Journal of Libertarian Studies
Volume 16, no. 2 (Spring 2002), pp. 103–137

www.mises.org

A PLAIN FOLK PERSPECTIVE ON RECONSTRUCTION, STATE-BUILDING, IDEOLOGY, AND ECONOMIC SPOILS

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If, as Richard O. Curry writes, "the politics of the Civil War and Reconstruction ought to be considered as a unit,"[1] then the politics of Reconstruction began the moment that Abraham Lincoln and other Northern leaders chose war over the Lower South's secession.

WAR, POLITICS, AND PEACE

Lincoln's delusion that the South was full of Unionists loyal to the government over which he presided emboldened him to call for volunteers to suppress "combinations" too numerous to be dealt with by normal judicial processes. His call precipitated most of the Upper South into secession, and Kentucky proclaimed its neutrality if war should break out between the two federations.

Only swift federal coercion held Maryland, along with parts of Kentucky and Missouri, for the Union. Many in the North were hesitant to risk war, especially when they could not find a Constitutional power whereby the general government could coerce whole states. For a time, Northern Democrats even discussed setting up a Middle Atlantic confederation, since the old Union had evidently outlived its usefulness.[2]

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[1]Richard O. Curry, "The Civil War and Reconstruction, 1861–1877: A Critical Overview of Recent Trends and Interpretations," in *Beyond the Civil War Synthesis: Political Essays of the Civil War Era*, ed. Robert P. Swieringa (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975), p. 33.

[2]See William C. Wright, *The Secession Movement in the Middle Atlantic States* (Cranbury, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973).

Thus, we must examine Reconstruction from the moment the North decided to "save the Union" by force, beginning with the conquest of the first square mile of Confederate territory. As such, the study of Reconstruction involves studying the war itself. If, as Clausewitz famously said, war is the continuation of politics by other means, then "peace" is the continuation of war by other means. As Murray Rothbard put it:

> since the State arrogates to itself the monopoly of violence over a territorial area, so long as its depredations and extortions go unresisted, there is said to be "peace" in the area, since the only violence is one-way, directed by the State downward against the people.[3]

Taken together, the "Civil War" and Reconstruction provide ample confirmation of Rothbard's view. Historians often overlook the way in which, historically speaking, state power plays out on a sort of continuum whose extremes are peace and war. The goals and methods of state-level actors are similar on either end of this spectrum, even if, in war, more is at stake, since opponents threaten the state's very existence. Hence, to meet a crisis, a state arrogates more and more power to itself, power it is loath to relinquish after the crisis ends. This also applies to the state's opponents if they, too, are organized as a state.

An unopposed state, at "peace," is concerned with exploiting its territorial domain at "normal" rates. As Jeffrey Rogers Hummel puts it, "The territory constituting the United States is in a very real sense already conquered—by the United States government."[4] In Reconstruction, a state which had just saved itself from dismemberment sought to make its victory permanent. At the same time, interest groups, politicians, and bureaucrats allied with, or part of, that state sought to benefit personally and perpetuate their rule indefinitely.

CHANGING INTERPRETATIONS OF RECONSTRUCTION

No new facts on Reconstruction have come to light in recent decades. Nonetheless, the interpretation of the period has changed

[3]Murray N. Rothbard, "War, Peace, and the State," in *Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature, and Other Essays* (Auburn, Ala.: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2000), pp. 121–22.

[4]Jeffrey Rogers Hummel, "National Goods vs. Public Goods: Defense, Disarmament, and Free Riders," *Review of Austrian Economics* 4 (1990), pp. 96–97.

dramatically.[5] The older interpretive school, named for William Archibald Dunning and popularized by Claude Bowers, sympathized with white Southerners and saw Reconstruction as a period during which Northern interlopers, con artists, and fixers allied with vengeful ex-slaves and propped up by federal bayonets took control of civil government in the South in order to loot and pillage a country already ravaged by war. The opponents of Reconstruction—the Redeemers, Conservatives, or Democrats—rescued the South from this ordeal through electoral efforts and irregular means amounting to low-intensity guerrilla war.[6] Almost alone, the black Marxist scholar and activist W.E.B. DuBois set out a defense of Reconstruction which saw it as a period of potential interracial democracy and radical reform.[7]

By the 1930s, historians began revising the work of the Dunning School. Francis Butler Simkins, a Southerner, pioneered "balance" in the field. Southern historian C. Vann Woodward reinterpreted the Redeemers and the New South, implicitly reading New Deal ideology back into the second half of the nineteenth century. Here, "business" —rather monolithically conceived—elbowed aside pre-capitalist Old South planters and defeated their other opponents, Populist yeomen, workers, and so on.[8]

After World War II, Northern "neo-abolitionist" historians like Kenneth Stampp, John Hope Franklin, and Richard Current up-ended the older reading. The Redeemers were deemed vicious agents of former slaveholders bent on aborting the Republican Party's much-needed social revolution in the South. Had this revolution succeeded, they argued, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s would have

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[5]Thomas J. DiLorenzo, "Reconstructing America: The Consolidation of State Power, 1865–1890," *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 16, no. 2 (Spring 2002).

[6]See Claude Bowers, *The Tragic Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1929); William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction: Political and Economic, 1865–1877* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1907); William A. Dunning, *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); Walter L. Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (Spartanburg, S.C.: The Reprint Company, 1978), regarded by many as the best work done by a Dunning School historian; and Avery Craven, *Reconstruction: The Ending of the Civil War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1969).

[7]W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1935).

[8]C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951).

been unnecessary. The pro-Reconstruction tide swelled until it swept all before it, as we see in Eric Foner's work.[9]

Alongside the neo-abolitionist revisionists, American historians influenced by Marxism have studied the origins of the New South, debating whether "pre-bourgeois" planters had retained political power and put the South on a sort of regional "Prussian Road to Capitalism" limited only by its colonial relationship to the national, capitalist economy.[10] Lately, there are signs of a "post-revisionism" in the study of Reconstruction, which seeks to rein in revisionist excesses. We might also think of certain economic historians who write about the New South as contributing, albeit loosely, to post-revisionism.[11] Unfortunately, Reconstruction "post-revisionism"—to the extent that such a school exists—may resemble Cold War "post-revisionism" in its failure to produce a new synthesis. Further, the two situations differ in that, with respect to the Cold War, we find orthodox historians claiming to assimilate a few valid insights from a minority of revisionists, while in the case of Reconstruction, we find a few historians making minor adjustments to the victorious revisionist picture. Finally, scores of specialized studies of the Southern plain folk, or yeomen, and poor whites have enlightened us in detail, although, at the same time, they have complicated the picture of Reconstruction.[12]

THE WAR AND ITS CONTINUATION BY OTHER MEANS

Despite the apparent revisionist victory, the matter remains contested. For example, we may still profitably ask, "What was Reconstruction about?" Was it a struggle for *empire*—a continuation of the

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[9]Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990). It is interesting, at least, that the now-dominant revisionist view of Reconstruction corresponds, in detail, to the communist interpretation put forth in the 1930s. See James S. Allen, *Reconstruction: The Battle for Democracy* (New York: International Publishers, 1937).

