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# GROUNDED FREEDOM: INTERPRETING FOUR EPISODES IN THE POST-EMANCIPATION QUEST FOR LAND

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the centrality of landed property in African American thought between the American Civil War and the end of the Second World War. Land is rarely understood to be fundamental to our practice of freedom in the twenty-first century. In the post-emancipation moment, however, the formerly enslaved people of the South and their allies believed that freedom was impossible without property in land. This dissertation asks two related questions with the hope of shedding light on the costs of losing that conception of freedom: what did landownership mean to freedpeople in the post-emancipation period? Did these meanings challenge emerging power structures in the period? This dissertation recovers historical reasons for attending to the material conditions of freedom in contexts beyond the mid-nineteenth century. I show that the focus on land in African American thought amounted to a two-level analysis of post-slavery domination. On one level, freedpeople believed that they needed to possess land so that they could experience privacy, cultivate economic self-reliance, and build communities. On another level, the land question served as an access point to think about the unequal relationships that pervaded post-emancipation life. From this perspective, land was a necessary fixture of public discussion because patterns of land ownership reflected social and political relations. Across the chapters of the dissertation, I identify four relational practices that the African American quest for land embodied: privacy, confiscation, reclamation, and cooperation.

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. In Chapter One I provide an overview of the freedpeople's desire for land. I show how the freedpeople's conceptual linking of landed property and freedom initiated a longstanding debate in African American thought about the possibility and conditions necessary to practice freedom after slavery. I also consider the

entanglement of the idea of grounded freedom with broader ideas about settler citizenship. In Chapter Two I explore a major reason that freedpeople wanted ownership of land: to establish homes. With a reading of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, I show how private property in the home enabled black enclosure and white exclusion. Chapter Three examines Congressman Thaddeus Stevens's Reconstruction Era plan to confiscate and redistribute planter land. Stevens answered the question, how can freedpeople obtain property in homes, but he failed to muster a winning coalition. In Chapter Four, I move beyond Reconstruction to think about the afterlife of grounded freedom. Pauline Hopkins's 1902 magazine novel, *Winona*, portrays abolition as a political project that resisted control over land, while also celebrating the reclamation of rightful inheritance. I highlight resonances between African American thought and indigenous thought in their aspiration for reclamation. The final chapter tracks W.E.B. Du Bois's turn toward cooperative organization in the twentieth century. While Du Bois briefly discards the idea that African American freedom depends on land ownership, he returns to an endorsement of cooperative ownership of land in the 1940s. Attuned to the transformation in economic production, Du Bois argued that land was still valuable in the twentieth century for the historical meaning attached to it. These four episodes in African American history offer us lessons on the continued importance of land in our present world. Though freedom does not necessarily require land as a material condition, the quest for land contributed to a struggle against white domination that continues today.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Land as the Foundation of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation

> "Their [African Americans in the rural South] politics and political struggles, that is, went into the making of two nations, deeply interconnected and stunningly distinct, imagined with a palpability and groundedness…embedded in persons, places, and land, in the relations and aspirations of rural family and community life, under their feet, as it were." [1]
> -Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*

> "We all know that the colored people want land. Night and day they think and dream of it. It is their all in all." [2]
> -C.P. Leslie at the South Carolina Constitutional Convention

On January 12, 1865 General William T. Sherman met with a group of African American leaders in Savannah, Georgia in order to ascertain what freed slaves might need in their newfound, emancipated condition. Garrison Frazier—an African American minister who not eight years before had bought his own freedom from a planter in North Carolina—stepped forward to speak for the group. When prompted to explain in his own words the meaning of slavery and freedom, Frazier exclaimed that the Emancipation Proclamation actively sought to take the slaves from "under the yoke of bondage" and place them "where they could reap the fruit of" their labor. General Sherman pushed Frazier to further explain how the government could ensure such a condition. "The way we can best take care of ourselves," Frazier boldly proclaimed, "is to have land, and turn it and till it by our own labor—that is by the labor of the women and children and old men."[3]

Frazier's conceptual linkage between freedom and land ownership was not unusual among freedpeople in the 1860s. Across the South, control over and access to land animated the

[1] Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 9.
[2] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of South Carolina,* 385.
[3] Berlin, *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labour: The Lower South: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, 3:331–38.

