner. But the taxes required to support the new investments were based on property, and they pressed down heavily on no one so much as the small farmer. "Here and there through all the cotton states . . . are reappearing the planter princes of old time, still lords of acres though not of slaves."[28] Slavery might have been legally dead, but it was only being replaced by hutted serfdom.

27. Grosvenor, "The Rights of the Nation, and the Duty of Congress," 756; Jonathan Weiner, "Planter Persistence and Social Change: Alabama, 1850–1870," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 7 (Autumn 1976), 237–38, 241, 257; William N. Parker, "The South in the National Economy, 1865–1970," *Southern Economic Journal* 46 (April 1980), 1021–22, 1027; Michael W. Fitzgerald, "Reconstruction Politics and the Politics of Reconstruction," in *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States*, edited by Thomas J. Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 97; Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 163.

28. Alex Lichtenstein, "Was the Emancipated Slave a Proletarian?" *Reviews in American History* 26 (March 1998), 132–33, and "Proletarians or Peasants? Sharecroppers and the Politics of Protest in the Rural South, 1880–1940," *Plantation Society in the Americas* 5 (Fall 1998), 300; Larian Angelo, "Wage Labour Deferred: The Recreation of Unfree Labour in the US South," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 22 (July 1995), 584, 590–91; J. Mills Thornton, "Fiscal Policy and the Failure of Radical Reconstruction in the Lower South," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, edited by J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 370–71.

Northern free-labor apostles, discouraged by the poor inroads they had made on Southern culture, went home, disillusioned. They were only "merchants, shopkeepers, mechanics, manufacturers, speculators, brokers, bankers" and not "barons after the fashion of the South." They were subject to harassment, shunning, and violence. Leander Bigger, an Ohioan who moved to South Carolina as a Freedmen's Bureau agent after service in the Union army, described the burning of a store he owned west of Manning, South Carolina, where the chief offense seemed to have been his willingness to extend credit to black farmers trying to set up on their own.

> They ransacked the store. . . . All my dry goods—everything that was combustible—they took out into the square, and took a keg of powder that I kept in a concealed place . . . piled the goods over it, and set the pile on fire. The goods, being calicoes, muslins, and delains, burnt slowly. They carried us up to the fire, and the speaker (they gave all their orders by signals) ordered his men to mount. They mounted their horses, formed in line, and then the speaker came up to me and told me, "You must quit business. This is only a warning: the next time we will put you on the fire." . . . He said he was from hell and represented the devil; that he would take me with him if I did not obey orders.[29]

Another South Carolina "merchant" committed a similar trespass by trying to impose the logic of the ledger by foreclosing "a lien he had on the crop of a planter's widow in the county."

> He did it because she was pursuing the usual aristocratic course of evading payment and putting him off. The indignity threw the lady into convulsions which caused her death. She was hardly buried before her three grown sons, all under twenty-five, were mounted and on their way to the merchant's. They found him in a lawyer's office in town, put everybody out but him, and closed the door. His screams and cries for mercy alarmed all the village. A crowd collected, and tried to interfere. But one of the young men came out on the steps with a cocked pistol in each hand, and kept them off till the victim was insensible, beaten to a jelly, gashed all over, and had one ear cut off. They then came out and rode off. The merchant lay at the point of death for weeks, is yet (two months since the fray) in bed, and is maimed for life.

29. "The Political Condition of South Carolina," *Atlantic Monthly* 39 (February 1877), 186; Examination of Leander Bigger, July 15, 1871, in *Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquiry into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 1:276.