[10]Jonathan Wiener's *Social Origins of the New South: Alabama, 1860–1885* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), is representative of the school, which is heavily indebted to Barrington Moore, Jr.'s, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

[11]One might mention here Robert Higgs, *Competition and Coercion: Blacks in the American Economy, 1865–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

[12]I will say more about this directly.

late war by other means—or was it indeed a premature civil rights movement? For that matter, now that the dust has settled, one might ask if the civil rights movement itself was partly implicated in a modern struggle for empire?

The answers to these questions depend substantially on one's view of what the war of 1861–1865 was all about. Many historians tell us that the Southern states—dominated from top to bottom by a narrow elite of slaveholding planters—seceded in a "crisis of fear" about the future of their slave property.[13] Other historians argue that, on the contrary, a confident, prosperous South not exactly in thrall to the Howell Cobbs undertook secession for a combination of reasons. One was the prior thirty-year "cold war" between North and South, while another was the protective tariff. Southerners believed that free trade would increase their prosperity by eliminating the massive tribute paid to Northern industry.[14]

Certainly, the fear of lost tariff revenue was decisive in Lincoln's decision to risk war. Key Northern business interests campaigned for war once they discovered the enormous gap between Union and Confederate tariff rates, raising the nightmarish specter of the South's engrossing the Atlantic trade while ceasing to patronize Northern industry at protected prices. There is an exact parallel with England's 1707 incorporation of Scotland via the treaty of union (immediately violated) to head off Scottish development through free trade.[15]

Another matter worth considering is the contrast between Northern and Southern views of the Union. Contrary to the Northern historiography, which suggests a "Great Reaction" whereby Southerners

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[13]See, e.g., William L. Barney, *The Road to Secession: A New Perspective on the Old South* (New York: Praeger, 1972).

[14]On Southern confidence, see, for example, William J. Cooper, Jr., "The Cotton Crisis in the Antebellum South: Another Look," *Agricultural History* 49 (1975), pp. 381–91. Clifford Dowdey discusses the North-South cold war in *The Land They Fought For* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955). Charles Adams emphasizes Southern dreams of prosperity grounded on political independence and free trade in *When in the Course of Human Events: Arguing the Case for Southern Secession* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

[15]On Scotland, the treaty, and free trade, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600–1750* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), p. 252.

invented the compact theory of the Union solely to protect slavery, there is substantial evidence of a straight-line continuity in Southern thought growing out of republican theory. Rather, it was the North that departed from the original understanding of federalism and the Union, embracing instead a democratic and Romantic unitary nationalism grounded on the notions of a single American people and an unbreakable Union.[16]

In the early nineteenth century, Americans North and South considered the Union an experiment, an arrangement of instrumental value to be modified, if necessary, for the happiness of its constituents.[17] In time, Northerners came to see the Union as a primary value to which almost everything else should be sacrificed. Yet, Northern hesitation remained, as Marshall DeRosa's collection of Congressional speeches on secession reveals.[18] Lincoln's decision to collect revenue by force set the stage for war. Jefferson Davis's impatient decision to bombard Fort Sumter gave Lincoln a *casus belli* by galvanizing Northern opinion in a way that months of Northern internal discussion had not.

Foner writes that when President Grant sent extra soldiers into South Carolina in 1871–1872 to put down Klan outrages, he was only trying to enforce "the rule of law."[19] One could as easily assert that the rule of law died the day Lincoln called for volunteers to suppress rebellious "combinations." The theory on which Lincoln conducted his war obscured important questions. If his theory was sound, then there was no legal basis for arresting even one *civil* official of any Southern state at war's end. It was absurd to claim that the secession

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[16]Walter Kirk Wood, "Rewriting Southern History: U.B. Phillips, the New South, and the Antebellum Past," *Southern Studies* 22, no. 2 (Fall 1983), pp. 217–43; and W.K. (Kirk) Wood, "The Central Theme: Republicanism, Not Slavery, Race, or Romanticism," *Continuity: A Journal of History* 9 (Fall 1984), pp. 33–71.

[17]Kenneth M. Stampp, "The Concept of a Perpetual Union," *Journal of American History* 65, no. 1 (June 1978), pp. 5–33; and Paul C. Nagel, *One Nation Indivisible: The Union in American Thought, 1776–1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

[18]Marshall DeRosa, *The Politics of Dissolution: The Quest for a National Identity and the American Civil War* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1998).

[19]Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, p. 197.

conventions had not represented majority opinion (albeit by slight margins, in some cases), or that the Southern states had ceased to have "republican forms of government" merely because they disagreed with the President of their former federation as to that union's character.

Slavery undeniably played a role in secession. Planters feared for the long-run safety of their labor system, to be sure, and some took an active role in secession. Other planters believed themselves safe enough and argued that a war—if it came to that—would risk the overthrow of slavery. Southerners thought they spied a total threat to *all* their values in the sectional Republican Party.[20] They found its postmillennial, reforming zeal as unappealing as its thoroughgoing espousal of the Federalist/Whig political economy of American mercantilism. Distaste for that program was separable from, and would even outlive, the slavery question.

The Republican Party program seemed a threat to republicanism and local self-government, and one which foretold irresponsible, centralized rule ("empire") and, with it, the possibility of slave emancipation by decree. The latter would entail a period of racial upheaval and readjustment, which the Southern "plain folk"—the non-slaveholding yeomen and small-scale slaveholders—were in no hurry to embrace. These considerations better explain the plain folk's early support for the Confederate enterprise than does the old hypothesis of diabolically clever manipulation by slaveholding oligarchs.[21] The reactions of the plain folk to Confederate policies would prove important in the war, and probably decisive in Reconstruction. We shall return to them shortly.

THE INCONVENIENCES OF TOTAL WAR

Conventional thinkers, whether liberal, conservative, or socialist, share the notion that wars, in and of themselves, are morally and psychologically neutral, and may actually improve people. What matters in determining the moral character of a war is whether the good side or the bad side won. According to this reading, the "Good" can

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[20]Joel H. Silbey, *The Partisan Imperative: The Dynamics of American Politics Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 166–89.

[21]See J. Mills Thornton, III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); and Michael P. Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic: The Secession of Georgia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977).

legitimately use whatever methods help them prevail, while the "Bad" cannot legitimately use any means at all. Conservatives of a type admire the sturdy patriotic virtues of the serried ranks marching off to be slaughtered; liberals and socialists love the self-sacrifice and social solidarity—and state-building—that wars entail.