politics of the postwar period. Freedpeople, no longer bound to plantation economies nor restricted to material production and biological reproduction, openly discussed their expectations about the world of freedom. Time and again, freedpeople connected their desire to enter a free condition with aspirations for land. The idea that land redistribution was needed to assuage the political and social tendencies toward oligarchic arrangements of power can be labeled the post-emancipation land question because it appropriated earlier agrarian republican ideas about freedom and applied them to the budding aspiration to create an interracial republic after the end of slavery. The hopeful yearning for government action on the post-emancipation land question spread like wildfire between towns and hamlets and cities of the former Confederacy. The contagiousness of such a 'rumor-has-it' circulation startled the Freedmen's Bureau officials and Republican carpetbaggers who sought to extinguish any desire for a radical reorganization of property. General Rufus Saxton, the assistant commissioner who oversaw operations in South Carolina, testified before the Joint Committee on Reconstruction assuring federal politicians that "all offices and agents of the Freedmen's Bureau were instructed to correct these impressions among the freedmen that they were to have lands," but also admitting that "so deep-seated a conviction was difficult to eradicate."[4] One reason for the difficulty in stamping out the demand for land was the de-centralized and widespread nature of the aspiration. Colonel F.H. Whittier writing from Fort Sumter reflected on the rekindling effect that rural to urban and inland to coastal migration achieved. Though he was doing "all in his power to do away with the expectation [for land]... [He] no sooner [got] back than there is another story started."[5] Many political officials and journalists shared Whittier's observations and feared that the freedpeople,

[4] United States, *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction.*, 121.
[5] Cited in Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 132.

in seizing the mantle of citizenship, might expand the meaning of the "rights and privileges" due to all citizens.[6]

This dissertation responds to two related questions. Why did the formerly enslaved and free African Americans conceive of freedom as an experience and practice grounded in access to land in the post-emancipation South? Did theorists of grounded freedom challenge emerging power structures and reconfigure the political relationships that undergirded American democracy? To answer these questions, my project assembles an archive of materials published and unpublished to reconstruct a lineage of American thinkers addressing the spatial dimensions of freedom. Far from being a fleeting concern in African American political thought, the demand for land during Reconstruction shaped the thinking of writers, reformers, and intellectuals for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though the end of federal Reconstruction policy muted the hope that government institutions would lend their coercive powers to secure widespread ownership, many freedpeople and African Americans sought to secure land through other means, most notably by accumulating wealth and purchasing property rights. As the Reconstruction faith that governmental power could be deployed to redistribute land dissipated, African American thinkers imagined alternative, non-state methods for responding to the land question. Those changing strategies coincided with profound changes in the meaning of land ownership and its role as a condition of freedom. By the twentieth century, African Americans in search of economic autonomy and space of their own could not achieve such freedom through land ownership alone. And yet, the idea that land grounded the practice of freedom captivated thinkers and popular writers well into the twentieth century because they recognized that white control over space perpetuated racial domination and secured the white republic.

[6] United States, *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction.*, 7.

I formulate answers to these questions by analyzing the figurations of land ownership and landed property in the writings and speeches of post-emancipation thinkers. Every writer in the project can be considered a post-emancipation thinker both for their situation in time—the fact that they witnessed or experienced life after the formal abolition of slavery—and for their engagement with political questions arising from that legal abolition. Each thinker offers a different political practice associated with land use and control. Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* addressed the question, why did freedpeople want property in land? Jacobs's narrative represents the power of *privacy* or *solitude* that ownership of private property conferred. Responding to the demands of Southern freedpeople, Congressman Thaddeus Stevens provided a radical answer to the question of how freedpeople ought to acquire title to property in land. Stevens's speeches defend *confiscation* to secure ownership of real property and break the slave power. In chapters three and four I move temporally beyond Reconstruction proper and consider how a concern with land continued to inspire a theorization of the political practices necessary for realizing black freedom. Novelist Pauline Hopkins's fictional account of the pre-Civil War period underscores the role and value of *reclamation* in African American efforts to obtain property. Her account of rightful inheritance at the end of the novel resonates with indigenous efforts to enact resurgence. W.E.B. Du Bois's decades-long engagement with the land question resulted in his promotion of *cooperation* as the surest method to achieve the economic and political autonomy that previous contests over land embodied.

Enclosure, confiscation, reclamation, and cooperation were repertoires of freedom grounded in land, vital tasks whose enactment embodied freedom in practice and—in that enactment—opened new fields of possibility for action. In deploying these strategies, African Americans also attempted to bring into existence new relationships between black and white

citizens. Understanding the relationality implied by demanding access to land highlights the potency of the freedpeople's political visions.[7] The demand for land amounted to more than a commitment to a universal ideal of economic citizenship or an effort to replicate the conditions of white citizens. For the freedpeople and their successors, land functioned as an intermediating object between citizens. Possession, use, and enjoyment of land and space were shaped by social and political relationships among people. Acquiring access and ownership, thus, constituted rearrangements to the social and political order and contested a powerful source of racial hierarchy. For this reason, I contend that grounded freedom constituted a "expressivist politics of resignification," in the words of political theorist Robert Nichols, an "imperfect, incomplete, and aspirational [project] of collective resignification of the basic terms of political order."[8] Put differently, even without the successful acquisition of property in land, the idea of grounded freedom reworked the vocabularies of citizenship, ownership, and justice.

