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

I wish to thank to Professor David Robbins for inspiration, advice and support with which he provided me over the course of writing this thesis.
Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně, a že jsem uvedla všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

V Praze, dne 5. prosince 2011

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a period in the history of the United States between 1865 and 1877 known as Reconstruction. It develops around the major pieces of legislation that were enacted over the course of its duration, and which incorporated for the first time into the American Constitution civil rights related to the country’s black population of (in the examined period already former) slaves. The Reconstruction Amendments, as Amendments Thirteen, Fourteen, and Fifteen to the U.S. Constitution came to be known, had several functions: one of them was to define the status of freed blacks in the post-war country, and they were also to serve as a means of restoring political and economic stability in the South devastated by the Civil War.

The first part of the thesis looks at the so-called Presidential Reconstruction, which lasted until 1866 and was characterised by rather ‘mild’ provisions in the South on the part of the U.S. government. Lack of national intervention on the level of individual states, insufficient financial funds and President Johnson’s sympathy toward the class of white Southern planters prevented a more radical development in the post-war South. Although Presidential Reconstruction saw some considerable achievements, such as the setting up of schools, health facilities and churches to be attended by the black population, it failed to provide blacks with citizenship and the right to vote.

The second part of the thesis concerns itself with the Radical Reconstruction starting in 1866, that is when Congress passed the Fourteenth Amendment granting former slaves and their children American citizenship. It was followed by other Reconstruction legislation and finally the Fifteenth Amendment, which ‘prohibited each government in the United States from denying a citizen the right to vote based on that citizen's "race, color, or previous
condition of servitude"¹ Radical Reconstruction is an era that overlaps what is ironically called the ‘Gilded Age,’ a time of massive industrial growth and expansion of the railroads. It is a time in which the United States economically flourished, or so it seemed, but large debts and the incapacity of the railroads to pay for themselves led to the fall of major financial houses and a collapse of the New York Stock Exchange in 1873. This event precipitated the end of Reconstruction, which came in 1877, with the election as president of Republican moderate Rutherford B. Hayes, who had promised during his campaign that, if elected, he would minimize federal intervention in the Southern states.

The final chapter on Reconstruction’s aftermath and implications looks briefly at what followed after 1877 in terms of civil rights of African Americans and racial segregation (known as Jim Crow), and it also discusses the general socio-economic trends in American society of the day.

SHRNUTÍ

Tato práce se zabývá úsekcem v dějinách Spojených Států Amerických mezi lety 1865 až 1877 známým pod pojmem „rekonstrukce“. Práce se odvíjí od významných legislativních počínů americké vlády v tomto období, které poprvé v historii země zakotvily do americké ústavy občanská práva vztahující se na černou populaci (ve zkoumané době již bývalých) otroků. Rekonstrukční dodatky, jak se třináctý, čtrnáctý a patnáctý dodatek ústavy zkráceně nazývají, měly vyřešit několik otázek: měly definovat postavení osvobozených černochů v poválečném období a také sloužit jako právní pilíř, na jehož základě by došlo k obnovení politické a ekonomické stability jihu země zničeném občanskou válkou.

První část práce zkoumá rekonstrukci pod vedením prezidenta Johnsona, která trvala do roku 1866 a jsou pro ni charakteristická umírněná opatření ze strany vlády Spojených Států týkající se jihu země. Uspokojivějšímu rozvoji poválečného jihu stály v cestě především nedostatečná intervence národní vlády na úrovni jednotlivých států, nedostatek finančních prostředků a Johnsonovo stranění vrstvě bílých plantážníků. Ačkoliv prezidentská rekonstrukce byla v některých oblastech úspěšná – například docházelo k zakládání škol, zdravotních zařízení a kostelů určených černošské populaci – nepodařilo se během ní prosadit udělení občanství a volebního práva bývalým otrokům.

Ve druhé části práce jsem se zaměřila na rekonstrukci pod vedením Radikálů po roce 1866, to je v době, kdy kongres schválil čtrnáctý dodatek ústavy, kterým získali bývalí otroci a jejich potomci americké občanství. Dodatek byl následován další legislativou a konečně i dodatkem patnáctým, který zakazoval vládám jednotlivých států upírat komukoli volební právo na základě rasy, barvy kůže nebo předchozího otroctví. Radikální rekonstrukce se časově kryje s obdobím nazývaným poněkud ironicky „the Gilded Age,” tedy “pozlacený věk.“ Je to doba, ve které Spojené státy zažívaly obrovský industriální rozmach spojený s
rozšířením železniční výstavby, a země se díky tomu dostala na ekonomické výsluní, za čímž ovšem nestála plusová ekonomika, ale hospodaření “na dluh”. Vysoká zadluženost a neschopnost železnice si na sebe vydělat měly za důsledek krach předních finančních institucí a nakonec i pád newyorské burzy v roce 1873. Tato událost předznamenala zánik rekonstrukce, ke kterému došlo v roce 1877, kdy nově zvolený president Hayes dostál svému předvolebnímu slibu, že se jeho vláda bude jen minimálně angažovat v záležitostech jihu.

Závěrečná kapitola “Reconstruction’s Aftermath and Implications” podává krátký pohled na postavení Afro-Američanů po roce 1877 poznamenané segregačními zákony, tzv. Jim Crow, a na obecné socio-ekonomické trendy v americké společnosti té doby.
1. INTRODUCTION

The Reconstruction era that followed the end of the Civil War can be perceived as a rather controversial period in the history of the United States of America. Undoubtedly, the year 1865 produced a breakthrough (in the form of the Thirteenth Amendment) in the civil status of African Americans; but the following twelve years, during which the national government took control over the defeated Southern states, proved to be both a success and a failure in terms of political, economic and social changes that affected the population of the U.S. and of which whites and blacks alike became both co-creators and co-victims. In this context it is surprising that despite its enormous significance, Reconstruction has been comprehensively examined by relatively few scholars. One of them, Eric Foner, was an invaluable source when writing my thesis. Another, W.E.B. Du Bois, provided me, through his essay *Reconstruction and its Benefits*, with insights into Reconstruction constitutions and the pros and cons of Republican rule in the South during the examined period.

Du Bois expressed in his “Black Reconstruction in America” (first published in 1935) the notion that:

The unending tragedy of Reconstruction is the utter inability of the American mind to grasp its real significance, its national and world-wide implications....This problem involved the very foundations of American democracy, both political and economic.

As late as 1990, only one in five graduating senior students in the U.S. was able correctly to identify Reconstruction, making it the least known period in the history of the United States. Foner considers the general ignorance of Reconstruction unfortunate because it is in no way a dead era, on the contrary its relevance to the present is demonstrated every year as Congress
and the Supreme Court debate issues arising from Reconstruction legislation. I chose the topic of my thesis precisely because, despite the quite marginal interest of the public in the period, I feel that the theme is of very contemporary relevance, since it touches upon issues with which not only Americans but nations worldwide deal in the world of today; whether it is so-called ‘reverse discrimination’ on the one hand, or the emergence of groups that oppose the idea of multi-racial communities for reasons that might have roots similar to those of the 19th century (such as xenophobia or the fear of economic advancement of one race over the other). Reconstruction is also a period in which the emancipation of American women and female suffrage started to be vividly discussed in relation to the civil rights movement and ‘the popular passion of liberty and equality,’ giving the era yet another meaning. I am looking specifically, although not exclusively, into the economic and social implications of Reconstruction not only because its main goal was the economic renewal of the Southern states, but also because the discrepancies between the economies and societies of the North and the South were, in my opinion, one of the underlying issues leading to the Civil War.

In my thesis I have attempted to show that the enforcement of the Reconstruction amendments and related legislation did not proceed in a smooth manner, but rather that it was a long-term process of gradually remodelling American society and its perception of the ‘other’ race, a process which some will argue is still unfinished today. Although Reconstruction legislation had implications both in the South and the North of the United States its effects were most visible in the South where the majority of blacks lived. In this context I think it is also important to note that Reconstruction did not proceed in a uniform fashion in all parts of the South; however, because of the extent of the topic and the limited

3 Foner, *Forever Free* 123.
space of a bachelor thesis, I am referring throughout my paper to the states of the South as a unit rather than separating them into individual legal entities, although the pace and the ways in which each particular state adopted measures arising from the Reconstruction program may have been very different.

