

Chapter 5

Reconstruction

At the end of the Civil War, the United States began an unprecedented experiment in democracy. Policies during the Reconstruction period enfranchised former male slaves and lifted them to a position of economic and political power. The United States for the first time attempted to be true to documents like the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights. New guarantees took the form of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments – abolishing slavery, enforcing equality before the law by the federal government, and prohibiting denial of the vote on racial grounds. At the same time, however, the word *male* made its entry into the Constitution for the first time, explicitly excluding women from the franchise. And while the Civil Rights Bill of 1875 banned discrimination in public accommodations, it lacked enforcement powers and by 1883 had been ruled unconstitutional.

Revolution and counter-revolution

During Reconstruction over 600 black men won elected office as Republicans – the “Party of Lincoln” – in the legislatures of the 11 former Confederate states.¹ Nineteen black men represented the South in the U.S. House of Representatives, including eight who served after Reconstruction’s formal end in 1877. Two black senators, Hiram R. Revels and Blanche K. Bruce, represented Mississippi in the U.S. Senate. The era closed when Congressman George H. White from North Carolina completed his second and final term in 1901.

At the state level, 18 black men held leading positions in five states: South Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida and Arkansas. P.B.S.

Pinchback briefly served as governor of Mississippi; while other elected leaders held the posts of Lieutenant Governor (LA, MS, SC), Treasurer (LA, SC), Superintendent of Education (AK, FL, LA, MS), and Secretary of State (FL, MS, SC). Often more important for grassroots people were the local positions filled throughout the South like – such as sheriff, county supervisor, and tax collector.

This newly gained political power also enabled black people to leverage economic power as well. Republican legislatures passed laws making credit available to poor people. They passed measures that protected the rights of tenants, favored renters and sharecroppers, and shifted the tax burden to the wealthy. New possibilities in every area of economic life opened for Southern working people of all races.

Driven by the freedmen's desire for schooling, Reconstruction governments set up many of the first public education systems in the South. By 1870, 50% of white children and 40% of black children were in school. Half of the nine thousand teachers teaching in the region's 4,000 schools were black. More than 20 major black colleges were founded during this period, including Fisk (1866), Howard and Morehouse (1868), and Meharry (1876). Graduates from these schools helped fill the demand for black teachers and elected officials.

Republican Reconstruction governments were activist in outlook – taxing land and property, and implementing policies that addressed the needs of their impoverished constituencies. Eric Foner notes, "Public schools, hospitals, penitentiaries, and asylums for orphans and the insane were established for the first time or received increased funding. South Carolina funded medical care for poor citizens, and Alabama provided free legal counsel for indigent defendants...Nashville expanded its medical facilities and provided bread, soup, and firewood to the poor...Washington itself embarked on a public works program, including the laying of much-needed sewer lines."ⁱⁱ These expenditures drew heated criticism from plantation owners, the Democratic Party, and racists across the country. What really stirred their anger was something very different, however. As Lerone Bennett, Jr., says, "The monstrous crime of Reconstruction was equality."ⁱⁱⁱ

Even after the bloody defeat of Reconstruction in the mid-1870s, both races could be found eating in the same restaurants and burying their loved ones in the same graveyards. While most classrooms remained segregated, Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina passed laws creating interracial school systems, and New Orleans "witnessed an extraordinary experiment in interracial education."^{iv} It was only in 1881

that a Tennessee Jim Crow¹ railroad law began the policy of segregating public facilities. Then in 1890 Mississippi moved a step further by drawing up a new constitution that effectively barred black voters from the polls. In following years this Mississippi Plan became the model for all the Southern states.