Recovering this lineage extends or modifies scholarship in several fields of study. I detail how the land imaginaries conceived of by post-emancipation thinkers contributes to the broader study of African American thought. The nineteenth century land question has received extensive coverage by historians working in the wake of W.E.B. Du Bois's publication of *Black Reconstruction in America*. Du Bois's defense of the enslaved and freedpeople's role in changing the course of historical events has led to wide-ranging historical literature on Reconstruction from the perspective of everyday freedpeople and African Americans.[9] Scholars have produced detailed studies of the political, cultural, and economic lives of the freedpeople and recent efforts

[7] See MacPherson for an articulation of property as a set of relations among persons. MacPherson, *Property*, Chapter 1; Goeman, "Land as Life: Unsettling the Logics of Containment," 77.
[8] Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*, 158.
[9] Holt, *Black over White*; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 77–123; Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*; Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*; Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*; Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*; Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South*.

have yielded research on the centrality of land in these everyday practices.[10] I add to this literature by analyzing and interpreting the archival material previously uncovered with an eye toward the spatial politics of the land question. By threading these four thinkers together, I show that the freedpeople's demand for land had long-lasting implications for the idea of freedom in African American thought. Even as African American intellectuals pushed debates toward new strategies of freedom and organized around issues as diverse as lynching, segregation, and voting rights, African American political imaginaries continued to pay homage to the land as a site of racialized political contest. Grappling with this lineage of thinking touches on the ways that we conceptualize African American ideas of freedom/emancipation, their entanglement with settler colonialism, and the existence of a black counter-geography. Before outlining these points of intervention, I briefly summarize the post-emancipation demand for land to provide context and grounding for the later chapters.

**The Post-Emancipation Demand for Land**

The origins of the idea of grounded freedom in African and American thought has roots in bodies of thought that permeated the antebellum United States. Members of the American Colonization Society and proto-black nationalists affirmed the need for a black homeland to resolve the political crises generated by slavery.[11] Reformers who disagreed with plans to remove Africans from the continent sought land in the United States on which to build settlements.[12] These experiments were part of the broader awakening of social movements in

[10] Magdol, *A Right to the Land*; Oubre, *Forty Acres and a Mule*; Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*; Holt, *Making Freedom Pay*; Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*; Petty, *Standing Their Ground*; Bell, *Claiming Freedom*.
[11] Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*; Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*; Foner and Hahn, *Nothing But Freedom*, 8–23; Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution*; David, *The American Colonization Society*.
[12] Pease, *Black Utopia*.

antebellum America.[13] Though both strategies to avoid racial conflict amassed large followings, neither achieved widespread acceptance or success. The formal emancipation of slaves during the Civil War raised a host of new questions. If Africanness and blackness were no longer synonymous with servitude and unfreedom from the perspective of the American legal system, could Africans become Americans and so participate as citizens of the American nation? What political, economic, and social transformations would need to accompany formal freedom to realize interracial rule? On the ground, freedpeople did not necessarily concern themselves with national policy. For ordinary black Southerners, the questions that weighed most forcefully on their minds were questions about their ability to remain free from the domination by their former masters, self-regulate their intimate and social lives, as well as make economic decisions for themselves. In recognizing the centrality of land in achieving these standards of free life, the freedpeople—like Garrison Frazier—turned to government officials to secure titles to land.

Freedpeople's dissatisfaction arose from a collective belief that freedom must include economic and political autonomy, a condition in which the former slaves would not have to work for their former owners and could set the terms of their laboring. As Garrison Frazier put it, having land guaranteed to the owners the ability to "turn it and till it by our own labor," to "reap the fruit of *our own* labor."[14] Subjection to the landowners' management through contractual obligations threatened to re-enable the authority of the planter class and intensify the extraction of wealth from black free laborers. Already in late 1865 and 1866, new state governments organized under the lenient standards set by President Johnson enhanced the power of large

[13] Hankins, *The Second Great Awakening and the Transcendentalists*; Thomas, "The Second Great Awakening in Virginia and Slavery Reform, 1785-1837"; Masters and Young, "The Power of Religious Activism in Tocqueville's America."
[14] Berlin, *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labour: The Lower South: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, 3:331–38.

landholders with the passage of Black Codes. Laws in Georgia permitted whipping for misdemeanors; in Mississippi laws required freed men and women to possess evidence of employment; South Carolina taxed freedpeople who sought employment outside of agricultural and domestic labor.[15] These new laws repurposed the language of antebellum slave codes to force freedpeople to work for the terms set by landholders. A resolution among landowners in Elon, VA enumerated many restrictions on laborers and concluded by assuring that "any person or persons…. violating these obligations…shall for such conduct receive the contempt of all good Citizens."[16] Widespread complaints to the Freedmen's Bureau that employers refused to pay black laborers a fair wage at the end of the harvesting season in 1865 merely affirmed the success of the Black Codes in fortifying the power of landowners.[17]