> The affair was mentioned in no paper, and the young men have never been indicted.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's free-labor colony in Florida limped on through white suspicion and unexplained arson, and Stowe's presence gradually diminished until by 1884 she and her ailing husband left to return no more. Charles Stearns was similarly flummoxed at the unwillingness of black Southerners to internalize the free-labor work ethic. "I can describe their conduct no better than by calling it a perfect carnival of waste. . . . If hay of their own needed cutting, it would be left standing until nearly dried up; and if we found fault with all this dilatoriness, we would be denounced as 'worse than the rebels.'" Eventually, Stearns concluded that he "cannot conscientiously advise Northern men to come South."[30]

The great losers in this process were Southern blacks. In the Mississippi Valley and the vast Black Belt of Alabama, Georgia, and the Carolinas, only 8 percent of black people owned their own land. In South Carolina, over 75 percent of the lower Piedmont's twenty-four thousand tenant farmers were black, fully half of them sharecroppers by 1900.[31] "Although emancipated," John Mercer Langston warned in 1879, the freedman "has not been given practical independence of the old slave-holding class, constituting the land-proprietors and employers in the section where he lives and labors for daily support." And no wonder: Southern elites saw little they wanted to embrace in the free-labor ideology, nor were there many incentives for them to do so. "Southerners used to look on the Northerners as coarse, money-getting people. . . . Their contempt for the commercial character of the North originated, of course, in the aristocratic training of the plantations, and their hatred of the liberty and equality doctrines . . . arose from the intolerance natural to all aristocracies." But so did Southern yeomen, who could not disentangle white supremacy from

30. "South Carolina Morals," 473; Charles Gayarre, "The Southern Question," *North American Review* 125 (November 1877), 475; Koester, *Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 281, 318; Stowe to Charles Beecher, May 29, 1867, in Charles Edward Stowe, *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe: Compiled from Her Letters and Journals* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1889), 402; Stearns, *The Black Man of the South*, 334; Dan T. Carter, *When the War Was Over: The Failure of Self-Reconstruction in the South, 1865–1867* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 163; Richard Current, *Those Terrible Carpetbaggers: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 369–70.

31. Lacy K. Ford, "Rednecks and Merchants: Economic Development and Social Tensions in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1865–1900," *Journal of American History* 71 (September 1984), 305; George C. Rable, "Bourbonism, Reconstruction, and the Persistence of Southern Distinctiveness," *Civil War History* 29 (June 1983), 139; Loren Schweninger, "A Vanishing Breed: Black Farm Owners in the South, 1651–1982," *Agricultural History* 63 (Summer 1989), 49–50.

economics. The same Confederate private who denounced the crimes of Reconstruction at the beginning of this essay likewise hailed slavery as the best charm against the evil attractions of the marketplace:

> What if the future shall say, that what the world called slavery, railed against as such, rolling up the whites of quite worldly eyes, in horror that such a thing should exist, stands forth as a patriarchal, beneficent relation, the kindest for the slave, as he came to us, not as France's "rights of man" fain would have him come; and what is now lauded to the skies, as "freedom," be exhibited, as a cruel, grasping sauve qui peut, and Devil take the hindmost, the most sordid, the most heartless of all tyranny, the one which most degradingly, and least pitifully, shoves the weakest to the wall, and keeps him there.

Free labor could even inspire a peculiarly gendered disdain, since (declared the Southern novelist Augusta Jane Evans in 1867) free labor made Northerners "effeminate, selfish, most unscrupulously grasping." Even their children were "pitiable manikins already chanting praises to the Gold Calf."[32]

Redemption was an anti-free-labor strategy as much as it was a strategy of political exclusion. "The nigger is going to be made a serf, sure as you live," prophesied one white Alabamian to John Townsend Trowbridge in 1865. "It won't need any law for that." And not only blacks. When it was pointed out that South Carolina's "eight box law" (requiring a voter to be able to read the names of candidates and the respective offices they were running for in order to place the correct ballot in one of eight ballot boxes) would disfranchise poor whites as easily as blacks, the major general of the South Carolina militia merely replied, "We care not if it does." The leader of the Republican minority protested that this had no other purpose than "keeping the middle classes and the poor whites, together with the negroes, from having anything to do with the elections," and he was not wrong.[33]

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32. John Mercer Langston, "The Exodus" (1879), in *Freedom and Citizenship: Selected Lectures and Addresses* (Washington: 1883), 238; "The Political Condition of South Carolina," *Atlantic Monthly* 39 (February 1877), 186–87; "Address of Private Leigh Robinson," 254; Evans, in Rable, "Bourbonism," 141.

