The Reconstruction Amendments and their Relevance to Economic and Social Issues Faced by the United States from the 19th Century Onwards

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This concise thesis concerns the Reconstruction era; its central argument is that “the enforcement of the Reconstruction amendments and related legislation did not proceed in a smooth manner, but rather […] it was a long-term process of gradually remodeling American society and its perception of the ‘other’ race, a process which some will argue is still unfinished today” (10). Or, as we read towards the end of the thesis, the Reconstruction amendments were “violated and misinterpreted,” and they “were to have their full implications come to terms with by the nation only in the 1950s and 1960s” (46) and even later.

As mentioned above, the thesis is clear and stylistically polished. What it lacks, I think, is a reflection on the history it presents. The text, for the most part, is a non-polemical historical overview which, interesting as it is, could have been more engaging had it drawn on further resources or at least had it presented some debates in the studies of Reconstruction. The thesis relies on two works by Eric Foner; the second chapter brings in Peter Kolchin’s American Slavery: 1619-1877; and W. E. B. Du Bois is incorporated (although beyond the Introduction, it is not indicated where). But Foner’s studies determine the tone of the thesis and the concluding sentence sounds like an homage to this scholar. This is fine, but even if the intention of this thesis was an analysis of Foner’s writings about Reconstruction (which it is not), then his views could have been inserted in the context and engaged with as interpretations of history rather than as its definitive explication. Where does Foner’s understanding of the Reconstruction era come from? Are there indeed no further worthwhile studies of the period that would (or would not) present different views?

Second, the thesis nicely illustrates the limits of mere legislative changes, but then it speaks about Reconstruction amendments as “gradually remodeling American society” (see above). What then, in Ms. Dudíková’s view, is the role of “high politics” in the historical process? And could she briefly discuss the position of the arts within the socio-politico-economic machinery she depicts?

Nevertheless, as a BA level work, the thesis is satisfactory and may be graded “very good” or “výborně.”

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Proposed Grade: velmi dobře or výborně.