While without doubt ‘the transformation of slaves into free labourers and equal citizens was the most dramatic example of the social and political changes unleashed by the Civil War and emancipation,’ I have tried to question the factual equality of the blacks, both economic and social, and consider the obstacles that prevented a genuine ‘freedom’ of African Americans in the period covering the years 1865–1877 -- that is, until the climax of the economic crisis and the consequent failure of Reconstruction. For the purpose of my argument I have used the above mentioned sources and other authors and websites devoted to the history of the U.S. and its institutions (a complete overview of which I include on the Bibliography page).
2. PRESIDENTIAL RECONSTRUCTION

2.1 The Notions of Freedom

‘With reference to emancipation, we are at the beginning of the war,’ David L. Swain, former governor of North Carolina, noted in 1865.4 His somewhat ironic statement sums up the fact that the end of slavery, introduced into to U.S. Constitution by the Thirteenth Amendment and effective as of December 1865, foreshadowed years of disputes over ‘where and how [were the slaves freed during the Civil War] to fit into a supposedly egalitarian system.’5 It soon seemed obvious that the former slaves, who at that time numbered approximately four million,6 would not be completely free, as both the South and the North, and even the individual states within them, had their own understanding of the meaning of freedom. Just what exactly the word ‘freedom’ in the context of the post-bellum era meant is almost impossible to define; its meaning kept changing over time, and it had different connotations for individuals also. Whereas for some it meant ‘an end to the separation of families, the abolition of punishment by the lash, and the opportunity to educate their children,’7 for others, like former slave Henry Adams, ‘freedom’ equalled the ability to access the same economic opportunities as the whites did: ‘I said if I cannot do like a white man, I am not free. I see how poor white people do. I ought to do so too, or else I am a slave.’8 As Eric Foner points out, “'freedom' itself became a terrain of conflict (...)”9 In the context of the U.S., we can perceive freedom as connected with mobility in a wider sense: as the possibility to move freely from place to place at a time of our choice or as a move up the social ladder,

6 Foner, Forever Free 79.
7 Foner, Reconstruction 78.
8 Foner, Forever Free 189.
9 Foner, Reconstruction 77.
which was related to the possession of land, a commercial enterprise or the chance of acquiring those at some point in one’s life. Secondly, and just as importantly, a person who is free has the means to improve his or her conditions of life, which in a democratic society is related to voting rights. Looking at these assumptions we can establish that the slaves who came out of the Civil War as freedmen benefited but little from the ‘rights’ that a white man living in the U.S. of the 19th century enjoyed (I am deliberately leaving out women as they were not entitled to the same rights as men as yet).

Just how deeply the notion of racial and class inequality was embedded into the ways in which the Southerners thought, can be demonstrated by the numerous acts of violence against the former slaves that appeared in the region after the abolition of slavery. Foner picked a relatively marginal case of violation of the rights of the blacks to show how everyday life was politicised in the Reconstruction era. In an incident reported in 1869 to the state’s governor Black North Carolinian A. D. Lewis complains:

Please allow me to call your kine attention to a transaction which occurred to day between me and Dr. A. H. Jones.... I was in my field at my own work and this Jones came by me and drove up to a man’s gate that live close by ...and ordered my child to come there and open that gate for him ... whole there was children in the yard at the same time not more than twenty yards from him and jest because they were white and mine black he woood not call them to open the gate.... I spoke gently to him that [the white children] hundred yards rite into my field where I was at my own work and double his fist and strick me in the face three times and...cursed me [as] a dum old Radical....Now governor I wants you to please rite to me how to bring this man to jestus.10

The above example illustrates, according to Foner, several facts of the Reconstruction days: how the whites continued to treat the blacks as the inferior race, Lewis’

powerful sense of place, his quiet dignity in the face of assault, his refusal to allow his son to be treated differently from white children or to let a stranger’s authority to be

10 Foner, Reconstruction 122.
imposed on his family, the way an everyday encounter rapidly descended into violence and acquired political meaning, and Lewis’ assumption (reflecting the situation after 1867) that blacks could expect justice from the government under which they lived.\textsuperscript{11}

But, as Foner argues, ‘most of all, it illustrates how day-to-day encounters between the races became infused with the tensions inevitable when a social order, with its established power relations and commonly understood rules of conduct, has been swept away and a new one has not yet come into being.’\textsuperscript{12}

During the period of transition from slavery to equality there are two major socio-political trends that we can follow and question the reasons for their occurrence: one is the ongoing treatment of the blacks by the whites as an inferior class, and the other one is the failure of the national government to restrict them from doing so. In order to offer explanation of these occurrences, I would like to look at a number of substantial issues concerning the former slaves that arose after the victory of the Union over the Confederacy in 1865. The first problem was where to fit the freed slaves into the newly formed society; the second problem regarded masses of land on which the slaves had previously worked as unpaid labour, and which had to continue to be taken care of if the South was to avoid bankruptcy, and the third problem that stirred much discussion among politicians of the day was the question of black suffrage, ‘the logical sequence of negro emancipation,’ according to Charles Sumner, Massachusetts senator and a leading figure of the Radical Republicans. Most Democrats or conservative Republicans of the day argued that the blacks could or should not vote as they lacked the education necessary for one to make responsible choices. Carl Schurz opposed such an opinion when he replied: ‘It is idle to say that it will be time to speak of negro suffrage when the whole colored race will be educated, for the ballot may be necessary to him

\textsuperscript{11} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 123.
\textsuperscript{12} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 123.
to secure his education."\textsuperscript{13} As can be seen from the above, emancipation was an issue that overlapped into the social, economic as well as political spheres. With freed slaves forming as much as 25 to 60 percent of the overall population in the states of the Deep South,\textsuperscript{14} they constituted an essential workforce of the Southern economy which had been, by and large, based on unpaid labour, now banned, and at the same time they represented a powerful mass of potential voters. Just how much freedom the African American should possess was, in this light, not only a matter for individual planters, but also a matter that had to be worked out ‘on the Reconstruction battlefields of local, state, and national politics.’\textsuperscript{15}

2.2 Changing Nature of the Marketplace in years 1865-66

The war left the South devastated not only economically, but also physically and psychologically. Nearly 260,000 men, that is over one fifth of the South’s adult white male population, died fighting for the Confederacy, and many more ended up disabled. On top of the physical loss, there were enormous financial losses too: the Confederate bonds and currency collapsed, leaving individuals as well as institutions without resources. Also, the wartime measure of the federal tax on cotton kept draining further capital from the South until it was repealed in 1868.\textsuperscript{16} Under such conditions a conflict seemed inevitable between the planters who believed that ‘the South’s prosperity and their own survival as a class depended (...) on one single condition – the ability of the planter to command labor,’ and the former


\textsuperscript{14} Kolchin, 242.

\textsuperscript{15} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 175.

\textsuperscript{16} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 124-5.
slaves ‘seeking to infuse meaning into their freedom by carving out autonomy in every aspect of their lives (…)’\(^{17}\)

The crucial question of ‘Will the free negro work’ occupied, according to Foner, the South in the years 1865-1866. Whereas under slavery the planters deployed a certain ‘paternalist ethos’\(^{18}\) in relation to their slaves, new market conditions did not leave space for such sentiment where the blacks were pressing ‘claims to autonomy and equality.’\(^{19}\) In the free market, the planters used the same free market argument previously widely used against white workers when getting rid of freedmen unfit to work, such as old or ill people. Moreover, the ‘benefits’ formerly enjoyed by the blacks -- for example food, accommodation or access to garden plots -- were no longer available gratis; they turned into ‘commodities for which payment was due.’\(^{20}\) To simplify a good deal, the traditional model of ‘barter’ in which labour was exchanged for useable resources, was replaced by paid labour. It was a challenging task for both sides to grasp this new mechanism: on the part of the freedmen autonomy sometimes meant neglecting work and doing as they wished, whereas some planters found it degrading to ‘haggle with...servants...over wages,’\(^{21}\) and either refused to pay for work or decided to leave the wages at their own discretion depending on whether they ‘thought them earned.’\(^{22}\) It can then be said that whereas both parties were pressed into adjusting to a free market economy, in the early years of Reconstruction little changed in a strictly practical sense.

Some Northerners touring the South after the War remarked that white Southerners ‘do not know what free labour is,’ to which many planters replied that Northerners ‘do not

\(^{17}\) Foner, *Reconstruction* 129.
\(^{18}\) Foner, *Reconstruction* 130.
\(^{19}\) Foner, *Reconstruction* 130.
\(^{21}\) Foner, *Reconstruction* 131.
\(^{22}\) Foner, *Reconstruction* 132.
understand the character of the negro.'23 It is interesting to follow how many people who came to the South to ‘show the beauties of free over slave labor’24 over time gradually adopted elements of Southern ways. This may be due to their not differing much from the Southerners in that they did not believe in the blacks’ capacity of ‘self-directed labor,’25 -- in other words, just like the white Southerner, his Northern counterpart thought of the black as intellectually inferior. However, contrary to the popular Southern view, some Northerners thought that the former slave could be effectively managed through an efficient system of labour rather than a lash. It did not take long for their theoretical methods to fail; as one Northerner expressed it: ‘the free labour system can be managed much more easily in the lecture room or an editor’s sanctum (theoretically north), than in the field practically here.’ Another one said with reference to the freedmen’s ‘long, long struggle against ignorance, prejudice and laziness...it is discouraging to see how...much more hopeful they appear at a distance than near to.’26 Soon even some Northerners started to complain about the blacks’ ‘shiftlessness’ and ‘unreliability.’27 One freedman asked his new employer ‘What the use of being free was, if he had to work harder then when he was a slave.’28 These examples show how no one was sure just what his or her place in the newly created society was, how he or she could benefit from it; moreover it demonstrates how the notion of emancipation, social and economic, was understood differently by the parties involved in the new market.