33. John Townsend Trowbridge, *The South: A Tour of Its Battlefields and Ruined Cities* (Hartford, Conn.: L. Stebbins, 1866), 427; Charles J. Holden, "'Is Our Love for Wade Hampton Foolishness?' South Carolina and the Lost Cause," in *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, edited by Gary Gallagher and Alan Nolan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 66–67; George Brown Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes, 1877–1900* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952), 70.

Reconstruction aspired to be a pure bourgeois revolution, and it expected to triumph as effortlessly as nineteenth-century liberal notions of progress had promised. If Marx had been right, that triumph would have, in turn, yielded ineluctably to a workers' rebellion, but it did not. So much for ineluctability; time sometimes does indeed go backward. To have achieved a different outcome would have required two ingredients—time and force—which circumstances denied Reconstruction. It is not inconsistent to imagine a bourgeois revolution arriving in the company of swords (that was certainly the way the English Civil Wars were described for a long time), and Wendell Phillips certainly believed that Reconstruction could hardly last less than forty years. "We have to . . . annihilate the old South, and put a new one there," and the best plan Phillips could imagine was long-term military occupation. "When England conquered the Highlands, she held them,—held them until she could educate them; and it took a generation. That is just what we have to do with the South."[34] But as Gregory P. Downs, in one of the more remarkable books on Reconstruction in the past twenty years, has complained, few Americans were prepared to supply those swords in meaningful numbers or over a meaningful length of time. "Out of the reduced army of thirty thousand men," estimated the *North American Review* on the eve of Grant's reelection in 1872, "the government could spare only one tenth for service at the South, exclusive of ordinary garrison duty." The reluctance to use state force in overwhelming strength, and to bear the political costs that accompany it, are easy to criticize from the distance of a century and a half, but the criticisms tend to freeze on the lips when it is realized that these were exactly the criticisms deployed most recently against the Gulf Wars.[35]

In the South, the pure bourgeois revolution failed. Its white promoters were politically inexperienced, and they made gaffes from which it proved impossible to recover. Their chief ally, the freedpeople, were a numerical minority almost everywhere in Southern politics, and their own inexperience and a lifelong suspicion bred from oppression and betrayal made it difficult to create stable coalitions. The freedpeople were frankly reluctant to accept white Republican leadership as unquestioningly as whites expected. The "Gideonites"

34. Wendell Phillips, "The State of the Country," January 21 and May 11, 1863, in *Speeches, Lectures, and Letters* (Boston: Walker, Wise, 1863), 544, 546.

35. Gregory P. Downs, *After Appomattox: Military Occupation and the Ends of War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 250–53; "The Political Campaign of 1872," *North American Review* 115 (October 1872), 418.

who descended on the occupied Port Royal Sound to "educate and uplift" the freedpeople discovered that "nothing is more evident to those who actually know the Colored, than that while they respect, value, and revere, the good, they want little companionship with the whites." Black Methodist leader Henry McNeal Turner frankly told "my colored friends" that "the white men are not to be trusted. They will betray you."[36]

But just as divisive were the fault lines that separated blacks from blacks. A racial hierarchy had long existed within the black South that bestowed privilege along a carefully graded spectrum of color. "There is in the Southern States a great amount of prejudice in regards to color," William Wells Brown admitted in 1867, "even among the negroes themselves. The nearer the negro or mulatto approaches to the white, the more he seems to feel his superiority over those of a darker hue." In postwar Savannah, Aaron Bradley mounted a political smear campaign against his rival for a seat in Congress, Richard White, a mixed-race Union Army veteran from Ohio. White, sneered Bradley, was a "hybrid" who did not deserve true African American votes. "What color will he represent himself?" asked Bradley. Answer: "The greasy color." Even Frederick Douglass struck sparks with Martin Delany and John Mercer Langston, with Douglass (himself biracial) bitterly criticizing Delany's black racial purism for "going about the same length in favor of blacks, as the whites have done in favor of the doctrine of white superiority." Delany was right to assert African Americans' "need for dignity and self-respect," but not to point where "he stands up so straight that he leans back a little."[37]

36. Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Urban Emancipation: Popular Politics in Reconstruction Mobile, 1860–1890* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 126; George Ward Nichols, *The Story of the Great March from the Diary of a Staff Officer* (New York: Harper, 1865), 59; Mrs. A. M. French, *Slavery in South Carolina and the Ex-Slaves; or, The Port Royal Mission* (New York: W. M. French, 1862), 136, 138; Jacqueline Jones, *A Dreadful Deceit: The Myth of Race from the Colonial Era to Obama's America* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 168; John Dennett, "The South as It Is," *Nation*, October 20, 1865; Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 90–91; Henry McNeal Turner, in Ruth Currie-McDaniel, *Carpetbagger of Conscience: A Biography of John Emory Bryant* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 95.

37. William Wells Brown, *Clotelle; or, The Colored Heroine* (1867; Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing, 1969), 21; Justin A. Nystrom, *New Orleans after the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 103–4, 131; David C. Rankin, "The Origins of Black Leadership in New Orleans During Reconstruction," *Journal of Southern History* 40 (August 1974), 426–27; Currie-McDaniel, *Carpetbagger of Conscience*, 123; Peter Kolchin, *First Freedom: The Responses of Alabama's Blacks to Emancipation and Reconstruction* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), 140–41; Jones, *A Dreadful Deceit*, 177–78; Egerton, *Wars of Reconstruction*, 269–70.

These interracial feuds lay at the base of the most singular absence in black Reconstruction in the South, and that was the nonemergence of a single commanding leader in the style of Martin Luther King Jr. who could bind together the disparate shards of African American identity into a single movement. Since only Louisiana and South Carolina had developed prewar black populations who were property owners, business proprietors, and skilled craftsmen, the likeliest quarter from which such leadership could have developed was the Northern black community. But few black people in the North made the attempt. And no wonder. It was doubtful whether Southern blacks would feel obliged to follow Northern leadership, and in 1879, the National Conference of Colored Men actually witnessed an attack on "Fred. Douglass and his accomplices" as "well-to-do Northern men who will not travel out of their way to benefit the suffering Southern Negro, and who care not for the interests of their race." Moreover, Southern whites would certainly make aggressive Northern blacks a target of choice. "Write as you please, but *never go south*, or killed you *most assuredly* will be," warned Julia Griffiths Crofts, Douglass's British friend and supporter. "You are, in many respects, *a marked man*." Only Martin Delany played a significant role in Reconstruction politics in the South, although it was usually more divisive than helpful and ended when he accepted a judicial appointment from Democrats. "What benefit," he asked in 1874, "have the colored people in South Carolina derived from the propagation of Republican sentiments?" None, in his estimate. "Such a party is not worth the effort to keep it in existence."[38]

But the final expiration of Reconstruction was an act of homicide, not a natural—albeit premature—death. Instead, the same Romantic feudalism that had created the old Southern order reasserted its

38. Alwyn Barr, "Black Legislators of Reconstruction Texas," *Civil War History* 32 (December 1986), 340–41; Richard Lowe, "The Freedmen's Bureau and Local Black Leadership," *Journal of American History* 80 (December 1993), 995; William F. Cheek and Aimee Lee Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1829–65* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 456; *Proceedings of the National Conference of Colored Men of the United States Held in the State Capitol at Nashville, Tennessee, May 6, 7, 8, and 9, 1879* (Washington, D.C.: Rufus H. Darby, 1879), 26; Luis-Alejandro Dinnella-Borrego, *The Risen Phoenix: Black Politics in the Post–Civil War South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 145; Crofts to Douglass, April 13, 1863, in Douglas R. Egerton, *Thunder at the Gates: The Black Civil War Regiments That Redeemed America* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 77; *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself* (Hartford, Conn.: Park Publishing, 1882), 247; William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1850), 94–95; "Green and Delany," in *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 444–45.