There is a current tendency to claim that the notion of "total war" is unscientific and methodologically unsound. If the idea of total war got abroad, after all, people might start wondering about several wars in which Good prevailed over Bad by any means necessary. Questions might be asked, pointing toward a general critique of wars and the states that wage them.[22]

Accordingly, there are those who are at pains to minimize the damage done to the South during the Good War of 1861–65. However, even if they had no name for it, Sherman and his colleagues acted on the theory of total war. Some have made comparisons to the devastation of Germany in the Thirty Years War, or to that of Belgium in World War I. Some 620,000 men died in the war, which helps explain why it is not as remote to most Americans as, say, the Wars of the Roses. The losses were proportionately greater for the South, with its smaller population. Approximately ten percent of the pre-war population perished, comparable to the losses suffered by Greece in World War II or Mexico in the Revolution of 1910–1928. It was a demographic and social disaster which can appear negligible only to those who adopt what Jeffrey Hummel calls "the Hitler-Stalin-Mao" standard of comparison.[23]

In the South, the plain folk did most of the dying, a point to which we shall return. In the meantime, I pause only to suggest that wars do not in general *improve* people: for every individual ennobled by war, a great many more are brutalized. While there is no Gini-type scale for

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[22]For just this sort of questioning, see Martin Van Creveld, *The Rise and Fall of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[23]Edward P. Lawton, *The South and the Nation* (Fort Myers Beach, Fla.: Island Press, 1963), pp. 47–50; and Stig Förster and Jörg Nalder, eds., *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861–1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For a critique of total war, see Richard M. Weaver, "Southern Chivalry and Total War," in *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver*, ed. George M. Curtis, III, and James J. Thompson, Jr. (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Press, 1987), pp. 159–70. On the "Hitler-Stalin-Mao" standard, see Jeffrey Rogers Hummel, *Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men: A History of the American Civil War* (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), pp. 267–68.

this, and no multivariate regression analysis can estimate such brutalization, we ought to keep it in mind in any assessing the costs of the war—economic, political, and psychological[24]—and its sequel, Reconstruction. Mere grumbling about inveterate "racism" is not likely to get us very far.

THE STRUGGLE FOR OCCUPIED DIXIE

From the first re-conquests of Southern territory forward, the U.S. federal government had to formulate mechanisms for reincorporating the conquered into the Union. Belying his belief in downtrodden Unionist masses misled by a few oligarchs, Lincoln settled in the end for re-founding state governments on a "loyal" ten percent of their population. This "lenient" Presidential Reconstruction continued, after Lincoln's assassination, under President Andrew Johnson.

Republicans had taken advantage of the South's absence from Congress to enact the whole Whiggish program of American mercantilism: high tariffs, subsidies to favored businesses, a national banking system, and more. With the surrender of Lee and the capture of Davis, there were many in the Republican Party ready to profit in the "new frontier" of the prostrate South.

In 1866, Southern civil governments reconstructed on the easy plan held elections for Congress and the Senate. Under the official theory of the war, they had every right to participate in the Saved Union. The Thirteenth Amendment, ratified by the required three-fourths of the states, including some reconstituted Southern states, had settled the matter of slavery. But emancipation had actually increased Southern representation in the House—with blacks now counted as whole persons rather than as three-fifths—and victorious Republicans were appalled to see their old enemies, the haughty planters barely out of gray uniforms, arriving to help govern the Union.

Even worse, the planters seemed to be trying to re-establish slavery in all but name via the Black Codes passed by the newly reconstituted Southern state legislatures. These draconian statutes restricted the mobility of labor so as to effect a return to plantation agriculture.[25]

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[24]One interesting work on this subject, albeit not specifically about the U.S. Civil War, is John V. Denson, ed., *The Costs of War: America's Pyrrhic Victories*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1999).

[25]Theodore Brantner Wilson, *The Black Codes of the South* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1965).

The motivation, though inconsistent with market freedom, is understandable, but the laws seemed a deliberate affront to the Republicans. Interestingly, these statutes sought to control the freedmen's labor by mechanisms of licensing and regulation that modern liberals would find laudable in any other context.

Outraged Congressional Republicans were determined to reconstruct the South "properly" by means of a social revolution imposed by outside military rule and local collaborators.[26] Whatever it might do for the black freedmen, the program would—if successful—guarantee permanent Republican ascendancy via control of Southern state governments and Congressional seats.

Of course, such control required there to be Republican parties in those states, but the expected mass base of potential Republicans to be drawn from the plain folk and "poor whites" had proved rather small in most places. Only the disenfranchisement of most ex-Confederates and a corresponding enfranchisement of male freedmen could produce the needed electoral margin. That this would produce a palpable reaction was known from the start, but Republican Congressional Radicals expected federal occupation armies to maintain control.

As the Radicals moved to implement this program—refusing to seat Southern representatives and, with the help of the army, imposing new interim state governments—a clash with President Johnson, a product of the plain folk of Tennessee, was inevitable. Johnson was impeached, barely avoided being convicted, and was reduced to complete political ineffectiveness.

Among other things, the Radicals' program required a new theory of the late war. Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts argued that by even attempting to leave the Union, the Southern states had committed political suicide—and were thus *felo de se*—and were therefore conquered territories subject to Congressional authority. As part of its struggle to wrest control of Reconstruction away from the executive, Congress enacted the Reconstruction Act in late 1866. The Act divided the South into five military districts. In each state, with most white males disenfranchised (except for the "loyal" minority) and male freedmen voting, new constitutions would be drawn up. New legislatures would ratify the proposed Fourteenth Amendment, after which Congress would "readmit" the delinquent states into the

[26]Elsewhere, I described this phenomenon as "social Bonapartism." See Joseph R. Stromberg, "The War for Southern Independence: A Radical Libertarian Perspective," *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 3, no. 1 (1979), p. 39.

Union. As historian Forrest McDonald has lately noted, this was wonderfully inconsistent: "By that means, the southern states were forced to ratify the amendment, though the same laws that required them to do so declared that they were not legally states."[27]

The new state governments, created on the basis of the Congressional majority's ad hoc theory, rested on a coalition of so-called "carpetbaggers," "scalawags," and freedmen. Carpetbagger was a derisive term referring to Northern businessmen, professionals, former officers, teachers, etc., who went South to make their fortunes, to uplift the downtrodden, or for other reasons. Revisionists extol them as philanthropists and constructive statesmen, arguing they were no more "corrupt" than their counterparts in Northern state governments (an interesting standard indeed). Scalawags were local collaborators, so to speak, i.e., native-born Southern Republicans. They came largely from the plain folk or poor whites, although a few men of wealth and prominence were in their ranks, most notably former Georgia Governor Joseph E. Brown.[28] Finally, the freedmen provided the Republican Party with a large, potentially loyal, voting bloc. Black Republican leaders came from the freedmen as well as from the prewar class of free Negroes.

Revisionist historians of Reconstruction downplay charges of corruption laid at the feet of the Republican regimes in the South. Foner's work on Reconstruction emphasizes the idealism and egalitarianism of the Radical Republican program as expressed by Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, and George Julian, but on his own presentation he comes close to proving that Republicans in the South mostly succeeded in selling railroad bonds to one another, bonds which the taxpayers would have to redeem down the road.[29]

Certainly there was, as Steven V. Ash writes,

> the growing conviction among northerners that the South's backward social system was the root cause of the rebellion and therefore must be reconstructed in the image of the modern, bourgeois North.[30]

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[27]Forrest McDonald, *The States and the Union* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 200), p. 213.