One of the indicators accompanying the change of marketplace was, in my view, the changing nature of racism towards blacks. Whereas racism before the war was, to an extent, perceived as a ‘function of slavery, maintaining that people held as slaves [are] slavish by

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23 Foner, Reconstruction 132.  
24 Foner, Reconstruction 137.  
25 Foner, Reconstruction 138.  
26 Foner, Reconstruction 138.  
27 Foner, Reconstruction 138.  
28 Foner, Reconstruction 138.
nature,²⁹ according to Foner ‘the requirements of the plantation economy shaped [the] specific content [of racism] in the aftermath of emancipation.’³⁰ This meant that white planters treated more harshly those blacks who tried to cultivate land of their own, because they represented a greater threat to the whites’ interest than blacks without land. It was not all that uncommon for whites to press charges of indolence, an offense with which only a black person could be charged, against such ‘entrepreneurs.’ As Foner puts it, ‘(...) in a plantation society, a black man seeking to work his way up the agricultural ladder to the status of self-sufficient farmer seemed not an admirable example of industriousness, but a demoralized freedman unwilling to work – work, that is, under white supervision on a plantation.’³¹

Confrontation over economic emancipation of the blacks did not limit itself to the hours and wages for which one should work, but it also included the problem of determining one’s ‘job description,’ to use a more recent term. The blacks started to be more particular about the scope of their duties, and they wanted to participate in deciding how the labour should be organized. Also, those without a work contract often hesitated before signing it because the competition for labour was tough in 1866 as former slaves expected to get free land from the national government.³² Incentives in the form of alcohol, education, free use of cattle or the right to set [one’s] own pace of work were not that uncommon among planters.³³ Such circumstances all contributed to the not infrequent failure of Northerners’ moving into the region either with ideas of introducing a new labour system to the South or in the hope to get rich quick, or both. These ‘carpetbaggers,’ as they were derogatorily called by the local population, were generally well-accepted by the whites because of the capital they brought

²⁹ Kolchin 14.
³⁰ Foner, Reconstruction 133.
³¹ Foner, Reconstruction 133.
³² Foner, Reconstruction 139.
³³ Foner, Reconstruction 139-40.
into the region and that helped to raise the prices of land and thus consequently stabilize the
class of planters.\textsuperscript{34} What, however, the local planters did not welcome in the carpetbaggers
was their ‘sublime confidence that they knew better than former slave-owners how to supervisefree black labor.’\textsuperscript{35}

Historically, the economies of the North and the South have operated on different principles. In the antebellum era the United States saw a rapid growth in all spheres of industries and agriculture. In terms of per capita income, the Southern economy between 1840
and 1860 even surpassed that of the North.\textsuperscript{36} As American economic historian Robert W.
Fogel noted, ‘If we treat the North and South as separate nations and rank them among the
countries of the world, the South would stand as the fourth most prosperous nation of the
world in 1860. (...)’\textsuperscript{37} According to Kolchin, ‘such a conclusion, although technically
accurate, provides an incomplete and distorted picture of the slave economy,’\textsuperscript{38} and he goes
on to likening the Southern wealth to that of modern Saudi Arabia: ‘[It] was based on the
fortuitous ability to export ever-increasing quantities of a highly prized commodity\textsuperscript{39}, but [it]
did not indicate a developed economy.’\textsuperscript{40} In opposition to the South, Kolchin perceives the
development of the North as a lot more complex: ‘(...) a vigorous transformation that altered
the very structure of economy and society.’\textsuperscript{41} While during the Colonial era the South was
recognized for its potential to provide highly valued crops, immediately before the Civil War
the Southern states were lagging behind the North, where industrial production, banking

\textsuperscript{34} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 136-8.
\textsuperscript{35} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 137-8.
\textsuperscript{36} Kolchin 174.
\textsuperscript{37} Kolchin 174.
\textsuperscript{38} Kolchin 174.
\textsuperscript{39} Note: Primarily cotton.
\textsuperscript{40} Kolchin 174.
\textsuperscript{41} Kolchin 174.
industry and railroad construction started off a flourishing economy.\(^{42}\) However, it must be said that if we look at the United States as a whole, the Northern economy was, to a large extent, dependent on the production of Southern plantations. Eastern manufacturers, merchants as well as big financial houses, had a direct interest in the ongoing agricultural output of the South: ‘Without cotton,’ Republican Senator William Sprague noted, America would be ‘bankrupt in every particular.’\(^{43}\) In this way, the rich Northeastern entrepreneurs shared the same interest with the Southern slaveholders, and although most such entrepreneurs supported and helped to finance the war effort, politically they tended to be either moderate Democrats or conservative Republicans and supporters of Johnson’s rather moderate Reconstruction program.\(^{44}\) For these people, the matter of restoring the agricultural productivity of the South as soon as possible came before the black suffrage question.

On the other hand, the Radical wing of Republicans believed that the issue of black voting rights had to be dealt with before anything else, and they saw in it the answer to the tough economic situation of the States. According to the Radicals, the truly free market could be created only when every participant had equal conditions, absolute freedom of movement and the means to determine his own fortunes: ‘We must divest ourselves of the idea that we can command, control the labourer. We must be prepared to receive him as a free man, as equal, and treat him as such.’\(^{45}\) In order to turn this idea into reality, the federal government would have to take the radical step of implementing black suffrage across the U.S. and enforcing legislation that would ensure that individual states would not violate those rights. It is the moderation and conditionality of the Reconstruction program that those Republican Radicals perceived (and I perceive) as its major downside. Johnson proved to be ‘a firm

\(^{42}\) Kolchin 174.
\(^{43}\) Foner, Reconstruction 220.
\(^{44}\) Foner, Reconstruction 220.
\(^{45}\) Foner, Reconstruction 214.
defender of states’ rights [who] denied that the federal government possessed the power to dictate voting requirements or other local political and social arrangements.\textsuperscript{46} When the Reconstruction program emerged in this form, it lacked the radicalism that would have been necessary if a true revolution were to happen in the South. On the one hand, the program called for economic development, for lifting the South up from its backwardness; on the other hand, many were not ready to accept the full implications of the program, as the Southern states were allowed to pass their own pieces of legislation that softened the impact of the program in favour of the white planter. The so-called ‘Black Codes,’ which, among other things, put restrictions on the blacks’ ‘occupations, ownership of property, and access to the judicial system (...),’\textsuperscript{47} factually meant that the Presidential Reconstruction program started to be viewed as efforts to “restore all of slavery but its name”\textsuperscript{48} by the Radical Republicans and, ever more increasingly, also by the general public of the North. By the autumn of 1865 many Northerners started to think of Presidential Reconstruction as a failure, because there was no proof of a positive change in the society or the well-being of either of the races. A growing number of Northerners started to think of the Civil War as of the war for the establishment of free competition.\textsuperscript{49}

2.3 The Freedman’s Bureau

In May 1865 the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands was established as a War Department Agency with the aim to ‘oversee the transition from slavery to freedom.’\textsuperscript{50} Headed by General O.O. Howard, the agency was primarily designed to help with reunification of families, setting up of churches and schools and solving ‘conflicting

\textsuperscript{46} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 79.
\textsuperscript{47} Kolchin 208-9.
\textsuperscript{48} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 225.
\textsuperscript{49} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 225.
\textsuperscript{50} Kolchin 212.
interests’ of former masters and their slaves.\textsuperscript{51} When it comes to the notion of creating a free labour market in the South, the ideology of the Bureau upon its foundation was based on the theory ‘of universal economic rationality and the conviction that all classes in a free labor society shared the same interests.’\textsuperscript{52} The reality, however, differed greatly. In my view, one of the problems was that emancipation for a black labourer meant, among other things, mobility in terms of being able to ‘[leave] the employ[er] (...) because he [could do better elsewhere].’ For most Northerners, this was perfectly understandable and vital for a healthy job market capable of self-regulation. However, plantation societies do not function that way. In the South, where the planters depended for virtually all they had on the work of black labour (and thus the states were indirectly dependent on that labour), this attitude was doomed to fail for a number of reasons. One of them was that influential planters found ways to use measures to prevent outflow of labour from the fields. Another reason was that without a more radical intervention of the national government, the freedmen’s starting position in the economic market was highly disadvantaged as most wages were ‘too low to allow for any accumulation,’\textsuperscript{53} that is, if the worker received any wage at all. Under such circumstances, the freedman had little chance to improve his situation in the future, which in many led to a lethargic state of mind and idleness, all the more reasons for the planter to be tough with his labourers.