At the heart of the freedpeople's worries was the recognition that separation from the land equaled separation from the means of subsistence. This condition empowered landowners by denying laborers unlimited access to the means of their survival. In the agrarian, rural South, the imperfect development of industrial production meant that freedpeople could achieve a level of independence by gaining access to land on which to grow food.[18] The desire be self-reliant was evidenced by the freedpeople's aversion to planting cotton which was popularly referred to as "the slave crop."[19] A Texas freedman recalled years after Reconstruction that he preferred growing sweet potatoes and corn to cotton because "we could not eat [cotton]."[20] If the

[15] Bell, *Claiming Freedom*, 54.
[16] "Resolutions Adopted by a Meeting of Virginia Employers."
[17] Bell, *Claiming Freedom*, 55.
[18] An idea that scholars have recently begun to champion as contemporary strategy to undermine the form of capitalist oppression unleashed in the wake of the "second industrial revolution" of the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries. Clegg and Lucas, "Three Agricultural Revolutions."
[19] Cited in Foner, *Reconstruction*, 108.
[20] Foner, 108.

freedpeople were hungry and destitute, they could not reject the predatory terms of labor that many planters would extend.

Beyond the personal fears of vulnerability resulting from their precarious economic positions, the quest for land in the South also embodied a collective world-building project on the part of freedpeople to build new, autonomous community institutions. Historian Julie Saville, reflecting on the collective interest in securing land, remarked that the common perception that freedpeople wanted their own forty acres and a mule to ensure economic progress "obscure[s] values that are foreign to the idea of land as a commodity."[21] Land also provided space on which the freedpeople could construct churches, schools, banks, and storehouses—institutions that fostered a robust public life and sustained the multiple forms of autonomy that freedpeople understood freedom to entail.[22] To accumulate the necessary wealth to make such purchases, freedpeople pooled their incomes, worked fields in tandem, and experimented with cooperative forms of ownership. Sometimes these practices offended Northern reformers who labeled the somewhat less efficient egalitarian modes of production—such as the allocation of noncontinuous strips of land to avoid the concentration of poor soil to entire families—"barbaric" and "disorderly."[23] When collective action followed more familiar methods, however, Bureau officials wholeheartedly endorsed the schemes. For example, two hundred and fifty freedmen in Kinston, NC received praise and admiration from the assistant commissioner for forming a joint-stock company to buy homesteads in August 1865.[24]

[21] Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*, 19.
[22] Holt, *Making Freedom Pay*, 100–129.
[23] Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*, 16.
[24] Blunt, Hargate, and Blunt, "Committee of North Carolina Freedmen to the North Carolina Freedmen's Bureau Assistant Commissioner, August 7, 1865; and the Latter's Reply."

Freedpeople's interest in collective uplift and community engagement found its most powerful expression in the construction of freedmen's settlements or 'freedom colonies' as they were informally known. Freedmen's settlements included a range of patterns and styles of planning, but most consisted of a scattered collection of homesteads anchored by a church and school. Though scholars have traditionally focused on the settlements in the western United States forged as a result of the exoduster movement, historians Thad Sitton and James Conrad have shed light on the much larger number of colonies within the South.[25] Established far from white urban centers, these "remote, informal, and unofficial" black communities allowed freedpeople to build independent political and social lives outside of the purview of white economic and political elites.[26] Garrison Frazier, in his famous conversation with General Sherman, endorsed the practice of establishing freedom colonies, admitting that he personally "would prefer to live by ourselves" because "there is a prejudice against us [African Americans] in the South that will take years to get over…"[27] Without property in land, freedpeople could not secure spaces of self-segregation that brought residents safety, social belonging, and participation in informal community governance.

Though freedpeople attempted to acquire property in land through sale in the early Reconstruction period, anti-black violence, financial constraints, and prejudices prevented widespread accumulation. Most straightforwardly freedpeople had to deal with landowners and sellers who knew that facilitating black land accumulation would weaken their control over laborers. Many white planters refused to sell to African Americans, believing that such a move

[25] Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, Chapter 1.
[26] Sitton and Conrad, 4.
[27] Berlin, *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labour: The Lower South: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, 3:331–38.

risked propping up the status of their black neighbors.[28] The rise of organized white supremacist resistance like the Ku Klux Klan forced freed people to reckon with the additional costs of purchasing large farms that made them public targets. Perhaps no constraint operated with as much compulsion as the financial burdens of ownership, however. Smallholding freedpeople constantly mortgaged their lands to sustain production and some evidence shows that ownership was often associated with worse material circumstances than those of the renting class.[29] Furthermore, purchasing and retaining land was a difficult undertaking for most families. In North Carolina, only twenty-five percent of attempts to increase the size of landholdings resulted in long-term ownership.[30] Given these pressures, the demand for government redistribution of land constituted a bid to circumvent the impediments that arose to prevent black land ownership.