[28]See Derrell C. Roberts, *Joseph E. Brown and the Politics of Reconstruction* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1973).

[29]Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, pp. 164–65.

[30]Stephen V. Ash, "Poor Whites in the Occupied South, 1861–1865," *Journal of Southern History* 57, no. 1 (February 1991), p. 47.

Perhaps so, but there were real practical and ideological limits to the Republicans' social Bonapartism. As James A. Rawley has written,

> Republicans were concerned less about black skins than their own. If historians have sometimes misunderstood this reality, so too did contemporary southerners. Southerners were concerned less about slavery than racial supremacy.[31]

This was the Republicans' pre-war posture, and while the war changed much, it did not change that.

Their program, idealistic or not, involved reforms in the South which had never existed in most of the North, and which, if they were implemented, would mainly impact the South, given the distribution of the black population. At most, the Fourteenth Amendment sought to make the Radicals' Civil Rights Act (1866) constitutional, thereby protecting nationally a shortlist of rights for the freedmen.[32] The real bearing (so to speak) of the Fourteenth Amendment emerges from the clause allowing Congress to reduce "the basis of representation" of any state violating its provisions. This suggests that the Republicans were more interested in controlling the South's elections or, failing that, striking back by reducing Southern representation in Congress.

Some have said that America had a revolution which was really a civil war and a civil war which was really a revolution. On this view, Reconstruction was an attempt to define the achievements and limits of that revolution. If the Republicans' social Bonapartism proved feeble in the end, this does not mean that there was not some kind of revolution. There was, but it was a revolution in the relation of Americans and their states and localities to the federal government, which could now claim to be truly national and sovereign.[33]

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[31]James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: J.P. Lippincott, 1969), p. 274. On the racial views of the Republicans, see also Eric Foner, "The Republicans and Race," chap. 8 in *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 261–300. For pioneering antebellum Northern efforts at legal segregation, see Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

[32]See Raoul Berger, *Government by Judiciary: The Transformation of the Fourteenth Amendment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977).

[33]Richard Franklin Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859–1877* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990).

WHITE SOUTHERNERS CONTINUE THE WAR BY OTHER MEANS

In the end, it was not the relative weakness of the Yankees' radicalism which led to its defeat, but the active resistance and sabotage of white Southerners. Southern resistance led to frequent clashes with Northern occupation soldiers and black militias, especially around election time. Richard E. Rubinstein writes that, "using classical guerrilla hit-and-run techniques and supported by a probable majority of the white population, the rebels were entirely successful." With reasonably pinpointed violence directed at carpetbaggers, scalawags, and black and white supporters of the new governments, Southerners "put sand in the gears of the [Yankee] pacification machine," to use John Shy's phrase describing partisan warfare during the American Revolution.[34] Rubinstein writes that

> [b]y supporting K.K.K. activity both passively and actively, white southerners told the North, in effect: "We will accept military defeat, legal union, even economic and political dependence upon the more powerful section; but we will *not* accept military occupation, rule by outsiders or a managed social transformation *on our own home grounds*."[35]

While he can see why it came about, Rubinstein seems appalled by this low-intensity political-guerrilla "war." By contrast, Richard M. Weaver writes that "[s]ome of the means, for example the Ku Klux Klan, were irregular, but essentially it was the political genius of Jefferson, of Washington, of Madison, and of Pinckney expressing itself in times of trouble and oppression."[36] If the Dunning School historians glossed over the methods used to stop Reconstruction in practice, Foner and the revisionists spend much time denouncing such

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[34]Quoted in William F. Marina, "Revolution and Social Change: The American Revolution as a People's War," *Literature of Liberty* 1, no. 2 (April-June 1978), p. 26.

[35]Richard E. Rubinstein, *Rebels in Eden: Mass Political Violence in the United States* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 69–70, emphasis in original.

[36]Richard M. Weaver, "The South and the American Union," in *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver*, p. 249. I assume that readers of this journal know that the Klan referred to here did not have the "pan-racist" agenda targeting blacks, Jews, and Catholics which we associate with the organization founded in 1915 by Dr. Simmons at Stone Mountain, Georgia. The original Klan's purpose, rightly or wrongly, was to defeat Reconstruction and drive out foreign occupiers.

methods as atrocities. Yet, to expect a people brutalized by war, rather than improved and ennobled by it, to placidly accept outside occupation, domination, and what seemed a perilous social revolution is quite unhistorical.

State by state, the so-called "Redeemers" took power from their enemies. Despite revisionists' complaints that the Redeemers, too, were corrupt, *their* governments were cheaper to keep up—a point to which we shall return. Under the new order, Northern politicians had to weigh the costs of endless military occupation and, perhaps, another kind of war. In the election of 1876, they made a "deal" with their Southern counterparts which effectively ended Reconstruction and removed federal troops from the last three occupied states, Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana. In all these events, the yeoman farmers of the South played a key role.

THE SOUTHERN PLAIN FOLK: THE SWING FACTOR IN WAR AND PEACE

Scholars in the field do not yet have an agreed upon Weberian ideal type specifying the outstanding characteristics of the white Southern "plain folk." Provisionally, I define them here as independent, property-owning farmers and herdsmen. All would have owned some land, but I use the words "property-owning" to underscore the possibility than some who owned relatively little land nonetheless owned a great many animals under the Old South's open-range system. Overall, this class could be called yeomen. As such, they correspond to the broad middle group of armed property-owners so central to republican theory. Not surprisingly, they tended to embrace that ideology. Most plain folk would not have been slave-owners, and those who were owned only small numbers of slaves.

In the 1950s, Frank L. Owsley and his disciples sought to demonstrate the importance and independence of this class in the Old South.[37] Critics of the Owsley School defended the notion of planter hegemony, denying that the plain folk enjoyed effective economic or political independence. Arguing in terms of acreage and land quality, the critics sometimes proceeded as if they believed that scientific

[37]Frank L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982). An interesting, newer collection in the Owsleyite tradition is Samuel C. Hyde, Jr., ed., *Plain Folk of the Old South Revisited* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

statements of the type "1 acre of class 1 land = 25 foot-pounds of political power" exist and can be "tested." Historians influenced by Marxism merely referred, ritualistically, to "relations of production" and "market penetration."

The social weight of the plain folk—the problem of whether they were, or even came near being, the broad middle rank called for by republican theory—is probably best decided by other methods. Certainly, the democratization of the Southern states in the Jacksonian period,[38] with the noteworthy exceptions of Virginia and South Carolina, meant that Southern politicians, whether slaveholders or professionals, must pay due attention to the yeomen's opinions. The Jackson-era reforms created a situation in which even landless white Southern males, tenants and mechanics, had suffrage.