Growth of black institutions

In just two years after the surrender of the Confederate Army in 1865, black civic and political organizations blossomed throughout the South – especially in the Black Belt region, the plantation low country known for its rich, dark soil. As Foner points out, under the protection of Northern occupying troops, many of whom were black, the newly liberated slaves created self-help organizations and schools, became active members of the Republican Party and Union Leagues, published newspapers and organized banks, established “burial societies, debating clubs, Masonic lodges, fire companies, drama societies, trade associations, temperance clubs, and equal rights leagues.”^v

As during slavery, black people also established their own churches – enriched by a musical and oral tradition going back to African origins. White churches refused to give up the markers of white privilege and physically segregated white and black worshippers. Black churches stood at the heart of community life and nurtured social, economic, and political leadership. Churches linked “blacks across lines of occupation, income, and prewar status...offered the better-off the opportunity for wholesome and respectable association, provided the poor with a modicum of economic insurance, and opened positions of community leadership to men of modest backgrounds.”^{vi}

More than any other factor, the intractable nature of white supremacy maintained the solidarity of these new institutions through all their internal tensions. The recognition that black people would never be allowed an equal partnership with white people – even with white allies – helped advance the trend of Black Nationalism historically. National consciousness grew out of the lived experience of the black masses – people who were still partly African, but forged together by generations of toil into a new people, with a culture of resistance linked to the land of North America.

The early development of black civil society in the post-Civil War years was a heady and hopeful time. People demonstrated a sophisticated grasp of issues and organization – and asserted these

¹ The term *Jim Crow* originated in a 19th-century minstrel song stereotyping African Americans and over time came to represent government-sanctioned racial segregation in the United States.

abilities often in the face of furious and violent reaction. Then a counter-revolutionary alliance of nightriders, Democrats, preachers calling for Southern "Redemption," newspaper editors, New South businessmen, and white craft workers took shape. And remnants of the defeated planter elite never missed an opportunity to inflame and alarm whites of every class about the perils of what they called "Negro domination."

From Presidential to Congressional Reconstruction

After Lincoln's assassination in April, 1865, Andrew Johnson became president. Johnson represented the white mountain people of Eastern Tennessee who hated the planters' domination of the South. Yet as Johnson's example makes clear, the mountain folks' attitude toward black people was uneven, at best. During the two years that Johnson controlled post-war policy – the period of Presidential Reconstruction – the planters moved to retake power and establish the plantation system as before, but without calling it slavery. Confederate leaders resumed their positions in state governments, and state legislatures passed Black Codes – laws aimed at forcing people back into their former work roles.

In celebrating their newly won freedom, the freed slaves took to the road to reunite with family members, explore new possibilities, and simply to assert their right to move about. When at work, people would stop to attend political or community meetings. Women refused to return to the fields, devoting time to their children and to campaigning for public education. In these exhilarating times, the Black Codes attempted to turn back the clock. Vagrancy laws meant people could be picked up for no reason, put in jail, and then leased out to local planters to work the fields under guard. Southern society as a whole became the collective slave master. Armed vigilantes roamed the countryside enforcing the codes, and white rioters attacked black people in New Orleans and Memphis.

General William Tecumseh Sherman's Special Field Order No. 15 granted the liberated slaves of the South Carolina low country 40 acres and the loan of army mules to help with plowing. Also, the head of the Freedmen's Bureau, O.O. Howard, ordered 40-acre allotments to be set aside for distribution. But President Johnson rescinded both these measures in the summer of 1865 – as he moved to reinstate the property of the plantation owners. Johnson's goal during this period was to consolidate a coalition of Democrats in the North with white workers, small farmers, and a reined-in planter class in the South.

The Republican Party responded slowly to this threat. Reports from black people and their allies in the federally sponsored Freedmen's Bureaus, along with a spontaneous strike wave by Southern black labor in 1866-67, made clear that conciliation with the racists was not an

option. Then when President Johnson vetoed the Civil Rights Act of 1866, the Republicans knew they had to take action. Led by the most principled anti-slavery advocates in Congress – Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, and other “Radical Republicans”² – the Congress quickly 1) overturned Johnson’s veto, 2) passed the 14th Amendment penalizing the South if they did not extend the franchise to black people, 3) drew up a set of punitive laws that overturned the Black Codes and removed Confederate sympathizers from the state governments, and 4) impeached President Johnson. While Johnson retained his position by one vote in the Senate, this new program of Congressional Reconstruction in the spring of 1867 opened a period of truly revolutionary change in the South.