If the government would not employ force to ensure that freedpeople had land, then alternative plans would need to be made. Violence was but one response to the inaction of the federal government. For many freedpeople, the slow and steady accumulation of wealth was the most viable option available to access land, underwrite their autonomy, and enable the construction of independent communities. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, black agricultural workers steadily accumulated land. By 1880, one in five black southern families claimed land of their own; by 1910 that number had reached one in four.[31] While individual families gained rights to land, the progress in accumulating landed property was uneven and many rural African Americans smallholders acted as sharecroppers or agricultural laborers to supplement their income. In Georgia, barely more than one in ten African American families

[28] Pierson, "A Letter to Hon. Charles Sumner, with 'Statements' of Outrages upon Freedmen in Georgia, and an Account of My Expulsion from Andersonville, Ga., by the Ku-Klux Klan."
[29] Holt, *Making Freedom Pay*, 73–75.
[30] Holt, 69.
[31] Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790-1915*.

held land by 1910.[32] That land often consisted of stretches of poor soil, rugged terrain, or uncleared forests, characteristics that rendered the land burdensome or useless for white owners.[33] These successful gains never amounted to widespread ownership of land.

**The Problem of Emancipation and the Idea of Freedom in African American Thought**

The freedpeople's demand for land intervened in the politics unfolding in the post-emancipation South. Though black Southerners rejoiced at the coming of the Jubilee, many remained anxious about the structure of post-emancipation life. The Union military victory had destroyed the antebellum slave order and heralded the end of legalized bondage first in Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and, more substantively, in the thirteenth amendment to the Constitution. Freedom understood as the end of chattel slavery had been achieved, prompting some abolitionists to signal the end of the struggle against slavery. Abolitionist leader William Lloyd Garrison represented this wing of the movement when he spoke in 1865 at the thirty-second anniversary of the American Anti-Slavery Society. He stated "[m]y vocation as an Abolitionist, thank God, is ended." Garrison supported his claim with the assertion that most hamlets and villages across the United States would endorse the thirteenth amendment, ensuring a lasting prohibition. Freedmen and women and their radical abolitionist allies, however, began to rework the meaning of freedom to combat new ideologies and institutions that perpetuated the racial hierarchies and domination developed under slavery. They claimed that the dissolution of their position as chattel and the corollary assumption of self-possession did not amount to real freedom. The conception of grounded freedom that this dissertation explores represents one such reimagination of freedom in the wake of Emancipation.[34] My project, therefore, raises questions

[32] Schultz, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy*, 46.
[33] Schultz, 49.
[34] I capitalize Emancipation when I refer to the specific event of the Civil Era and I use the term emancipation to refer to the general idea of ending legalized bondage.

that stand at the heart of African American political thought. What has freedom meant to people of African descent in the United States? How has land figured in African American visions of freedom after Emancipation?

"Grounded Freedom" engages a conceptual dilemma arising from the empirical realities of America's history of slavery and emancipation: What difference—if any—is there between emancipation and freedom? Does emancipation necessarily result in freedom? The land demands of the freedpeople embodied an acknowledgement that emancipation had not given way to freedom. Freedpeople often claimed that they were not *truly* free until they had land.[35] Therefore, the freedpeople can be read as originating a longstanding debate in African American thought about the problems of transitioning from enslavement to freedom. Scholars have extensively critiqued the authoritative power that the image of Emancipation exerts on American collective memory. Saidiya Hartman has offered a potent reinterpretation of Emancipation and Reconstruction. In her view, liberal notions of freedom—such as political equality, self-possession, property ownership, and sovereignty—served to re-enslave black bodies.[36] She theorizes how slavery transformed and extended itself "in the limits and subjection of freedom."[37] Hartman prompts the question, if emancipation from slavery should be understood as a process in which new institutions and ideologies are fashioned to constrain black agency, what counter imaginaries are necessary to resist slavery's transmutations?