Kinship ties existed between the plain folk, poor whites, and planters. As any genealogist knows, people in the nineteenth-century South tended to find marriage partners within three or four contiguous counties, and that, given the size of the population, often married second, third, or fourth cousins. This complicates the pattern of patron-client relations within the Southern white population, but may not prove or disprove the thesis of planter political dominance (hegemony). Marxist historian Eugene D. Genovese, a noted proponent of the notion of decisive slaveholder dominance in Southern life and politics, nevertheless writes that the plain folk were "touchy, proud people who hardly specialized in groveling." Bertram Wyatt-Brown notes that, as independent, armed people with their own code of honor, the plain folk were hardly pushovers for manipulation by their social betters. Finally, the fact that wealthier members of the plain folk participated in the "system" by owning slaves (typically around five to twelve) likely contributed to their willingness to follow leaders drawn from the class of wealthy planters. John Solomon Otto notes that "[a] quarter of all southern families owned slaves, but only 7 percent of these families held more than ten slaves—the bare minimum for inclusion in the planter class."[39]

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[38]Charles S. Sydnor, *The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 1819–1848* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948), pp. 275–93.

[39]Eugene D. Genovese, "Yeoman Farmers in a Slaveholders' Democracy," in *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism*, ed. Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 250; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Ante-Bellum South as a 'Culture of Courage'," *Southern Studies* 20,

The subject of white Southerners outside the planter elite has called forth a large body of work. This work is a vast improvement on the early writing of Yankee observers, such as the redoubtable Olmstead, who lumped together all Southern whites below the grandees as "poor whites." Some contemporary writers focus on "poor whites," but specify that they are dealing with landless mechanics, tenants, jacks-of-all-trades, lay-abouts, and even outright criminals. The writings of Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney on southerners as leisure-oriented herdsmen originating in the "Celtic fringe" of the British Isles has helped further characterize the plain folk and poor whites. It also suggests that whites with little or no land may have been as well off as they wished to be in terms of owning cows and pigs. Information about these class fault lines has vastly increased in recent decades.[40]

This growing literature shows that there was extensive "class conflict" in the Old South rooted in the usual political-economic issues: taxes, land tenure, and specification of property rights—as in the open-range question and other matters involving surviving common rights, such as hunting vs. game laws. Other fault lines were religious

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no. 3 (Fall 1981), pp. 213–46; and John Solomon Otto, "Slaveholding General Farmers in a 'Cotton County'," *Agricultural History* 55, no. 2 (April 1981), p. 167. On the plain folk as small-scale slave-owners, see Otto H. Olsen, "Historians and the Extent of Slave Ownership in the Southern United States," *Civil War History* 18 (June 1972), pp. 101–16; and James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Knopf, 1982). Owsley's critics say that he tended to play down slave ownership by plain folk.

[40]Frederick Law Olmstead was a careful and entertaining, if hostile, observer who noticed some distinctions among "poor whites" but did not name his subcategories. See his *A Journey in the Back Country* (Williamstown, Mass.: Corner House Publishers, 1972). On poor whites as distinct from plain folk, see Charles C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994); and J. Wayne Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979). On the "Celtic South," herdsmen, drovers, and the open range question, see, out of a larger body of work by these authors, Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The South from Self-Sufficiency to Peonage: An Interpretation," *American Historical Review* 85, no. 5 (December 1980), pp. 1095–118; and Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1988). I shall not wade into the controversy over the term "white trash" other than to say that Southerners, as empiricists, know them when they see them. The sheer bulk of the work on plain folk, poor whites, etc., suggests that a synthesis on the subject cannot be far off.

(high church on the coast, low church in the backcountry) and cultural (planters from the southwest of England on the coast, Scots-Irish settlers inland). The state-mandated slave patrol shifted important enforcement costs of slavery onto non-slaveholders. In addition, there was as yet no single Solid South, but a variety of differing "Souths": Tidewater, Piedmont, Mountain, and, in its own category, Texas. North Carolina polemicist Hinton Helper, radical (and racist) spokesman for the plain folk, exposed the raw nerve of Southern internal divisions just before the War for Southern Independence.[41]

SOUTHERN YEOMEN IN THE SECESSION CRISIS

The Secession Winter did not fully unveil the the social fault lines summarized above. The elections held to nominate delegates to the state secession conventions were probably as "fair" and representative —if not more so—as the comparable elections held to elect delegates to the conventions to weigh the proposed U.S. Constitution in 1787–1788. Ideological, unconditional Unionists seem largely noticeable by their absence. Ralph A. Wooster believes it is "a fallacy" to assume "that the organized opposition in the conventions of the cotton states was predominantly unionist." J. Mills Thornton, III, writes that, in Alabama, opposition to remaining in the Union under Lincoln "was most forcefully expressed not in those areas which would have the most to lose, in a material sense, from emancipation. The threat was neither primarily material nor was its substance emancipation, except in the long run. The abomination with which the Republicans menaced the

[41]On the slave patrols and other state props of slavery, see Mark Thornton, "Slavery, Profitability, and the Market Process," *Review of Austrian Economics* 7, no. 2 (1994), pp. 21–47. William F. Freehling's *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) is useful on the internal diversity of the pre-"Civil War" South. On Helper, see his anti-slave-owner broadside, *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It* (New York: A.B. Burdick, 1860); as well as Hugh C. Bailey, *Hinton Rowan Helper: Abolitionist Racist* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1965). Clement Eaton discusses such Southern antislavery proponents as Helper, Daniel R. Goodloe, and Henry Ruffner in *The Mind of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), pp. 152–69; see also Carl N. Degler, "The Peculiar Dissent of the Nineteenth-Century South," in *Dissent: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, ed. Alfred F. Young (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1968), pp. 110–35.

South was not freedom but slavery."[42] Alabama's plain folk, in other words, feared *political* enslavement in the old Union, a fear stemming from their Jacksonian commitment to republican theory. Thornton believes that the "cooperationists" in the secession debate were not, for the most part, disguised Unionists, but were men who genuinely preferred a plan of secession coordinated with other seceding states.

Michael P. Johnson's findings concerning Georgia are similar. He notes that disunionists in Georgia campaigned on republican ideas:

> When secessionists tied their hopes to the ideas of the Founding Fathers, rather than to the pro-slavery argument, they implicitly acknowledged *the limited hegemony of slaveholders*. The ideology of 1776 did what proslavery ideology apparently could not do. . . . If there had been a broad consensus on the proslavery view that slavery was the fundamental basis of southern society, secessionists would have had to demonstrate only that the Lincoln administration threatened slavery.[43]

As it was, secession carried most of the plain folk. Similarly, Michael Holt writes that "secessionist rhetoric was aimed primarily at ideological values shared by all white Southerners, not at the economic interests of slaveholders alone," and that "Democratic non-slaveholders were the decisive group throughout the South."[44] He adds that the political experience of mountain Southerners, differing from that in the Lower South, gave them greater confidence that republicanism could be sustained without secession.

Once Lincoln forced their hand, the Upper South yeomen largely chose the secessionist path of their more southerly peers. Feelings of Southern solidarity (incipient "nationalism"), a particular "take" on republicanism, and (yes) fear of racial upheaval surely contributed. There were pockets of real Unionists, but to find any large number, one has to look in Kentucky, eastern Tennessee, and western Virginia.