The dramatic shift in Reconstruction policy, however, also gave rise to a counter-offensive. Opponents moved quickly to organize the Klu Klux Klan, and cracks opened in the Republican front that eventually contributed to Reconstruction’s defeat. Armed terror directed at black people had already taken a heavy toll since the close of the war. Then in April 1867 former Confederate officers and planters formally organized the KKK. Hooded nightriders targeted local black political leaders and their white Southern (“scalawag”) and transplanted Northern (“carpetbagger”) allies. For three years the Klan ran amok. White-led Republican governments in the South generally lacked the resolve to suppress the terrorists. In Texas and Arkansas, however, the governors declared martial law and relied on the state militia (Arkansas) and state police (Texas), both of which had large numbers of black ex-soldiers in their ranks. These forces broke up the armed gangs, made hundreds of arrests, tried and hung three leaders, and drove the stragglers across state lines. Finally, in 1870-71 the federal government passed the Enforcement and the Klu Klux Klan Acts. These laws empowered federal troops to intervene when state governments refused to take action. Committed Attorneys General, Amos T. Ackerman and George H. Williams, pursued the Klan, prosecuted its leaders, and sent federal troops into nine South Carolina counties – forcing thousands of racists to flee the state. Ackerman also carried out an educational campaign throughout the North that mobilized public opinion behind these actions.

² The Radicals were the wing of the Republican Party with roots in the abolitionist movement. Leaders in the Senate included Sumner, Benjamin Wade, and Henry Wilson; and in the House, Stevens, George Julian, and James Ashley. (Foner, *Reconstruction*) Radical Benjamin Wade: “The radical men are the men of principle: they are the men who feel what they contend for. They are not your slippery politicians who can jigger this way or that, or construe a thing any way to suit the present occasion.” (Simkin, “*Radical Republicans*”)

The Republicans, however, did not fully unite behind this campaign to suppress the Klan. Some balked at the exercise of federal power. Others used the post-war climate of scandal-ridden business expansion to promote government by the “best men,” in place of President Grant’s Reconstruction agenda. The party began to fracture into *stalwarts*, aligned with President Grant and Republican machine politics, and *liberals*, promoting non-interference by the federal government and reliance on the elite to rule. Radical Republicans could be found in both camps – some alignments resulting from personal animosity directed at President Grant, particularly after his attempt to annex the Dominican Republic in 1871. The divisions among Republicans led to a Liberal Republican Convention in 1872 – and a subsequent alliance with Democrats to oppose Grant’s reelection. Grant won by a large margin, and Reconstruction remained in place for four more years. But the Liberals singled out the Reconstruction governments of the South – and the strong role of black leadership there – for particularly vehement abuse.

Over time white paternalism toward the South’s black people showed its true character. Northern capital gained control of the Republican Party’s mix of Unionists, abolitionists, liberal elitists, utopian socialists, machine politicians, and free black people. Much like the Democratic Party of today – with its 1990s Welfare Reform and Effective Death Penalty laws – the Republican Party of the 1870s ratcheted to the right. While courting black voters, the party betrayed black interests when it came time to deliver on election promises. Meanwhile, the Democrats of the 1870s, after toying with more tolerant “New Departure” politics, fully committed themselves to open white supremacy. Echoes of this anti-federal government outlook have persisted in the South to this day in calls for “states’ rights.”

Counter-revolution and federal retreat

By the early 1870s, only South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana and Florida – states with majority or near-majority black populations – still retained Reconstruction governments. The planter controlled Democratic Party had successfully “redeemed” the others, beginning in 1867 with Maryland. Then in 1873 an economic depression hit the country, which pushed concern for the treatment of black people out of public consciousness. Charles Sumner on his deathbed made an appeal for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1875. A watered-down version became law – after dropping the section that desegregated the schools – but it was essentially an empty gesture. That same year Grant drew public condemnation for blocking the forced seating of Democratic legislators in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Liberal, free-market oriented Republicans

joined the Democrats in citing Louisiana as an example of excessive federal intervention in state affairs. This Republican backsliding undermined Grant's efforts to move against electoral violence and thereby safeguard black people's voting rights.