Hartman's diagnosis of slavery's afterlife builds on an historical recognition that Emancipation and Reconstruction fell short of enacting the depth of transformation required to

[35] A committee of freedmen argued that if the government did not grant their right to the soil, "we are left in a more unpleasant condition than our former... You will see this is not the condition of really freemen." Foner, *Reconstruction*, 160.
[36] "Burdened individuality" and "indebted servitude" became choice tools in the reconstruction of racial hierarchy in the post-emancipation United States.
[37] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 115.

enable freedom for African Americans. Frederick Douglass first sounded the alarm in 1888 at a commemoration of Emancipation in Washington, D.C. Douglass lambasted the failures of reformers and politicians to ensure that emancipated black southerners could realize political and economic freedom:

> That he [the freedman] is worse off, in many respects, than when he was a slave, I am compelled to admit, but I contend that the fault is not his, but that of his heartless accusers. He is the victim of a cunningly devised swindle, one which paralyzes his energies, suppresses his ambition, and blats all his hopes; and though he is nominally free he is actually a slave.[38]

This rendering of Reconstruction's failure emphasized that the formal abolition of slavery did not culminate in the realization of a substantive form of freedom for black southerners. Black codes and poverty, according to Douglass, had pressed the formerly enslaved into a new kind of servitude. The re-emergence of slavery's hierarchical and oppressive order was even more nefarious because it appeared to be a post-slavery order, obfuscating the realities of persisting domination. W.E.B. Du Bois likewise criticized the kind of freedom made possible in the post-emancipation period in his 1903 *Souls of Black Folk*. According to Du Bois, "the Negro is not free" because "in well-nigh the whole rural South the black farmers are peons, bound by law and custom to an economic slavery, from which the only escape is death or the penitentiary."[39] Both thinkers argued that the post-Reconstruction settlement could be understood as the result of the failures of emancipation or formal freedom to dismantle the political, social, and economic determinants of racial hierarchy and domination.[40]

Rinaldo Walcott reads the critique of emancipation as an opportunity to imagine possible ways out of the cycle of re-subjection. To make this thinking legible, Walcott posits a distinction

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[38] Douglass, "Address Delivered on the 26th Anniversary of the Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia."
[39] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 60–61.
[40] Ida B. Wells echoed this line of thinking when she criticized that emancipation was accompanied by "homelessness, pennilessness, ignorance, namelessness, and friendlessness." Wells-Barnett and Gates, *Selected Works of Ida B. Wells-Barnett*, 61.

between freedom and emancipation. Though we may celebrate the emancipation of slaves in 1865, Walcott contends that "emancipation is a legal process and term that…marks continued unfreedom, *not* the freedom it supposedly ushered in."[41] Freedom, by contrast, is "extra-emancipation" or "beyond the logic of emancipation."[42] Not only does the distinction between emancipation and freedom enable theorists to recast emancipation as a necessary but insufficient threshold for practicing freedom, it also allows them to salvage a value to which the emancipated, but fettered subject can appeal: freedom.[43] By separating freedom from emancipation, Walcott reorients readers toward a horizon of potential action. This theoretical insight resonates with the broader investment in freedom in African American thought. From antebellum thinkers like David Walker and Frederick Douglass to the Civil Rights Movement of the twentieth century, African Americans have understood the violence of white supremacy, limitations on their participation in an integrated public sphere, and economic disenfranchisement as constituting conditions of unfreedom or impediments to freedom.[44] The idea of grounded freedom is an early iteration of the larger African American project to rethink the meaning of freedom.[45] It offers a starting point for answering the question, what does freedom mean? Is freedom a state of being, a practice to perform, or a right to possess?

This dissertation explores how "Afro-modern political thought" revises our understanding of freedom.[46] Given the initial articulation of grounded freedom in the post-

[41] Walcott, *The Long Emancipation*, 1.
[42] Walcott, 1–2.
[43] Katherine Franke echoes this distinction when she affirms a difference between "being free and being freed." Franke, *Repair*, 7–8.
[44] Richard King argues that the worry about racial equality was largely an "argument among white people." King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*, 14.
[45] Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*.
[46] Gooding-Williams articulates the parameters of such a tradition in his book. Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*.

emancipation moment, it assumes that absolute slavery and total freedom from slavery are not the only states of being possible in modern democratic life. One can be groundless, landless, placeless, and homeless and not enslaved. These conditions, as we will see, amount to unfreedom even if the subjects inhabiting the conditions are not property of another person. The thinkers in this project offer a complicated and—at times—conflicting definition of freedom as ownership. Grounded freedom is a condition, constituted by possession, that enables certain practices. By owning land, freedpeople believed that they could realize economic autonomy, achieve self-subsistence, and so eschew the directives and coercion of their white neighbors. Such a condition of free laboring allowed freedpeople to exert control over their leisure time and accrue wealth which served as the basis for community engagement. The inverse process of grounded freedom also holds true; grounded freedom is a practice, aimed at possession, to achieve specific conditions. The thinkers in this dissertation frequently address this inverted construction of grounded freedom and, in the process, emphasize the actions and practices necessary to achieve freedom rather than the static condition of owning land. It is in embarking upon the project of securing land, the freedpeople found themselves practicing freedom in new ways. To hold public discussions about their shared problems and petition state and federal politicians, the freedpeople engaged in concerted political efforts and so claimed their position as citizens.