Support for the Confederate cause by plain folk, and, indeed, by most poor whites, was probably more conditional than the Montgomery

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[42]Ralph A. Wooster, "The Secession of the Lower South: An Examination of Changing Interpretations," *Civil War History* 7, no. 2 (June 1961), p. 125; and Mills Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*, pp. 413–14.

[43]Michael P. Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic*, p. 33, italics added.

[44]Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983), pp. 243–44.

(later Richmond) leadership realized. In a study of populist politics in the Georgia Upcountry, Steven Hahn remarks:

> Southern Rights or Unionism could be two sides of the same coin—the coin of local autonomy beholden to a particular social, economic, and political experience. . . . [Thus,] a state-rights stance could be attractive, less because it represented a constitutional protection for slavery than because it expressed a broader commitment to defending local affairs and institutions against the intrusions of outsiders.[45]

SOUTHERN YEOMEN IN THE WAR FOR SOUTHERN INDEPENDENCE

The Richmond leadership cadre soon revealed itself as more Hamiltonian than Jeffersonian in practice.[46] Jefferson Davis's adoption of the so-called "offensive defense" required a far more aggressive strategy than the name suggests and involved a gargantuan effort to hold territory almost for its own sake. Worse still, the decision to spend most of the war defending *one city* remarkably close to the enemy's capital further distorted Confederate policy and wasted its resources.

These decisions precluded a genuinely defensive war shading over into guerrilla war, the kind of war which arguably had been the hidden key to American success against the British during the American Revolution.[47] In a country where many whites could ride and shoot with great skill, where they knew the country itself, and where vast expanses of varied terrain stood ready to help swallow up invaders, the offhandedness with which the West Point–trained C.S. authorities threw away the guerrilla option seems astounding, especially considering the Confederate Army's seemingly boundless willingness to use up its relatively scarce manpower in frontal charges resulting

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[45]Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 107.

[46]See Stromberg, "The War for Southern Independence," pp. 44–45; and Paul D. Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), pp. 82–86.

[47]See Marina, "Revolution and Social Change," pp. 5–30.

in high casualty rates.[48] This decision may have stemmed from that famous "habit of command" said to be such a virtue among the planter elite.

Southerners made great fighters and bad soldiers—"bad" from the standpoint of military punctilio, that is. The Confederate Army's "democratic" character, with its elected officers and the general atmosphere of an impromptu hunting party, is often cited by historians. Such men seem more than normally predisposed to partisan warfare. Even their inherent "Celtic" tendencies to suicidal bravery[49] might have done more good had the guerrilla option been used more frequently. Where it was employed, it succeeded. At sea, for lack of any other obvious choice, Confederate raiders accomplished much for the cause. This was, in effect, the guerrilla model afloat.[50]

Guerrilla war was a real option, all the more so once the Yankees adopted proto-modern total war. Robert Kerby remarks on the potential "fit" between the culture of the Southern plain folk and guerrilla war: "The South's enlisted men knew instinctively how to wage their revolution better than their generals did."[51] Grady McWhiney adds:

> The rifled muzzleloader gave the defense at least three times the strength of the offense; theoretically the Confederates could have stayed in entrenchments and killed every man in the Union army before the South exhausted its own human resources.[52]

Elsewhere, McWhiney notes that this lesson should have been obvious from the Mexican War, but that West Pointers on both sides, typically, had missed the point. Jefferson Davis's last message to the people of

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[48]On Confederate leaders' willingness to sustain high casualties, see Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, *Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1982).

[49]For this "Celtic" dimension, see McWhiney and Jamieson, *Attack and Die*, pp. 170–91.

[50]See, for example, Arthur Sinclair, *Two Years on the Alabama* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1989). For a general discussion of commerce raiding, see Larry J. Sechrest, "Privateering and National Defense: Naval Warfare for Private Profit," *www.mises.org,* Working Papers.

[51]Robert L. Kerby, "Why the Confederacy Lost," *Review of Politics* 35, no. 3 (July 1973), pp. 338–39

[52]Grady McWhiney, "Who Whipped Whom," in *Southerners and Other Americans* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 116.

the Confederacy called for partisan warfare, but it was three-and-a-half years too late.[53]

So why was there no Confederate guerrilla war? In an essay that compares the War for Southern Independence and the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1903, George M. Frederickson suggests that, in the former case, Confederate leaders feared that such a strategy would get out of their control. Given the class divisions within the Southern white population, they did not wish to take the risk.[54] This may be true, but the decision was hardly in the interest of the majority of those called on to die.

RESULTING DISCONTENT OF THE YEOMANRY

Confederate wartime policies resulted in a loss of support for the C.S. cause. Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia, Confederate Vice President, had warned of this from the beginning. Military conscription and class-based exemptions from it, taxes in-kind, runaway inflation, impressment of private property, and similar practices alienated the Southern people. Great sacrifices leading to little apparent success squandered not just the lives and fortunes but also the good will and morale of the Confederate public, of which the most important element was the plain folk.

What followed was the rise of a wartime "peace party," sometimes mistaken by historians, rather willfully, for ideological Unionists. Congressional elections in North Carolina sent an increasingly pro-peace delegation to the Confederate House. Much-abused Governors Joe Brown of Georgia and Rupert Vance of North Carolina emerged as spokesmen for an unorganized Confederate internal opposition "party," as did Congressman W.W. Boyce of South Carolina. The Georgia group—Alexander Stephens, his brother Linton, Governor Brown, and Robert Toombs—were especially prominent as critics of Richmond's policies and strategy. While they may have harbored illusions

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[53]On the U.S. and C.S. generals' misreading of their Mexican War experience, see Grady McWhiney, "Conservatism and the Military," *Continuity: A Journal of History*, 4/5 (Spring/Fall 1982), pp. 93–126; see also Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still, Jr., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

[54]George C. Frederickson, *Why the Confederacy Did Not Fight a Guerrilla War after the Fall of Richmond: A Comparative View* (Gettysburg, Penn.: Gettysburg College, 1996), pp. 26–29.

of a negotiated peace leading to Southern independence, these disaffected "revolutionary defeatists" and their plain folk constituents had not become ideological re-unionists on Northern terms. Rather, they hoped that changes in Confederate policies, or the election of General McClellan in the North, or Northern war weariness might end the brutal war and make possible the resumption of normal life—with or without slavery, which both the war itself and Lincoln's 1863 addition to his proclaimed war aims has already eroded.[55]

Some writers imagine that widespread suffering and discontent show that the plain folk should have switched their allegiances to the *other* costly, centralizing outfit, based in Washington. They constituted, supposedly, natural Unionists: the local white constituency for the Republican Party in the South.[56] That the plain folk shunned this role for the most part is proof, for many historians, that they suffered from a "false consciousness" constructed for them by the great slaveholders, or that their "racism" was decisive. Racial antipathies certainly played an important role both North and South, but even they did not exist in a political and economic vacuum. Anyway, "racism," a concept with ever-changing content these days, is holding up a rather heavy explanatory load in historiography and may need a rest. Racism must be factored in, but other things were at stake.