The Bureau had to, apart from the lack of funds and the low number of agents it had in the South,\textsuperscript{54} fight two major issues: ‘cruelty on the part of the employer [but also] shirking on the part of the negroes.’\textsuperscript{55} Interestingly, the latter was considered a greater threat to the

\textsuperscript{51} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 142-3.
\textsuperscript{52} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 156.
\textsuperscript{53} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 98-9.
\textsuperscript{54} According to Foner, the Bureau employed at its peak no more then 1,000 agents in the entire South, that is one agent to every 40,000 freed blacks (Source: Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 98.).
\textsuperscript{55} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 157.
economic mission in the South. The former slave’s status was only semi-free, as some of the agents went to the trouble of imposing measures on the unemployed blacks and in some cases made them work involuntarily on plantations.\textsuperscript{56} Indicative of how the Bureau’s representatives thought of the blacks and the whites is the commission of Gen. Godfrey Weitzel, Union commander at Richmond, when just after the end of the Civil War he ordered that the whites seeking economic relief sign an oath of loyalty (to the Union), whereas the blacks sign labour contracts.

For a majority of blacks, emancipation also meant being able to gain one’s own land to work on. While all Republicans believed that free labour must replace slave, no one was sure how to go about this replacement. Lincoln’s 1862 Confiscation Act remained largely unenforced, although through non-payment of taxes on land or due to abandonment of property the government did acquire land. However, giving it to the former slaves ‘for granted’ was seen as controversial. Although some Radicals argued that the blacks deserved it because they had been working on the land for ‘free’ as slaves (and indeed there were men committed to the idea of settling freedmen on their own land and protecting their rights), many moderates expressed the opinion that in this way, the former slave would not appreciate the land’s value, and others thought of it as discrimination against the whites or a ‘class legislation,’ that is ‘singling out one group of citizens for special government favours.’\textsuperscript{57}

In 1865 the Bureau was in control of 850,000 acres of land, a sufficient amount to start off a black yeomanry,\textsuperscript{58} although not enough to accommodate all the former slaves. Among those who favoured settling freedmen on land of their own were Thomas Conway, Orlando Brown and Gen. Rufus Saxton. The last named was responsible for the settlement of some

\textsuperscript{56} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 156-7.
\textsuperscript{57} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 308.
\textsuperscript{58} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 158.
40,000 blacks on the so-called ‘Sherman reservation.’ Saxton decided to use the property controlled by the Bureau and under Gen. Sherman’s Field Order 15 started to provide freedmen with 40-acre homesteads in South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. He believed in market-oriented farming and advised the blacks to ‘put in all the cotton and rice [they] can...for these are the crops that pay best.’\(^5\)

Howard, who supported the radical ideas of the above mentioned men and in his Circular 13 asked Bureau agents to ‘”set asid” forty-acres tracts for the freedmen as rapidly as possible’ without having consulted President Johnson first, was disappointed in a series of presidential pardons by which Johnson gave back (with some minor exceptions) property confiscated from former Confederates. After disputes with Howard over the restoration of land settled by the freedmen in accordance with the law establishing the Bureau, Johnson ordered a new Circular to be issued. Under Howard’s Circular 15, as it came to be known, restoration of property to pardoned owners commenced in September 1865. Howard had the bitter duty of announcing to the freedmen on ‘Sherman’s land’ that they either had to sign a labour contract to work for planters (that is, the former owners) or be evicted. He delivered the bad news on Edisto Island, where ‘one of the most poignant encounters of the entire Reconstruction took place.’\(^6\)

On Edisto the former slaves in 1865 not only possessed land but also established their own government ‘complete with "selectmen and constables elected by the people."’\(^7\) When Howard suggested that the former slaves nominate a three-man committee to discuss ways of easing the transition when the planters came back to reclaim their property, the committee instead returned with petitions of protest to Howard and President Johnson. The first of them started as follows:

> General, we want Homesteads, we were promised Homesteads by the government. If it does not carry out the promises its agents made to us...we are left in a more

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\(^5\) Foner, *Reconstruction* 159.
\(^6\) Foner, *Forever Free* 76-77.
\(^7\) Foner, *Forever Free* 76-77.
unpleasant condition than our former...You will see this is not the condition of really free men. In its depriving them of access to land and in giving the confiscated land back to the disloyal planters, the former slaves saw a betrayal on part of the government and an intensification of their struggles for economic independence.

In conclusion, although the achievements of the Bureau were extraordinary in some areas, especially education or health care, its central effort - to build up a functional system of free labour - was less impressive. Its starting position in the post-war South was extremely difficult, as in 1865 large numbers of blacks were already at work under agreements approved by army officers, with little or no wages and their employers allowed to regulate their personal lives. The Bureau’s agents found themselves in the position of mediators between the planters and the freedmen, and often they were at the same time trying to negotiate better contract conditions for blacks and simultaneously threatening with arrest those who refused to sign contracts. The Bureau’s agents also intervened in balancing the supply and demand of the market by transporting former slaves to parts of the South where there was less labour and better wage conditions. Few blacks, relative to their total number, managed to acquire their own land and thus work towards their own profit. A problematical compromise between the possession of one’s own land and labour in exchange for wage came out of the scheme of share-cropping, in which the labourer working on his employer’s land was entitled to part of the crop and therefore had a direct interest in as large an output as possible. After President Johnson’s failure to assist the freedmen in acquiring land, it was the Bureau’s officials who had to pass the message to the freedmen and make them work the land they had no future prospect of owning. Foner concludes that

62 Foner, *Forever Free* 77.
63 Foner, *Reconstruction* 164-5.
64 Foner, *Reconstruction* 165.
In the end, the bureau’s activities revealed that the free-labor outlook was not entirely applicable to an impoverished agricultural society just emerging from slavery. Far from being able to rise in the social scale through hard work, blacks were confronted by a labor market rigidly segmented along racial lines, in which black men were generally confined to unskilled and service labor, and black women to jobs in private homes as cooks, maids, and child nurses.\(^{65}\)

**RADICAL RECONSTRUCTION AFTER 1866**

3.1. Legislative Changes

When President Johnson introduced the plan for reconstruction, a majority of Northerners were willing to support him. Johnson’s policies were promising a fast return to ‘normality,’ and during the war he embraced emancipation of the slaves. At one time Johnson ‘even promised to be a "Moses" who would lead Tennessee’s [that is, the state of which he was senator during the war] blacks to freedom.’\(^{66}\) However, Johnson held deeply racist views with regards to the blacks\(^{67}\) and did not see in them other potential than that of dependent labourers. When it comes to Southern politics, Johnson voiced the opinion that ‘White men alone...must manage the South.’ In 1865 he returned most of the confiscated land to the former owners and let the former Confederates establish purely white governments, which consequently led to implementation of the Black Codes.\(^{68}\)

An increasing number of Republicans were feeling dissatisfied with the course post-war politics were taking. Radical leaders, such as Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens, started to consider ‘the enfranchisement of blacks as the sine qua non of a successful Reconstruction.’\(^{69}\) Even Moderate Republicans thought that implementation of further measures by the federal government would be necessary in order to protect blacks’ civil

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65 Foner, *Forever Free* 98.
66 Foner, *Forever Free* 79.
69 Foner, *Forever Free* 111.
rights. In 1866 two bills were passed by Congress: the first one prolonged the life of the Freedman’s Bureau, which was a temporary institution, and the second one was the Civil Rights Bill, which defined all persons born in the United States, with the exception of Indians, as American citizens, with equal rights ‘to make and enforce contracts, to sue, be parties, and give evidence, to inherit, purchase, lease, sell, hold, and convey real and personal property, and to full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property.’ The Civil Rights Act brought an end to the Black Codes and thus represented the first attempt at giving meaning to the Thirteenth Amendment. Its impact was nation-wide; although aimed at the South, it also ended discriminatory laws in the North. President Johnson vetoed both bills because he did not perceive them as a means of making both races equal, but rather saw them as ‘reverse discrimination’ (although this term was not used then) that would suppress the rights of the whites on behalf of the blacks. In the case of the Civil Rights Act, the Congress passed it over the President’s veto. By one vote the Congress failed to pass the bill for extending the existence of the Bureau; however, another measure adopted in July of the same year prolonged it until 1870.