Then in the summer of 1876, Grant received news that the Oglala Sioux leader Crazy Horse had joined with the Cheyenne to defeat federal troops at the Battle of the Rosebud in Montana. Crazy Horse then linked his forces with the Hunkpapa Sioux chief, Sitting Bull, and on June 25th they trapped and destroyed General George Armstrong Custer's 7th Cavalry in the valley of the Little Big Horn. This indigenous threat, when combined with recession-driven worker unrest in the East, convinced the ruling class that Federal forces could no longer be spared for the increasingly ineffective occupation of the South.

Meanwhile, white vigilante violence had become commonplace in all the elections in the Reconstruction states. When combined with the planters' economic power over black voters, Democrats were able to take power state by state across the Deep South. By the time the Republicans agreed to the Hayes-Tilden Compromise in 1877, which kept the presidency in Republican hands, Reconstruction was essentially already dead. The Republicans simply formalized Reconstruction's end by pledging not to interfere with Democratic governments across the South. President Hayes withdrew the federal troops to their barracks – and later redeployed them against striking railroad workers in Pittsburgh and against the Nez Percé people resisting forced relocation in the Northwest.

President Grant later commented that he “found the events of 1877 ‘a little queer.’ During his administration...the entire Democratic Party and the ‘morbidly honest and “reformatory” portion of the Republican’ had thought it ‘horrible’ to employ federal troops ‘to protect the lives of Negroes. Now, however, there is no hesitation about exhausting the whole power of the government to suppress a strike on the slightest intimation that danger threatens.”^{vii}

The struggle continues

Migration movements

While 1877 marked the close of Reconstruction, it by no means ended the self-organization and initiative of the African American people. In 1879 a mass movement out of the South drew on Biblical imagery of the Exodus to mobilize tens of thousands to flee economic hard times and political oppression.^{viii} Planters, in turn, mobilized vigilante squads to turn these “Exodusters” back from the Mississippi River. They bribed steamboat captains and threatened reprisals if crowds eager to emigrate gained passage. Plantation owners saw their labor force fleeing before

their eyes and resolved to stop the exodus. But because of the hard economic times, poor white workers were not so inclined to terrorize black people into returning to a crowded labor market, and violence was limited.

Steven Hahn reports that the total number of black people who moved to Kansas was in the range of 20,000 to 25,000. Another thousand migrated from the upper South to Indiana – and then possibly on to other states. In subsequent years, with the breakup of Indian Territory in Oklahoma after the 1887 Dawes Act, those lands too became a destination. A black “town-building” movement established more than 20 communities in Oklahoma. And together with descendants of slaves owned by the territory’s native peoples in pre-war times, the newcomers formed the social basis for the emergence of Tulsa’s “Black Wall Street,” destroyed by white rioters in 1921.³

Meanwhile, the white-led African Colonization Society received inquiries in waves, depending on social conditions, during each of the closing decades of the 19th Century. The number of actual emigrants tended to be in the hundreds during each peak period. But many others made plans to move to Africa, with organizing often centered on their church and its pastor. Emigration was a major undertaking, and expensive. The timing had to be right and the harvest and sales adequate to pay off debts, purchase tickets, and still have enough left to get to embarkation points in New Orleans, Charleston, Norfolk, or Baltimore. Then there were the costs of setting up once in Liberia. A developing sense of peoplehood and self-affirmation drove these emigration efforts. Hahn reports that “there is to be seen in the letters, petitions, and testimonies about emigration the articulation of a deep sense of identity among those who simultaneously shared African descent and suffered white oppression, of an incipient popular nationalism, and of a desire for social separatism.”^{ix}

³ A false newspaper report on the rape of a white woman set off the worst race riot in U.S. history in the segregated Greenwood section of Tulsa Oklahoma on Monday, May 30, 1921. Rioters torched over a thousand homes and killed up to 300 people. The Tulsa Race Riot Commission set up in 1997 recommended that compensation be paid to survivors – as had happened in 1994 with survivors of the Rosewood, FL, massacre of 1923 – but the city and state failed to follow through. Four hundred plaintiffs, including 150 survivors, then filed suit in federal court in 2003 with the help of a team of lawyers led by Harvard Law Professor Charles Ogletree. On May 16, 2005, the Supreme Court rejected without comment an appeal of the lower court’s ruling that a two-year statute of limitations could not be extended. (*Askia Muhammad*, Final Call, June 1, 2005)

Post-Reconstruction alliances

Even in the difficult post-Reconstruction period, however, people seized on opportunities to advance issues of local concern to the black community. In the Deep South, for example, *fusion* politics aligned certain black politicians and their voting base with elements in the Democratic Party, thereby maintaining a measure of local political control within the overall white supremacist structure. A second type of alliance, linked with white agrarian insurgencies, aimed to reduce debts and provide easier access to credit. Independents and Greenbackers led such campaigns in Eastern Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and the northern counties of Georgia and Alabama. To appeal to black voters, these parties often called for increased school funding and an end to voter fraud.