THE YEOMEN MOBILIZE TO DEFEAT OUTSIDE OCCUPATION

The C.S. government had alienated the plain folk. Now, with Confederate defeat, the U.S. government and its allies did the same

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[55]Stromberg, "The War for Southern Independence," p. 45; for the waning of Confederate morale, see Escott, *After Secession*, pp. 94–134; on the North Carolina "peace" contingent, see Richard E. Beringer, "The Unconscious 'Spirit of Party' in the Confederate Congress," in *Beyond the Civil War Synthesis*, pp. 185–201; on economic conditions, see Robert B. Ekelund, Jr., and Mark Thornton, "The Union Blockade and Demoralization of the South: Relative Prices in the Confederacy," *Social Science Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (December 1992), pp. 890–902, and "The 'Confederate' Blockade of the South," *Quarterly Journal of Austrian Economics* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2001), pp. 23–42; for defenses of Stephens, see John R. Brumgardt, "The Confederate Career of Alexander H. Stephens: The Case Reopened," *Civil War History* 27, no. 1 (March 1981), pp. 64–81; and William Marina and Joseph Stromberg, "'Truths of the Defeated': Alexander H. Stephens's Reflections on the Course of the American Republic," *Continuity: A Journal of History* 9 (Fall 1984), pp. 121–38.

[56]Ash, "Poor Whites in the Occupied South, 1861–1865," pp. 40–62.

and more. As for the yeomen's "natural role" as the Southern Republican mass base (alongside the freedmen), the national Republicans' betrayal of plain folk allies (if any) was inevitable, and sooner rather than later. The party of the Union quickly alienated its limited plain folk and poor white supporters by appearing too egalitarian, and by letting it seem that its real interests were railroad bonds, business subsidies, and government salaries, in pursuit of which they imposed much higher taxes than Southerners were accustomed to paying. In their last desperate years in power, the Republicans in the South sacrificed the freedmen's interests *first* in a vain attempt to keep their white supporters in tow—another of those tragic ironies of which revisionists like to write.

The vast majority of the plain folk had not been tempted to join the "biracial social revolution" offered by their late conquerors. The North had answered the question often heard during the last two years of the war: could the Northern government be more despotic than the one in Richmond? In an exercise in Anglo-American empiricism, many plain folk quickly concluded that it could. That lesson learned, the plain folk and the former planters strove by means fair and foul to drive out the occupiers and unmake their institutions. They succeeded with respect to the Yankees' social revolution, but failed, in the end, to reverse the Yankees' hard-won control over the South's political economy. Given the circumstances, though, such an outcome does not seem unexpected.

CENTRALITY OF TAXATION AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

The plain folk did not take kindly to either foreign occupation or the temporary elevation of the freedmen. They had just been dragged through a brutal and destructive war, which their betters both North and South claimed had somehow centered on the question of slavery. To expect them to be kindly disposed would be too much.

But does racism really possess all the explanatory powers which contemporary writers attribute to it? A growing literature sees taxation as the decisive issue for the plain folk and, along with that, a desire, stemming from the republican ideological heritage, to recover local self-government. Thus, J. Mills Thornton, III, demonstrates that pre-war Southern governments derived much of their revenue from property taxes on slaves. This in itself says something about the plain folk's political power in the face of supposed planter hegemony. After the

war, that property no longer existed, and the radical Reconstruction governments resorted to general taxes on land. Further, the Republican regimes were committed to such ambitious projects as expanded public education, "infrastructure," and that perennial favorite, railroad subsidies.

As a result, hard-pressed yeoman farmers trying to recover from war-wrought destruction found themselves presented with drastically higher tax bills. Some had never even *seen* a tax bill before the war. While details vary from state to state, Thornton sees something that has eluded historians:

> Recent historians of Reconstruction, displaying little sensitivity to the world view of nineteenth-century Southern small farmers, have therefore been unable to offer any compelling explanation for small farmers' behavior during the decade [1867–1877]. Small farmers' increasing distrust of the Republicans, and their eventual cooperation with the Redeemer Democrats in overthrowing Reconstruction, have been attributed simply to racism. . . . [But] racism [is not] an all-purpose explanation for small farmers' electoral behavior.[57]

John Tice Moore believes that the Redeemers delivered most of what their plain folk constituents wanted:

> [T]he southern Democrats neither abandoned the farmers nor embraced Whiggery in the aftermath of Reconstruction. Indeed, their economic programs were more congruent with the ideals of Jefferson, Jackson, or even Calhoun than with those of Clay or Webster.[58]

Revisionists tend to complain that Democrats' exploitation of the tax issue was somehow "unfair." *What*, exactly, would revisionists expect them to have done? The Southern states were not modern social democracies working on the assumption that there is no limit, in principle or fact, to the amount of people's wealth which may be taxed away and spent on "services." The plain folk got what they wanted,

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[57]J. Mills Thornton, III, "Fiscal Policy and the Failure of Reconstruction in the Lower South," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 349–94, quotations on pp. 349–50.

[58]John Tice Moore, "Redeemers Reconsidered: Change and Continuity in the Democratic South," in *C. Vann Woodward: A Southern Historian and His Critics*, ed. John Herbert Roper (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), p. 110.

and if they wanted the wrong thing, they were still better off in that respect than modern Americans. The Redeemers, if not perfect, were cheaper to maintain. Under their regimes, many plain folk regained lands lost to tax sales during the Republican rule.[59]

Michael R. Hyman writes, however, that many yeoman farmers in the lower South were unhappy even with the lower level of taxes under the Redeemers. Such farmers resented tax concessions to corporations but "did not favor correcting deficiencies in southern state tax systems by centralizing the systems. *They preferred to keep tax officials responsible to the communities they served*."[60] This may be "false consciousness" and mistaken self-interest, but it does reflect an ideological continuity in plain folk thinking from Jefferson and Jackson down to secession, war, Reconstruction, and, probably, into the Populist movement.

With a certain loss of ideological precision, the republican tradition contributed to the Southern Populist movement of later decades. Clyde Wilson finds Populists "chiefly in the upcountry plantation belt, among the small planters and larger yeomen—the same regions that had been most in favor of secession in 1861." He notes that Tom Watson, the Georgia Populist *par excellence*, "was tutored in politics by the Confederate statesmen Robert Toombs and Alexander Stephens."[61]

LOCALISM, NATION-STATE, AND EMPIRE

The revisionists' refrain that the Redeemers, or Bourbon Democrats, as they are later called, were "just as corrupt" as the carpetbaggers

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[59]Moore, "Redeemers Reconsidered," p. 107.

[60]Michael R. Hyman, "Taxation, Public Policy, and Political Dissent: Yeoman Dissatisfaction in the Post-Reconstruction Lower South," *Journal of Southern History* 55, no. 1 (February 1989), p. 68, emphasis added.