To understand grounded freedom as a response to the "constrained emancipation" of the Civil War moment is to occupy a particular perspective on the politics of emancipation.[47] Many scholars have probed the emancipation moment to articulate the ways in which antebellum slavery gave way to post-slavery forms of re-enslavement.[48] These accounts emphasize that legal

[47] Davis, *The Meaning of Freedom*, 138.
[48] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Mbembé and Meintjes, "Necropolitics"; Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black*; Sharpe, *In the Wake*; Weinbaum, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery*; Leroy, "Empire and the Afterlife of Slavery."

abolition was the midwife of slavery's "afterlives." My project draws on the re-enslavement narrative to better understand the context of post-emancipation. I depart from the focus of these accounts, however, in my interest in recuperating conceptions of freedom that sought further political and social changes than those entailed by legal abolition.[49] Grounded freedom can be read as a corresponding narrative to the rich literature on the re-emergence of slavery. Whereas the treatment of slavery's afterlife interrogates the remolding of racialized practices of governance, I am interested in the practices of freedom imagined and undertaken as a response to such changes. I share Eric Foner's belief that Reconstruction, in addition to denoting a discrete historical event, can be understood as an ongoing process, one that continued after the withdrawal of federal troops and that can be taken up in the present.[50] Without pretending to have access to the nuances of the everyday, I undertake a robust exploration of the freedpeople's freedom dream by way of an engagement with its own afterlife.[51]

It is worth noting that this project does not address all forms of dependency and domination that the neo-slavery literature identifies. Property in land and homes amounts to a single imaginary among many that gave shape to the meaning of freedom in the wake of emancipation. Though it was an incomplete freedom project, the privacy, economic independence, and self-respect that landed property would have conferred was understood to be a broad bulwark against many of the racialized inequalities that enabled re-enslavement. Furthermore, the grounded freedom that I detail is only partially reflected in the ideas of the

[49] I understand myself to be engaging in a conceptual recovery akin to Neil Roberts. Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage*.
[50] Foner, *Reconstruction*, xxxv.
[51] I take seriously Hartman's analysis of the limits of the archive, though I do not undertake critical fabulation to circumvent the problem.

black nationalist tradition.[52] Black nationalism in the United States, as Wilson Jeremiah Moses clarifies in his thorough study, "has often meant either the desire to return to Africa and establish a modern black state, or to establish a separate black nation in the Americas."[53] Michael Dawson's analysis of black political ideologies explains that many varieties of black nationalism center at least one of two major questions: on what territory will the nation be built and how can the nation form a shared black identity? The thinkers in this dissertation, like many proponents of black nationalism, understood control over land to be a vital condition for the exercise of freedom. Unlike the black nationalist tradition, however, all four thinkers conceive of freedom as a possible practice that need not entail sovereign control of territory or the formation of a unifying national identity to link participants.[54] In fact, many believed that property ownership was a condition and practice that would activate one's ability to participate in the civic life of the American nation. Therefore, while black nationalism can be described as advancing a notion of grounded freedom, it is not an approach to grounded freedom that I will deal with at length.

**Landed Freedom and the Settler Nation-State**

In the very moment that the United States government deployed its military power to quell the violence of rebels and enforce the emancipation of fugitives, it also turned toward the West to extract compliance from indigenous peoples. The Civil War and Reconstruction witnessed the commencement of decades-long Indian wars to contest indigenous sovereignty over western lands. The demand for land and the imagination of grounded freedom arose alongside white expansion and indigenous dispossession. Recovering a conception of landed

[52] Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*; Dawson, *Black Visions*, 85–134; Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, Chapter 1.
[53] Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*, 19.
[54] Du Bois comes close to articulating a version of community nationalism in his idea of a nation within a nation. His turn away from land ownership and territory as well as the lack of an identarian foundation makes the work that I engage dissimilar from the major strains of black nationalism.

freedom in African American thought raises questions about its entanglement with the history of indigenous dispossession. Was the quest for landed freedom an embrace of settler citizenship? How should we understand the relationship between African American demands for land ownership and indigenous claims of sovereignty?

Scholarship has addressed the sometimes conflictual relationship between projects of African American freedom and indigenous resurgence. In their most provocative form, the disagreements between scholars of Indigenous Studies and Black Studies appear to be an evenly matched tug-of-war. For example, Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua maintain that the viability of black anti-racism efforts depends on a movement's ability to address the prior and foundational role of settler colonialism in the formation of American nation-states.[55] "Democratizing the settler colony as belatedly enfranchised citizens and subjects" forgoes the possibility of advancing a political project that can actualize a genuine form of freedom for all.[56] Some scholars working within Black Studies, by contrast, argue that scholars of Indigenous Studies fail to grapple with the depth of anti-blackness as a structuring ideology of modernity. As Jared Sexton has contended, Black Studies as a field orients us toward Abolition, an order "altogether different from… the colonized native." Abolition is "beyond (the restoration of) sovereignty," suggesting that the formation of anti-blackness embodied in slavery creates a politics incompatible with the restoration of "a lost commons."[57] Reversing the foundational claims of scholars of Indigenous Studies, Sexton argues that the indigenous claim to precede and exceed the Western property regime is itself undermined by the "unsovereignty" of landlessness and selflessness experienced in and through slavery. These disagreements have given us