Readjusters: In Virginia an alliance of black people in the east together with white mountain people in the west took control of the state government from 1879 to 1883. Once in power, the reformers reduced the burden of bank debt, put money into education – a major demand of the movement’s black constituency – and founded a black state college, the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute. Hahn reports that in the four years the Readjusters were in power, “black schools multiplied from 675 to 1,715, and the students enrolled increased from 35,768 to 90,948.”^x

Faced with these electoral gains, the Democratic Party responded with a racist campaign aimed at dividing the hill people from their black allies. The Readjusters failed to meet this challenge head-on and refused to put forward black candidates above the local level. Meanwhile, black people grew tired of providing the voting muscle for the alliance while seeing all the major positions going to white politicians. The result was a defeat for the Readjusters in 1883. Eastern Virginia pushed on, however, forming political clubs that included non-voting women, founding a newspaper, and building an electoral machine that in 1888 sent former slave and Union League organizer John Mercer Langston to Washington.

Knights of Labor: The Knights of Labor, which we will discuss in some detail in Chapter 9, organized Worker Assemblies and mounted bi-racial electoral campaigns that overlapped other insurgent movements of the period. The Knights actively organized black people – but in the South usually into segregated assemblies. Nonetheless, in 1886 the Knights held an integrated national convention in Richmond, Virginia – reflective of the interracial politics in the state during the 1880s. Black people also were active in the 1877 national railroad strike, and supported union organizing on the New Orleans waterfront, in coalmines, and in cotton and sugar cane fields across the South.

Broken promise of Populism

Populism – North Carolina: In the 1890s, black initiative contributed to the agrarian upsurge known as the Populist Movement. In North Carolina an alliance of white and black small farmers mounted a Populist-Republican fusion campaign that gained control of the state legislature in 1894. Once in power the alliance gave local voters the right to select county officials and took steps to protect the black franchise. These measures paid off in 1896 with the election of a Republican governor and George H. White as Congressional representative from the “Black Second.” Even more important was the upsurge in black office-holders at the local level. Hahn quotes the outraged comments of white supremacist Furnifold Simmons: “Negro CONGRESSMEN, NEGRO SOLICITORS, NEGRO REVENUE OFFICERS, NEGRO COLLECTORS OF CUSTOMS, NEGROES in charge of white institutions, NEGROES in charge of white schools,...NEGRO CONSTABLES arresting white women and men, NEGRO MAGISTRATES trying white women and men, white convicts chained to NEGRO CONVICTS, and forced to social equality with them.”^{xi} The emphasis given here to “white women” and “social equality” is a forerunner of the Democrats’ racist campaign that succeeded in smashing the fusion movement two years later.

North Carolina’s interracial politics stood out as an exception during these years. But the lack of resistance by white allies to the ensuing Democratic onslaught fit the dominant pattern of the period. Georgia’s Populist leader Tom Watson moved from courting black votes in the 1890s to actively promoting segregation a few years later. Populist platforms across the South made gestures toward black people’s concerns, but once in power the party bent over backward to prove it had no interest in social equality. Robert Allen notes that Virginia Populist conventions were segregated, while Alabama’s had no black delegates.^{xii} Populists proclaimed their opposition to lynching – but took no action when a lynching actually occurred. Populists failed to oppose, and even supported, segregationist legislation being passed throughout the South in these years. They offered a promise of jury duty as an enticement to black voters – but then refused to open the rolls in Populist-controlled counties. Populists opposed racially mixed education and refused to support federal aid to either black or white schools out of a concern to preserve states’ rights.