Soon after the Civil Rights Act, the Republicans drew up the Fourteenth Amendment, which was approved by Congress in 1866 and ratified two years later. The amendment represented the Republicans’ idea of Reconstruction, and it ‘enshrined for the first time in the Constitution the ideas of birthright citizenship and equal rights for all Americans.’ Moreover, it ‘gave a constitutional foundation to the principle that state laws "should operate

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72. Foner, Forever Free 115-17.

73. Foner, Forever Free 117.
equally upon all."74 In the era of industrial and economic growth that especially the North and the West of the U.S. where there were mine locations were experiencing, the amendment had the power to affect ‘the millions of people of foreign birth who [would] flock to [American] shores’75 that would continue to come to the U.S. in search of economic prosperity. However, it should be mentioned that even the Radicals’ universalism had its limits; while the Naturalization Clause76 of the Fourteenth Amendment was interpreted to include blacks, it left Asian immigrants out, even though their children born on the American soil were considered U.S. citizens.77 Frederick Douglass opposed such prejudice in his 1869 speech ‘Composite Nation’ in which he expressed the notion that ‘America’s destiny was to transcend race by serving as an asylum for people "gathered here from all corners of the globe by a common aspiration for national liberty."78

Although the amendment left black suffrage at the discretion of individual states it did say that ‘if a state deprived any group of men of the franchise, it would lose some of its representatives in Congress.’79 The social revolution commenced by the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Fourteenth Amendment started off incidents of race-related violence, especially in the South, which further weakened Johnson’s position. In December 1866 the Republicans set out to plan a new Reconstruction while ignoring Johnson. In March 1867 they came out with a new Reconstruction Act, which was passed over the president’s veto. The Act said that ‘lawful governments did not exist in the South, and that Congress could

74 Foner, Forever Free 117.
75 Foner, Forever Free 118.
78 Foner, Forever Free 123.
79 Foner, Forever Free 118. (It should be noted here that the penalty did not included cases of states denying female suffrage.)
govern the region until acceptable ones had been established.\textsuperscript{80} The Reconstruction Act also mandated that the Southern states implement the provisions of, if not compulsorily ratify, the Fourteenth Amendment, which, with the exception of Tennessee, they had not yet done, and `adopt new constitutions embodying the principle of manhood suffrage without regard to race.'\textsuperscript{81} This was, de facto, the start of the Radical Reconstruction that lasted until 1877.

With Reconstruction well under way in the South, political disagreements continued in the North. By 1868 the entire Republican Party regarded President Johnson as incompetent and racist. After Johnson had removed from office Secretary of War Edwin B. Stanton, the House of Representatives decided to impeach the President for violating the Tenure of Office Act (passed over his veto in 1867).\textsuperscript{82} Although Johnson was not convicted, he had to spend the remaining time in office not interfering with Reconstruction. In the next election Ulysses S. Grant defeated the Democrat Horatio Seymour, and the Fifteenth Amendment (the final `Reconstruction Amendment') was ratified in 1870. While the Reconstruction Act was applicable only to the South, the new amendment theoretically guaranteed black suffrage to the whole nation by liquidating restrictive voting laws in the North. It must be said though that the Fifteenth amendment was still a far cry from universal suffrage. Leaving aside female voting rights, which were only talked about, the amendment still allowed for discrimination – for example, in the South certain inconvenient `rebels' were excluded from the vote. Nevertheless, the amendment was considered a victory by many: `At last,' said Frederick Douglas, `the black man has a future...The black man is free, the black man is a citizen, the black man is enfranchised. ... Never was revolution more complete.' There were, however, voices that saw this `completion' only as the beginning of further struggles: Wendell Phillips,

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\textsuperscript{80} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 121.
\textsuperscript{81} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 121-122.
\textsuperscript{82} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 145-6.
\end{flushright}
a major figure in the abolitionist movement during the Civil War, expressed an opinion that the blacks due to their long enslavement had accumulated too many ‘wrongs,’ had fallen victims to ‘cruel prejudice,’ and ‘would continue to deserve the nation’s "special sympathy" in the years to come – ‘a call,’ Foner says, ‘that would be echoed in demands of affirmative action in the twentieth century.’\footnote{83}

3.2. Changing Face of the South

‘We have gone through one of the most remarkable changes in our relations to each other, that has been known, perhaps, in the history of the world,’\footnote{84} a white South Carolinian commented on the relationship between whites and African Americans in 1871. Biracial democratic Republican government was functioning in many parts of the South by the early 1870s. Blacks could vote and on their votes depended not only black but also white politicians. During Reconstruction some two thousand African Americans held public office, and thousands more had the means to influence politics either as leaders of Union Leagues (organization that originated among middle-class northerners during the Civil War in support of the Lincoln administration\footnote{85}) or branches of the Republican Party, or by their work for the newspapers.\footnote{86} While before the war and under Johnson the ruling class of planters with a large share of the political power shaped regional institutions, such as schools, hospitals or orphanages in its own interest (often meaning that these institutions were terribly underfunded), the new Southern governments embraced a new definition of public responsibility: ‘Public schools, hospitals, penitentiaries, and asylums for orphans and the

\footnotesize{83} Foner, 	extit{Forever Free} 148-9.
\footnotesize{84} Foner, 	extit{Forever Free} 129.
\footnotesize{85} Foner, 	extit{Forever Free} 130.
\footnotesize{86} Foner, 	extit{Forever Free} 129.
insane were established for the first time or received increased funding.\textsuperscript{87} Schooling started to be seen as ‘the foundation of a new, egalitarian social order.’\textsuperscript{88}

With regard to education, it is relevant to mention here that a number of blacks holding official posts had to fight with prejudices on the part of the white population concerning their lack of education and literacy. In some cases such a lack existed, although the gaps in education were not caused by the blacks themselves but because attempts of individuals to learn how to read or write were an offence for which one could be severely punished during slavery. Abram Colby, Georgia’s minister of religion and former barber said: ‘I have a son I sent to school when he was small (...). I make him read all my letters and do all my writing. I keep him with me all the time.’\textsuperscript{89} However, many black leaders originated from men who received education in schools for free blacks, in the Union army during the war or secretly while in slavery.\textsuperscript{90} A public school system was gradually built in the South but since most blacks there remained in rural areas where schools were not widely accessible, 70 percent of them were still illiterate in 1880.\textsuperscript{91} Racially mixed schools were uncommon since most ‘white’ parents in both the South and the North, regardless of their political affiliation, did not want to have their children educated alongside black children. The Republicans in general did not press the issue of integrated schools hard: when a Texas board of education tried to found an integrated school, it was removed by a Republican state superintendent. Interestingly though, when New Orleans experimented with an integrated school system, after

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\textsuperscript{87} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 364.
\textsuperscript{88} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 365-6.
\textsuperscript{89} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 359.
\textsuperscript{90} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 137.
\textsuperscript{91} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 366.
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the initial drop in white attendance, many of the white students returned from newly set up private and parochial schools to attend racially mixed classes together with the blacks.92

With black officials entering politics, the composition of regional governments changed substantially. In the South the most common occupations of white politicians were those of planter, lawyer or farm owner, while in the North they were lawyer, professional, farmer and urban businessman. The occupations of black politicians differed; most frequently they were farmers, ministers, teachers, skilled artisans, storekeepers and labourers. In terms of personal possessions there were great differences – a minority of blacks entered office as wealthy men whereas others had very little. “The majority,” however, ‘were men of modest means.’93

Many black leaders had to deal with threats of violence, which was a common feature in the South after the Civil War. Approximately 10 percent of black officials became victims of direct assaults or threats for reasons which varied greatly from running for office against a white man and beating him in elections, as was the case of Andrew J. Flowers, a justice of the peace in Tennessee, to delivery of a speech on equality between blacks and whites with regards to bearing arms in the case of Richard Burke, murdered by the Ku Klux Klan in 1870.94 Ordinary black men were threatened too, especially at the time of elections. The hatred of groups such as the above mentioned Klan, the White Brotherhood, and the Knights of the White Camelia was not aimed solely at black persons, but virtually anyone who voted for the Republican party or anyone who showed any relationship towards the blacks other than the ‘proper’ one as defined by the white supremacist groups; therefore even white women could become victims of the groups if they engaged in a relationship with a black

92 Foner, Reconstruction 367.
93 Foner, Forever Free 137.
94 Foner, Forever Free 134.
man. Not only did many white Southerners tolerate racism, but an insubstantial number participated in them; the community support for the Klan stretched from lawyers defending the KKK’s members in court to women sewing disguises for the Klansmen. This may be because the average, white pro-Democrat citizen shared in the Klan’s vision of overthrowing Reconstruction and restoring white rule (because ‘everyone’-- that is anyone ‘white’ -- was better off then), but also because the Klan succeeded in spreading fear of the blacks among people -- especially the fear of the black man and his ‘animal’ instincts and sexual lust for white women.\textsuperscript{95} The violence that the South experienced during Republican rule was so widespread and unmanageable that Congress had to take measures to put a stop to it. As a result, three Enforcement Acts were passed between 1870 and 1871, of which that aimed at controlling the Ku Klux Klan was, arguably, the most important. For the first time in the history of the U.S., ‘certain crimes committed by individuals were declared offenses punishable under federal law, including conspiracies to deprive citizens of the right to vote, hold office, serve on juries, and enjoy the equal protection of the laws.’\textsuperscript{96} Apart from that, the KKK Act authorized the arrest and holding of individuals without charges, as well as the use of the army to control Klan violence.\textsuperscript{97} By 1872 the ‘reign of terror’ had been temporarily suppressed.