hegemony, and in another decade, the promoters of a "New South" would link hands with Northern Democrats in a comprehensive critique of the free-labor ideology. The bourgeoisie in this bourgeois revolution scenario did not flee to the aristocrats to create a "counterrevolution of property"; quite the opposite occurred. The postwar Southern aristocrats ensured the destruction of the pure bourgeois revolution by appealing to a set of cultural and racial biases that safely defused the importance of property and sharply restricted access to it.

Understanding Reconstruction as a pure bourgeois revolution that was strangled in its cradle by vengeful cotton nabobs offers a fourth understanding of Reconstruction. On the one hand, it rebukes those Eurocentric Marxists who seem unwilling or unable to see capitalism or the bourgeoisie as anything but a poor transition to a collectivist future; indeed, a "bourgeois revolution" ought to excite an element of sympathy for those who so energetically fought with the beasts at Ephesus during Reconstruction's dying years. It should also point us toward a more comprehensive notion of what constitutes Reconstruction, since consideration of the activities of the South's Northern Democratic allies has been almost nonexistent. Yet the opposition of the Northern Democracy was as crucial an element in the failure of Reconstruction as the Ku Klux Klan or the Redeemers. "It has always been a sad and sore fact for an honest lover of his country to contemplate," sighed John Pendleton Kennedy, that "the South played off that great party of the North, to make it subservient to the selfish and sectional purpose of putting the whole Union at the foot" of "the lordly ambition of the aristocratic South. . . . Nothing is stranger than that long association of the aristocratic with the democratic element of the country . . . pigging it together in the same truckle-bed."[39] Nothing stranger, perhaps; but that alliance survived the Civil War, and the reassertion of a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives in 1875 was as much the curtain-downer for Reconstruction as the inauguration of Hayes a year and a half later.

Reconstruction's failure also serves as a warning to overexuberant neoliberals not to embrace historical inevitability for themselves, either. After the destruction of the Berlin Wall, Francis Fukuyama seized on the ignominious collapse of the Soviet system as proof that "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution" was "the

39. John Pendleton Kennedy, "Letter VIII," March 1864, in *Mr. Ambrose's Letters on the Rebellion* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1865), 147–48.

universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." That conclusion was, to say the least, premature, and not only because it reckoned without the rise of Islamist theocracy or the fallout from the 2008 worldwide recession, which provoked a renascence of Marxist advocacy in the writings of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, Alain Badiou, the Occupy Movement, and Thomas Picketty. As Badiou remarked, "[T]he senescent collapse of the USSR" only "provisionally suspended fear" on the part of the bourgeoisie. "Monetarist free exchange and its mediocre political appendage, capitalist-parliamentarianism . . . is ever more poorly dissimulated behind the fine word 'democracy.'"[40] This pattern is itself an echo of what happened in Reconstruction, where Southerners stood the free labor ideology on its head, turning it from being an engine of social mobility into a legal chimera for the enforcement of serflike "contracts" with laborers, and it stands as a warning to those who yet believe that liberal democracy is the most desirable political future to be as wary of Whiggish assumptions about liberal democracy's inevitability as the Marxists were about the dialectic. Human society has oscillated between desires for stability, security, and reciprocity—which is what feudalism, Marxism, and theocracy promise—and desires for mobility, liberty, and profit, which is what the Enlightenment offered to satisfy on a world-historical scale. Hence there is nothing that can be declared permanent in a "bourgeois revolution," and our own Reconstruction, not to mention a good deal of recent history, is the unhappy proof.

40. Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989), 18; Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 6, 25, 57; Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, translated by Ray Brassier (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 7.