The movement lost momentum when the Populist Party merged nationally with the Democrats in 1896. In North Carolina during the 1898 electoral campaign, Democratic newspapers carried hysterical denunciations charging black men with raping white women. Editors claimed that with black politicians in power, black people were “taking over” even the most intimate aspects of white people’s lives. Defense of

“white womanhood” became the rallying cry for the assault on North Carolina’s fusion politics – and with it, on black political rights generally. The violent defeat of fusion came in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898. White mobs shot down black people in the street, drove hundreds from their homes, and seized the mayor’s office. Desperate appeals to the Republican governor and to President William McKinley, also a Republican, went unanswered.

Populism – Eastern Texas: In Eastern Texas, Grimes County remained the country’s last outpost of interracial politics. Here German settlers had joined with black Republicans to wield significant local power for decades. But by the late 1890s the Southern tradition of “White Capper” gangs and rural “Regulators” emerged in the form of the local White Man’s Union. Vigilantes roamed Eastern Texas, intent on suppressing the last vestiges of black political power. The story repeated itself here as it had elsewhere over the previous 30 years – a history of armed outrages against striking sugar workers in Louisiana (1887), against Colored Alliance boycott leaders in Mississippi (1889), and against striking cotton pickers in Arkansas (1891), as well as lynch mob terror that became commonplace in the South from the 1880s on. In 1900, the last biracial post-Reconstruction government passed into history. In the small town of Anderson, Texas, the White Man’s Union gunned down “much of the Populist leadership, beginning with the blacks.”^{xiii}

Overview and a look ahead

Intense struggles marked the 35 years from Lee’s surrender at Appomattox in 1865 through Reconstruction to the defeat of fusion politics in Eastern Texas in 1900. Throughout these years and into the 20th Century, as one front of struggle closed down, another opened up. Acting through the Republican Party, black people held power in parts of the South for less than a decade. But during this time they turned the world upside down, putting “the bottom rail on top.”^{xiv} Social legislation – in matters affecting land and labor, education, civil rights, and the public sphere generally – benefited all working class people. The social order the former slaves created compares favorably with today’s rampant inequality, overflowing prisons, and shrinking opportunities for people in the poorer sectors of the workforce. After 1875 people’s creativity continued to break through in reform movements driven by the same aspirations that shaped the Reconstruction program.

With the suppression of fusion politics in the 1890s, new forms of struggle emerged. At Tuskegee University from 1895 to 1915, Booker T. Washington represented a new class of black businessmen who preached class peace, self-improvement, and an alliance with white monopoly power. Counterposed to Washington were W.E.B. DuBois and William

Monroe Trotter, editor of the *Boston Guardian*, who together with 25 others founded the all-black Niagara Movement in 1905. While this organization was short-lived, the Niagara Movement projected the voice of northern black intellectuals – independent and clear in their denunciation of the unjust racial order. Publisher and anti-lynching campaigner Ida B. Wells supported the Niagara Movement and joined in the 1909 call to found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Black workers organized within the Mineworkers Union and in the International Workers of the World (IWW) – and later formed the Union of Sleeping Car Porters, led by A. Philip Randolph. Black intellectual Hubert Harrison, originally from St. Croix in the Virgin Islands, struggled within the white left, challenging the Socialist Party to recognize the advanced character of black people's struggle – as did Cyril Briggs, leader of the African Blood Brotherhood, in relation to the Communist Party USA.

Ida B. Wells founded the first black women's suffragette organization, the Alpha Suffragette Club, in 1913. Black women fought for women's suffrage, even though the racist pragmatists in the leadership of the movement discounted their support. W.E.B. DuBois published trail-blazing studies of black life; edited *The Crisis*, the independent organ of the NAACP founded in 1910; and built on H. Sylvester-Williams 1900 London Pan African Conference to call together the first Pan-African Congress in 1919. As the Great Migration of black people to the North took shape during the World War I labor shortage, Marcus Garvey brought national consciousness into the streets of New York and into organized chapters of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) across the South. Taken together, these businessmen, intellectuals, workers, and women – the broad masses of black people, North and South – represented the stirrings of a nation that was seeking its authentic voice and its place in history.