The black community during Reconstruction was extraordinarily united in its political thinking. Foner puts it down to the fact that the only division there was before Reconstruction was that of free and slave and black and mulatto, and that it was only several years into Reconstruction that a 'class' stratification started to developed among blacks. Although there was, specifically in the North, a black élite of educated and more well-to-do blacks or

\textsuperscript{95} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 174-5.
\textsuperscript{96} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 175.
\textsuperscript{97} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 175-6.
mulattos, their proportion was tiny in relation to the overall black population and, unlike the whites, they did not own the banks or factories that would give work to additional blacks. A ‘rich’ black man invested rather in real estate then in economic enterprise, and thus to this point ‘black business [remained] small business.’ Even though black women were excluded from voting rights, they often attended political meetings, took part in parades and campaigns and expressed their opinions by wearing campaign buttons or shouting slogans. Blacks were very responsible voters: unless threatened by violence, up to 90 per cent of those eligible to do so would cast their ballots. Naturally, they voted almost unanimously for the Republican Party, and so did two white groups: the already-mentioned ‘carpetbaggers’ and also ‘scalawags,’ the white Republicans born in the South, whose primary aim was to ‘build the South on a broader base than the plantation aristocracy of Antebellum days.’

3.3. Economic Reconstruction

In terms of economic development, the Radical Reconstruction of the South, was, as in the rest of the United States, characterised by the rapid development of the railroad. Foner says that while ‘in the prewar South, railroads had generally been conceived as adjuncts of the plantation system, a way to facilitate the marketing of staple crops (...), Republicans (...) saw railroads as catalysts of a peaceful revolution that would dislodge the plantation from its economic throne.’ With emerging opportunities in the railroad industry or industries linked to it (such as mining), even those Republicans who had previously thought of the blacks only as of a source of labour in agriculture had started to accept the fact that soon black labour would be needed to satisfy the increasing demand for workforce in industrial occupations.

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98 Foner, Reconstruction 397-8.
99 Foner, Forever Free 131.
100 Foner, Forever Free 137-8.
102 Foner, Reconstruction 380.
The social relationship between the former master and the slave had by the 1870s transformed dramatically. Black labour was hard to obtain for work on plantations in most of the South, and where there was black labour available, it was not easily manageable. And yet there were instances where centralized plantations with gang labour survived long into Reconstruction, often as a result of sharecropping that blacks saw as a means to make relatively good money. The downside of sharecropping, however, was that often the labourers concentrated only on profitable crops (depending on the location this would be cotton, sugar or tobacco) while neglecting crops grown as edibles (which also renitrogenated the fields thus planted), leading in the long run, among other things, to the soil's losing its original quality. Although sharecropping offered a solution to the labour shortage, it clearly had its negative side: firstly, sharecropping still was perceived by many, both inside and outside the system, as a form of oppression; and secondly, the labourers were commonly compelled to sell their crops before they were grown, which, in the longer term, led to crippling, demobilizing, and deference-compelling indebtedness, sometimes described as ‘debt slavery’ or ‘debt serfdom.’

Although a Mississippian Republican newspaper claimed in the 1870 that ‘the colored people ... were never so well off as at present...they have money to spend in stores, their real situation was far from economic prosperity, as they were spending money they had not yet earned.

In order to attract capitalist development to the South, state and federal subsidies were needed to supplement and encourage private investment. Common interest brought Republicans and Democrats together to the extent that they cooperated in obtaining financial funds; for the time being, Democrats had become colour-blind:

103 Foner, Reconstruction 402-11.
104 Foner, Reconstruction 409.
Prominent Edgefield County Democrats temporarily put aside their white supremacist convictions to join black officials in an effort to attract a railroad, and Charleston’s Board of Trade did not hesitate to lobby among black legislators for state aid to the Blue Ridge Railroad, hoping that a link to the Western markets would reserve the city’s economic decline.105

In this respect, state or private financial support was a unifying factor in southern politics.

The railroad aid bills drafted by Republican committees and passed by Republican legislatures proved in many cases controversial. Apart from increasing public debts and raising taxes, they drained finances that could have been used in education, health, or other programs. Moreover, they meant the beginning of corruption on an unprecedented scale. At a time when the whole of the United States was seemingly flourishing, the South especially was already deep in a financial crisis - although it would take a few years for the true state of things to show in full clarity. Behind the problem stood a mixture of factors: firstly, in a region that had never completely recovered from the Civil War, the rebuilding of damaged facilities was costly, and with the citizenship now doubled there was an increased need for development of more public facilities that would serve the demands of the new citizens. High taxes, increasing debts, the decreasing value of state bonds,106 and the dissatisfaction of both white yeomen and freedmen with what the republican government was doing for them created an atmosphere of political uncertainty. When in 1868 the new governments issued bonds, they found them unmarketable except at enormous discounts.107

With the victory of Ulysses S. Grant in the presidential election of 1868, the bonds recovered to an extent, but still their credit was nowhere near those issued in the North. The South had become ‘the last region on earth in which ... a Northern or European capitalist

105 Foner, Reconstruction 381-2.
106 Foner, Reconstruction 383.
107 Foner, Reconstruction 383.
[would] invest a dollar,'\textsuperscript{108} proclaimed one New Yorker. According to Foner, corruption in the South was thriving because of ‘the specific circumstances of Republican rule.’\textsuperscript{109}

The expansion of public responsibilities and the rapid growth of capitalist enterprise linked to the state dramatically increased both the size of budgets and the demands placed upon them. Officials regularly handled unprecedented sums of money, corporations vied for the benefits of state aid, and communities competed for routes that would supposedly guarantee their future prosperity – conditions that offered numerous opportunities for bribery and plunder. The prevailing spirit of economic promotion fostered a get-rich-quick mentality, and many officials saw nothing wrong with taking a piece of the expanding economic pie for themselves. ‘Ten years from now, wrote an ally of one entrepreneur, ‘the people...will see so clearly the vast benefit of the present proposed Railroads that they will care very little how or by what means they were built.’\textsuperscript{110}

It was very unfortunate that Southern Republicans forfeited any reputation for honesty. Illicit gains of the men in power, white and black alike, together with financial difficulties of the region not only contributed to the demise of what Foner calls the ‘gospel of prosperity,’\textsuperscript{111} but it also brought a fresh wave of ‘patriotic’ sentiment among whites. Soon, some elements of the nation would grow tired of Reconstruction and would turn to the ‘negro governments’ and the black race in their search for scapegoats.

Politics and economy have always been closely interconnected in the South, however the nature of the relationship changed during Republican rule. For the first time, whites and blacks alike could participate in both. Black men could vote and could be voted into office. The old plantation class was left without access to power and liquidated by the new market. Public facilities were (re)built, school systems established and ‘black’ churches multiplied, but both blacks and whites were unhappy about the increased taxes, state debts and the extent of corruption that occurred within the Republican establishment. After the Democratic party’s

\textsuperscript{108} Foner, Forever Free 166.
\textsuperscript{109} Foner, Reconstruction 384-5.
\textsuperscript{110} Foner, Reconstruction 384-5.
\textsuperscript{111} Foner, Reconstruction 389.
initial refusal of black suffrage, many of the party’s leaders started to accept it as a fact and started to plan a return to the political centre by leaving ‘the issues of Civil War and Reconstruction behind them (...) and [proclaiming] their realism and moderation and [promising] to ease racial tensions.’\textsuperscript{112} Their ‘new’ approach started to be attractive to wider constituencies and along with the economic factors resulted in Democrats' winning control of the House of Representatives in 1874.\textsuperscript{113}

3.4. The Panic of 1873 and its Consequences

From the end of the Civil War, the railroad industry became the major provider of employment in the U.S., with the exception of agriculture.\textsuperscript{114} In 1869 the first transcontinental railroad was completed and the construction of a second one, the Northern Pacific, was planned. The federal and state governments, as well as private enterprises, were pouring money into the railroad industry. However, at some point it started to be obvious that the construction of railroads was more costly than the revenue from the already completed stretches. In September 1873, Jay Cooke and Company, an investment bank and a main financier of the Northern Pacific, announced bankruptcy. After the fall of the ‘most credible banker in the US’\textsuperscript{115} other financial houses soon followed suit, which led to a collapse of the New York Stock Exchange.\textsuperscript{116} The financial crisis that started was the biggest one that America had seen to that day, and it was accompanied by massive unemployment, waves of bankruptcies across all business sectors and a virtual cessation of industrial growth. The Panic
of 1873 turned the focus of the national government from the issues of Reconstruction to economic recovery.