[61]Clyde Wilson, "Up at the Fork of the Creek: In Search of American Populism," *Telos* 104 (Summer 1995), p. 78. For earlier phases of republicanism ("country ideology"), see Robert Shalhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 29, no. 4 (January 1972), pp. 49–80; and John M. Murrin, "The Great Inversion, or Court versus Country: A Comparison of the Revolution Settlements in England (1688–1721) and America (1776–1816)," in *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 368–453; and Clyde Wilson, "The Jeffersonian Conservative Tradition," *Modern Age* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1969–70), pp. 36–48.

and scalawags obscures an important truth: people might endure a little "political capitalism"[62] at the local level more easily than a full-fledged program of centralized state capitalism, however benevolent the professed intentions of its sponsors. Seen through social democratic glasses, the Bourbons did nothing for the people except leave them alone in most respects. Why that particular service is felt to be unworthy, I do not know.

Reconstruction can be seen as a phase in the consolidation of the U.S. continental-imperial state apparatus.[63] At the level of the saved Union, Northern politicians and their business allies got what they wanted: a consolidated national state against which no region or locality would again dare "rebel." Despite internal differences within the national political elite,[64] they were able to impose a political economy resting on high tariffs and subsidies to favored industries, a system that historians ever after have denounced as constituting "*laissez faire*." In republican terms, the war and Reconstruction represent the triumph of the Court party. Secretary of State William H. Seward, who lasted from the first Lincoln administration into that of Grant, perfectly embodies the Northern mercantilist program. It is no accident that Seward had already envisioned a U.S. neo-mercantilist world empire.[65]

Neither is it especially accidental that the Saved Union now undertook to solve the Plains Indians problem, as DiLorenzo points out. Likewise, the Republican platform of 1856 had denounced Southern slavery and Mormon polygamy as "twin relics of barbarism." By the 1880s, the Saved Union was solving the Mormon problem, too, using

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[62]See Gabriel Kolko, "Max Weber on America," in *Studies in the Philosophy of History*, ed. George H. Nadel (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 180–97.

[63]On the "civil war" and Reconstruction as state-building processes, see Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan.* Norbert Finzsch and Jürgen Martschukat, ed., *Different Restorations—Reconstruction and "Wiederaufbau" in the United States and Germany: 1865—1945—1989* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996), compares state-building "reconstructions" in the United States and Germany; unfortunately, with few exceptions, the essays in this collection set a good example of how *not* to write comparative history.

[64]See Howard K. Beale, "The Tariff and Reconstruction," *American Historical Review* 35, no. 2 (January 1930), pp. 276–94; and Stanley Coben, "Northeastern Business and Radical Reconstruction: A Re-Examination," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 46, no. 1 (June 1959), pp. 67–90.

[65]Ernest N. Paolino, *The Foundations of the American Empire: William Henry Seward and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973).

its by now habitual methods. Interestingly, the only opposition to the bills that escheated the Mormon Church's Salt Lake and other properties, set up special, manipulable registrars of elections, and the rest of it, came from Southern Democrats who saw the persecution as an anti-republican repetition of Reconstruction. Southerners had regarded Mormonism and its "peculiar institutions" as another crazed by-product of Yankee intellectual ferment and religious instability. Nevertheless, roughly half the members of Southern Congressional delegations overcame their strong aversion to Mormonism and voted against the anti-Mormon legislation.[66]

There is also an interesting parallel between the way in which U.S. and British ruling groups abandoned their ostensible commitment to subject non-white peoples as part of their respective "reconstructions" of secessionist peoples in the South and the Boer Republics.[67] Their political-economic goals secured, both empires left the care of subject populations in the hands of the conquered. This was an imperfect result in an imperfect world, but, for those there at the time, it seemed better than a renewal of either war or its low-intensity equivalent. War is a blunt instrument unsuited, perhaps, for delicate projects of social reform.

No space remains to address such other outstanding issues of the post-Reconstruction South as the "internal colonialism" thesis of C. Vann Woodward, Walter Prescott Webb, B.B. Kendrick, and A.B. Moore. Nor can I do justice here to the debate over the notion of a Southern "Prussian Road to Capitalism" conditioned by Northern power, or to the fate of the freedmen abandoned by their putative Northern protectors. The same applies to the interesting debate over the political "bearing" of the closure of the Old South's open range. Such questions of ideology, political power, and economics must wait for another day.[68]

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[66]DiLorenzo, "Reconstructing America," p. 20; David Buice, "A Stench in the Nostrils of Honest Men: Southern Democrats and the Edmunds Act of 1882," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1988), pp. 100–13. For the larger, structural problem, see D.W. Meinig, "The Mormon Nation and the American Empire," *Journal of Mormon History* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1996), pp. 33–51.

[67]Joseph R. Stromberg, "*Maatskappy*, State, and Empire: A Pro-Boer Revision," *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1998–99), pp. 21–26.

[68]I expressed some views on these matters in 1979 which, in the light of more reading (and criticism), I may wish to revise. A well-established "Civil War"

YET ANOTHER "IRONY"?

The aftermath of the war of 1861–1865 suggests that the ordinary people of the North, Northern "plain folk," so to speak, lost something in the war for which they thought they were fighting. For Eric Foner, this is just another tragic irony of history:

> modern, total war, against the intentions of those who fought, was a powerful modernizing force, [which brought about] the rationalization of capitalist enterprise, the centralization of national institutions, and, in certain industries, mechanization and factory production. . . . Each side fought to defend a distinct vision of the good society, but each vision was destroyed by the very struggle to preserve it.[69]

Perhaps, but perhaps not. Maybe Northerners' support for Lincoln's invasion of the South, and not the Southern plain folk's failure to rally behind Lincoln, was the great mistake, the *real* problem. False consciousness can be argued more than one way. Foner's view perfectly illustrates what Edward P. Lawton saw as the Northerners' "fatalistic view of history": their "mixed pragmatic-deterministic perspective on the events of our past."[70]

I leave the final word on the war and Reconstruction to the eminent historian Clyde Wilson:

> Historians who are well aware of the corruption that followed the war . . . seem to imply that it mysteriously appeared after Lincoln's death, and somehow miss the obvious conclusion that it was implicit in the goals of the Lincoln war party. This is to abandon fact and reason for the mysticism of Union and emancipation, a pseudo-religious appeal inappropriate to the discourse of free men.[71]

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historian treats theses put forward by Frank Meyer, Murray N. Rothbard, Joseph R. Stromberg, and Jeffrey Rogers Hummel, in Thomas J. Pressly, "'Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men': Modern Libertarians Interpret the United States Civil War, 1960s–1990s: A Review Essay," *Civil War History* 46, no. 3 (September 2000), pp. 254–65.

[69]Eric Foner, "The Causes of the American Civil War: Recent Interpretations and New Directions," in *Beyond the Civil War Synthesis*, pp. 31–32.

[70]Lawton, *The South and the Nation*, p. 31.

[71]Clyde N. Wilson, "War, Reconstruction, and the End of the Old Republic," in *The Costs of War: America's Pyrrhic Victories*, ed. John V. Denson, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1999), p. 160.

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