The rejection of Reconstruction's attempt at multiracial democracy also impacted other people of color across the country. Federal troops redeployed westward to fight the Indian wars. White homesteaders followed, with their settler consciousness no longer challenged by the reality of black political power in a reconstructed South. Lynchings, which enforced white supremacy in the South after Reconstruction, targeted Mexicans in the Southwest as well. After being reconstituted in 1874, the Texas Rangers resumed their role as the main enforcers of racial inequality in Texas. Their actions contrasted sharply with those of the Reconstruction state police who had suppressed the Klan just few years earlier. Many black soldiers, veterans of the Civil War and Reconstruction, found themselves transported to the border with Mexico in a conscious effort by authorities to foment hostility between black

people and Mexicans. Contradictions later erupted in Beeville, near Corpus Christi, in a riot between black and Mexican workers in 1894. Finally, anti-Chinese agitation, the Democratic Party's secret weapon in undermining the Republican's Reconstruction program, helped turn the 1877 railroad strike in San Francisco into an anti-Chinese riot.

Overall, the closing decades of the 19th Century were a time of turmoil – featuring economic centralization, hardship for workers and farmers, deflation, and widespread anti-monopoly struggles. Race was central to this process of capitalist consolidation. White people gained privileged access to land and jobs; but in return the majority of them found themselves squeezed by debt and having little control over work conditions, farm prices, or credit rates. Such tensions fed the white agrarian movements of the 1880s and '90s – at the same time that Indian wars, lynch mobs, exclusionary legislation, and segregation tended to govern relations among the masses of working people. In this climate of division and violence, the bankers, monopolists, and land speculators rose to dominate the country. They embodied capitalism's drive to accumulate – at any cost – while politicians cleared the way. Elite institutions justified expansion across the continent and beyond with theories of white racial superiority – and dressed it up as social science.

In the environment of industrial expansion after the Civil War, the democratic aspirations of the freed slaves had stood in practical opposition to the drive for monopoly and, later, imperial power. Even in defeat, as Lerone Bennett, Jr. comments, "Long before the rise of Afro-Asia, long before the emergence of the United Nations, black Americans struck a blow – in the heart of the Western World – for all the peoples of the [Third]⁴ World."^{xv} The defeat of Reconstruction represented a decisive step away from a society based on political and social equality. Instead, the dominant forces in society used legal and illegal terror to reestablish the color line – and extend it through the further dispossession of indigenous peoples and Mexicans, and the exclusion of Chinese immigrants.

White workers and farmers fought the new monopolists. But, with few exceptions, they also accepted, if not participated in, the brutal treatment of peoples of color. These divisions among laboring people made possible the accumulation of vast fortunes, the reorganization of society on a foundation of extreme differences of wealth and power – within a shell of self-righteous, liberal, democratic institutions – and the projection of the white owning class onto the world stage. Reconstruction had been a period of opportunity and hope. Its defeat

⁴ Bennett actually refers to the "First" world – giving precedence of order to the majority people of color across the globe.

moved the question of political power – and the question of nationhood – more to the center of oppressed peoples' struggles inside the United States. In this way a basis developed for political unity with the oppressed nations of Latin America, Asia, and Africa that were to come under U.S. influence in the 20th Century.

ⁱ The main sources for the discussion of Reconstruction are Eric Foner's *Reconstruction* and Lerone Bennett, Jr.'s *Before the Mayflower*.

ⁱⁱ Foner, op. cit., p. 364-365

ⁱⁱⁱ Bennett, Jr., op. cit., p. 236

^{iv} Foner, op. cit., p. 367

^v Ibid., p. 95

^{vi} Ibid., p. 95

^{vii} Ibid., p. 586

^{viii} The discussion of the post-Reconstruction period mainly draws on Steven Hahn's *A Nation at Our Feet*.

^{ix} Hahn, op. cit., p. 333

^x Ibid., p. 382

^{xi} Ibid., p. 437

^{xii} Robert Allen, "Self-Interest and Southern Populism," in *Reluctant Reformers*

^{xiii} Hahn, op. cit., p. 440

^{xiv} W.E.B. DuBois in *Souls of Black Folk*, quoting a freedman's comment to his former owner

^{xv} Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, p. 252