Another implication of the crisis was the growing sympathy of the white northerners towards the complaints of the white southerners with regards to Reconstruction and the Republican governments. Between 1873 and 1877 the price of cotton was half of what it had been before the crisis making in turn the market conditions for the Northern goods in the South harder. Many merchants and planters went bankrupt, while small farmers lost their land and became sharecroppers. The economic crisis led to the Democratic Party's winning control of the House of Representatives in 1874, for the first time since the Civil War. In 1875 Republicans managed to enact the final Reconstruction Act, the Civil Rights Act, prohibiting racial discrimination in public transport and accommodation. However, by this point Congress had become unwilling to discuss further legislation that would protect the blacks.117

Anti-black sentiment spread around the country with renewed intensity, mutually reinforcing Democratic, or "immigrant" racism, and the above-mentioned Republican, or "economic" racism. Liberal Republican journals were heavily involved in this as they put the crisis down solely to the incapacity and inferiority of the black voters in the South. At a time when racism towards new-comers from Europe, for instance Ireland, Italy or Central Europe, was very common, James S. Pike, a journalist writing for the *New York Tribune*, compared African Americans, who supposedly were not willing to labour efficiently for the white man but at the same time were hungry for a piece of land of their own, to the Northern labourer who goes on a strike and at the same time is asking the national government to give jobs to the unemployed.118 Pike gathered his ‘observations’ from South Carolina in a widely read

118 Foner, *Forever Free* 192.
book *The Prostrate State*, which gave the Northerners a distorted picture of the former slaves and put all blame for corruption and the economic crisis on the ‘negro government.’ In another popular depiction, blacks were portrayed as ‘slightly above the level of animals,’ which, considering that this was a period of growing credibility for doctrines based on ‘natural selection’ and ‘survival of the fittest,’ meant that more and more whites in the North started to turn away from ‘artificial’ protection of the rights of African Americans. Social Darwinism was based on the idea that any interference with the ‘natural’ workings of society is wrong. According to this ideology, the poor were responsible for their own condition and African Americans were born to occupy the bottom ranks of the social ladder. Any interference with this ‘natural’ order only slowed down the progress of society.\(^{119}\)

Racially motivated attacks on black Americans were again on the rise. In 1876 the Supreme Court upheld no convictions in the *United States vs. Cruikshank* 1873 case from Colfax, Louisiana, in which a paramilitary unit of the White League burned alive or shot seventy black men who were trying to defend the local courthouse that decided in favour of the Republican vote from the pending Democratic takeover,\(^{120}\) and executed many more upon their surrender. The court overturned three convictions of the white murderers, and it also ruled that Washington had no authority to act against violations of citizens’ rights by individuals but only by the states. White terrorism started to grow strong again in the South, all the more since President Grant was unwilling to suppress violence by the use of the federal troops.\(^{121}\)

\(^{119}\) Foner, *Forever Free* 192-3.
\(^{121}\) Foner, *Forever Free* 194-5.
White Democrats resorted to threats and violence where necessary in order to obtain a majority in elections. In states with large white populations, they appealed to the sanctity of the white family and the threat of ‘mongrelisation’ which might eventually lead to a ban on discrimination in places of entertainment, hotels and public transport. Democrats intensified their campaign in the South after President Grant’s refusal to send the army to Copiah County, where the whites “formed themselves into military organizations”....and prevented blacks from assembling or campaigning.\textsuperscript{122} Grant said: ‘The whole public are tired with these annual autumnal outbreaks in the South ...[and] are ready now to condemn any interference on the part of the government.’\textsuperscript{123} The Democrats thought of it as a license to push hard in order to win, and the Klan started to operate without disguise as if to show that they could not be held legally responsible for any of their violent action. In the words of disappointed Republican governor Adelbert Ames, ‘A revolution has taken place...by force of arms, and a race [the blacks] are disfranchised. They are to be returned to a condition of serfdom, an era of second slavery.’\textsuperscript{124}

During the 1876 presidential campaign it was already clear that Reconstruction would not survive long. Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes promised to ‘bring the South "the blessings of honest and capable local self government",’ in other words to bring an end to Reconstruction in case of his victory. The disputable victory of Hayes by only one electoral vote over Democrat Samuel J. Tilden led to behind-the-scenes negotiations between the two parties, which resulted in the Bargain (or Compromise) of 1877. The Compromise established Hayes as President and gave the Democrats control over Florida, South Carolina and Louisiana. Reconstruction as ‘a distinct era of national history, when Republicans controlled

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
    \item[122] Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 195.
    \item[123] Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 196.
    \item[124] Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 196.
\end{itemize}
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much or all of the South, blacks exercised significant political power, and the federal
government accepted the responsibility for protecting the fundamental rights of all American
citizens\textsuperscript{125} was over.

3. \textbf{RECONSTRUCTION’S AFTERMATH AND IMPLICATIONS}

‘The colored man has no home in America,’ proclaimed Harrison N. Bouey in 1877 as he
organized an emigration movement in South Carolina.\textsuperscript{126} Like him, many other blacks felt
that they had little chance to rise from poverty. Migration within the U.S. commenced with
the failure of Reconstruction. Two hundred blacks sailed to Liberia in Africa and between
twenty to thirty thousand went to Kansas, where they sought ‘political equality, protection
against violence, access to education, and economic opportunity,’\textsuperscript{127} all of which they should
have had access to under the Reconstruction legislation but which were continuously denied
in the South. The well-known black leaders, such as Frederick Douglass, opposed the mass
migration to Kansas, which the blacks called ‘The Exodus,’ thinking of it as the
‘abandonment of the struggle for citizenship rights in the South.’\textsuperscript{128} Very few blacks had the
capital to work for themselves and a lot of the migrants took jobs as unskilled labourers in the
Midwest. However, well into the twentieth century the majority of African Americans stayed
in the South as they did not have much other choice.\textsuperscript{129}

Meanwhile, a coalition of merchants, planters and business entrepreneurs, whose aim was
to undo the system established during Reconstruction, formed in the South under the name of
‘Redeemers.’\textsuperscript{130} Florida’s governor, George F. Drew, ordered his government to ‘spend

\begin{thebibliography}{130}
\bibitem{125} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 199.
\bibitem{126} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 199.
\bibitem{127} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 200.
\bibitem{128} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 600.
\bibitem{129} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 199-200.
\bibitem{130} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 201.
\end{thebibliography}
nothing unless absolutely necessary,'\(^{131}\) and such was the attitude in general of other Democratic leaders in the South. Costs across the public sector were cut to a minimum, leading to education and health services being once again drastically underfunded. Especially black schools suffered, and not an insubstantial number of whites considered them a waste of state money; one planter proclaimed: ‘What I want here is Negroes who make cotton...and they don’t need education to help them make cotton.’\(^{132}\) It seemed that the ways of thinking of the original Southern planters, had not changed at all since the days of slavery and the newcomers adopted them. Taxes were decreased; in some cases, such as taxes on land, they were almost non-existent. Some of the rights women had achieved during Reconstruction were nullified in order to improve the position of the male in the family.

Various legislative acts, such as the ‘pig law,’\(^{133}\) vagrancy laws and penalties for breach of contract, were passed over the next few years, and although they applied to whites and blacks alike, they were enforced almost exclusively on African Americans.\(^{134}\) The Jim Crow racial caste system was in operation between 1877 and the mid 1960s mainly in Southern and border states, and it was, it can be said, a way of making anti-black racism ‘legitimate.’ The pro-segregation officials again stressed in their speeches the danger of ‘mongrelisation’ of the white race if blacks were not kept separate, and so did many Christian ministers and theologians in the South who taught that ‘Whites were the Chosen people.’\(^{135}\) Following the Supreme Court’s pivotal decision in the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case (1896) states no longer hesitated to demand separate facilities for blacks and whites. Anything from schools

\(^{131}\) Foner, *Forever Free* 201.

\(^{132}\) Foner, *Forever Free* 201.

\(^{133}\) Note: The ‘pig law’ defined the theft of any cattle or swine as grand larceny punishable by five years in prison. Source: Foner, *Forever Free* 202.

\(^{134}\) Foner, *Forever Free* 202.

\(^{135}\) Dr. Pilgrim, David, "What Was Jim Crow?," Ferris State University, Sep 2000, 22 Nov 2011 <http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/what.htm>.
to cemeteries to drinking fountains had to be ‘separate but equal,’ although facilities for blacks were almost uniformly of inferior standard in relation to those for whites. The ‘Negro question’ was at the beginning of the 1890s discussed by prominent white men, among them former President Hayes, who concluded that ‘self-help, not national assistance or political agitation, offered the best route to racial progress.’ Among the participants, only Albion W. Tourgée, former Reconstruction judge, expressed the opinion that attention should be devoted rather to the ‘white’ problem, since ‘the hate, the oppression, the injustice, are all on [the side of the whites].’

Concerning the economic well-being of African Americans, due to the failure to give land to former slaves during Reconstruction, most southern blacks continued to work on white-owned land and some found menial jobs in cities. Those who were sharecropping complained that ‘[They] make as much cotton and sugar as [they] did when [they] were slaves...and it does [them] as little good now as it did then.’ Under new legislation, the tenant had a status of a wage labourer and s/he was not entitled to any payment until the planter had fulfilled his other obligations. With the Redeemers in power, the South experienced a massive economic decline that continued for long decades, leading President Franklin D. Roosevelt to declare the region ‘the nation’s "number one" economic problem’ in the 1930s. Black farmers were the most disadvantaged of all classes. The situation in southern cities was, with regard to African Americans, more diverse. Institutions, such as schools, churches, etc., provided a foundation for more economically successful communities, and they also functioned as the basis for the creation of a black middle class, even if it consisted

136 Foner, Forever Free 208.
137 Foner, Forever Free 211.
138 Foner, Forever Free 211.
139 Foner, Forever Free 202.
140 Foner, Forever Free 202.
primarily of physicians, teachers, or businessmen serving other blacks. The majority of blacks, however, worked in unskilled occupations, and racial segregation gave them little chance to rise above this level. Thus the most common job of an urban woman was that of a domestic worker or a laundress, whereas men usually worked as manual labourers or personal servants in white households. Overall, due to exclusion from most jobs, African Americans did not have good prospects of improving their situation in life or accumulating enough money to buy land of their own. The percentage of those who did possess land was smaller in 1900 than it had been at the end of Reconstruction.\textsuperscript{141}

Regarding black suffrage, from the 1890s all southern states passed laws or provisions that would eliminate the black vote. Because discriminating against voters on the basis of their colour would be a breach of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, measures were taken to ensure that African Americans would not qualify for the ballot. Among the most popular ones were the poll tax, literacy tests, and the requirement to demonstrate one’s ability to understand the state constitution. This resulted in practical extinction of the black suffrage in the South, but it also meant that many whites did not qualify for the vote (although election officials often showed less strictness when registering white voters). In many Northern states, however, African Americans retained their right to vote, which proved to be a fact of a great importance, especially at the time of increased black migration from the Southern states.\textsuperscript{142}

Also, education was accessible to most Northern blacks, even though – just as in the South – it was badly underfunded.

\textsuperscript{141} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 203-4.
\textsuperscript{142} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 208-12.
In conclusion, it can be said that under ‘Redemption’

Blacks ... found themselves enmeshed in a seamless web of oppression, whose interwoven economic, political, and social strands all reinforced one another. In illiteracy, malnutrition, inadequate housing, and a host of other burdens, blacks paid the highest price for the end of Reconstruction and the stagnation of the Southern economy.\textsuperscript{143}

Although a limited number of African Americans held office even during Redemption on both the state and federal level, they did not possess enough power to influence Democratic governments. Charles Harris, a former member of Alabama’s legislature, commented on the situation of the black population:

We are taxed without representation...We obey laws; others make them. We support state educational institutions, whose doors are virtually closed against us. We support asylums and hospitals, and our sick, deaf, dumb, or blind are met at the doors by invidious distinctions and unjust discriminations...From these and many other oppressions...our people long to be free.\textsuperscript{144}

Thus the Reconstruction amendments, which should have been the legislative pillars on which the United States would be re-created after the Civil war, proved to be, after their incorporation into the U.S. Constitution, ‘sleeping giants’\textsuperscript{145} rather than truly functioning articles of constitutional reform. Having been violated and misinterpreted during Reconstruction and Redemption, the Reconstruction Amendments were to have their full implications come to terms with by the nation only in the 1950s and 1960s. And as Foner says in his 1988 work, ‘In many ways, it has yet to do so.’\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{143} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 598.
\textsuperscript{144} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 601.
\textsuperscript{145} Foner, \textit{Forever Free} 212.
\textsuperscript{146} Foner, \textit{Reconstruction} 612.
CONCLUSION

A correspondent of Senator Blanche K. Bruce of Mississippi wrote after 1877: ‘We are not Africans now, but colored Americans, and are entitled to American citizenship.’ The self-awareness that he shared with millions of other blacks across the country was, I believe, one of the major achievements of Reconstruction. Although African Americans had at the end of the Civil War a hundred of years of struggles for equal rights still ahead of them, Reconstruction legislation was an important milestone on their road to full emancipation.

The results of Presidential Reconstruction were ambivalent. Although blacks were able to travel freely and, theoretically, to seek at will the best paying job, in practice things did not work out that well – blacks had no capital to get started, and they were bound by obstacles in the form of contracts they signed which were often not in their favour, or by racially discriminatory laws, such as the one listing indolence under criminal offences. Racism, which was by no means confined to the Southern states, was the largest problem blacks had to face. On the upside, the Freedman’s Bureau managed, despite its limited human and financial sources, to reunite families that were separated under slavery, and to give support to the development of the Black church, school, and health systems that provided unprecedented services to blacks. In all, it was certainly a massive achievement.

The period of Radical Reconstruction saw some major legislative changes, and it was the start of a true revolution in the South. Blacks were first given American citizenship, followed by the right to vote. Historically, for the first time African Americans could hold official posts and thus could influence legislation, state budgets and other public or state

147 Foner, Forever Free 200.
matters that had until now been firmly in the hands of the white population. Large sums of money poured into Southern states for the purpose of financing work related to the railroads, which became, apart from agriculture, the largest providers of employment. However, Southern economy did not thrive since it consumed a great deal more money than it was able to return to the state budget, partially also due to corruption generated in the region by the new availability of monetary resources. During Radical Reconstruction a specific form of organized racism reinvigorated among the class of white planters, but also many ‘common’ white Democrats participated in it either directly or indirectly. The white supremacist organizations were successful in spreading the fear of ‘mongrelisation’ of the white race, which provided one main rationalization for the rise of the so-called Jim Crow racial segregation system, or rather way of life, after 1877. The panic on the stock exchange in 1873, followed by collapse of the economies of both South and North, deepened prejudices towards African Americans.

The failure of Reconstruction affected the whole nation, but African Americans came out worst. Foner is of the opinion that

If racism contributed to the undoing of Reconstruction, by the same token, Reconstruction’s demise and the emergence of blacks as a disenfranchised class of dependent labourers greatly facilitated racism’s further spread, until by the early twentieth century it had become more deeply embedded in the nation’s culture and politics than at any time since the beginning of the antislavery crusade and perhaps in the entire history [of the United States].

The new militancy of post-Reconstruction Southern white racism, changing nature of racism, economic difficulties, and general disillusionment among African Americans were important reasons behind black migration, which was disapproved of by prominent black leaders. A majority of blacks, however, remained in the South, where they often continued to work for

white land owners (if settled in rural areas) or in unskilled jobs (if living in cities). A black middle class started to develop around black institutions, such as the churches or schools. The return of white supremacy under the Redeemers did not mean much improvement for the white yeomanry either, and it can be said that ‘Redemption’ turned out to be, for all concerned, one of the worst periods in the history of the South in economic terms.

My last remark concerns material available on Reconstruction. While there are masses of material on slavery and the Civil War, sources that investigate beyond the year 1865 are significantly less common, or to be more precise, there are not many authors who put slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction into context. From my initial research I got the impression that historical writers treat the aforementioned periods as separate ‘chunks’ of history, and I think there is a danger that the general public will perceive them as such. While I am aware that the extent of each of the respective periods is vast, I believe it is important to establish such links because a lot of people nowadays have not only a somewhat distorted vision of the Civil War era, influenced by its ‘romanticised’ depiction in popular culture, but also a blurred perception of the connection between the ‘second’ Reconstruction of the twentieth century and the one that preceded it. By introducing Reconstruction as a phenomenon that emerged as a consequence of the Civil War, and which itself had further consequences lasting long into the twentieth century, Eric Foner’s comprehensive writings have performed an invaluable service to their readers.
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