[55] They maintain that real dialogue "requires taking on Indigenous terms." Amadahy and Lawrence, "Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada: Settlers or Allies?," 137.
[56] Here Sexton is paraphrasing a collection of works in Indigenous Studies. Sexton, "The Vel of Slavery."
[57] Leroy, "Black History in Occupied Territory"; Sexton, "The Vel of Slavery."

extraordinarily detailed accounts of the obstacles complicating the merging of indigenous and black freedom, but I agree with Justin Leroy that any plan for solidarity must insist on the suspension of claims to an uncontestable exceptionalism by either group.[58]

At the heart of these disagreements lies a bundle of questions about oppression in the modern world as well as the subsequent relationships between differently situated subjects. What are the conditions of indigenous sovereignty and African American freedom respectively? Can these conditions be realized simultaneously? What is the role of the (white, settler) nation-state in these visions? Patrick Wolfe has defended the stark view that we must recuperate the settler/native binary when thinking about global history. To Wolfe, "the fact that enslaved people immigrated against their will… does not alter the structural fact that their presence, however involuntary, was part of the process of Native dispossession."[59] From this perspective, claims for land always reduce to participation in settler practices. Against this uncompromising insistence on an either/or logic of settler/native, scholars have proposed differentiating between multiple positions opened up by the overlapping structures of slavery, settler colonialism, and imperialism. We might think of African Americans as "arrivants" or "exo-settlers."[60] The proliferation of new language to destabilize the settler/native binary has enabled a turn toward theorizing indigenous and black solidarity.[61] Regardless of the way that we choose to stage African Americans in the story of settler colonialism, indigenous critiques are nearly unanimous.

[58] Saunt, Miles, and Krauthammer all provide thorough historical evidence that black freedom was sometimes a project of Indigenous displacement and Indigenous sovereignty was sometimes a project of African enslavement. Saunt, "The Paradox of Freedom"; Miles, *Ties That Bind*; Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*; Miles, "Beyond a Boundary"; Leroy, "Black History in Occupied Territory."

[59] Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism."

[60] Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, xix; Miles, "Beyond a Boundary," 425.

[61] Rifkin provides an extensive theoretical account of solidarity, while Leroy and Seeley examine historical instances of mutual recognition. Rifkin, *Fictions of Land and Flesh*; Leroy, "Black History in Occupied Territory"; Seeley, *Race, Removal, and the Right to Remain*.

Attempts at inclusion, appeals to the settler state, and refusals to acknowledge indigenous sovereignty or life forms all "reinscribe the original colonial injury."[62]

I propose that recovering an African American conception of grounded freedom offers a way to forge commonalities between these two differently situated groups.[63] While Mark Rifkin is correct to say that "enchattlement and settlement operate as differentiable backgrounds in ways that engender varied trajectories for Black and indigenous political and intellectual formations," they also entail certain overlapping processes. To paraphrase Rifkin, there are moments in which a temporary "we" can be constructed around a shared object or aim.[64] The practice of indigenous dispossession—dispossession's role as an "inherited background field" for further domination, in the words of Glen Coulthard—can be found in the treatment of slavery.[65] Leslie Schwalm has identified slavery's essential reliance on the process of "uprooting," enforced migration and dislocation that frustrated enslave people's desire for place-making and home-making.[66] This condition of initial selflessness and later landlessness made possible new forms of domination and oppression.

Similarly, the destruction of indigenous sovereignty through dispossession has produced conditions of vulnerability for indigenous peoples past and present. Leroy Staples Fairbanks III, the Leech Lake tribal representative, commented on the recent Ojibwe reclamation of more than elven thousand acres of land, stating that such renewed jurisdiction would counteract the "limited amount of land opportunities for tribal members, for housing, for business, for economic, for

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[62] As Robert Nichols puts it "inclusion was conscription." Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, xxiii; Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*, 132.
[63] For a detailed critique of the search for commonality and an opposing view of the need to stake out "uncommonality" see: Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 28.
[64] Rifkin, *Fictions of Land and Flesh*, 222.
[65] I share Joanne Barker's inclination to treat dispossession as a component of multiple structures of domination. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 14; Barker, "Territory as Analytic," 34.
[66] Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 12–13.

agriculture, for whatever use they are."[67] Recognition of the related dispossessions of enslaved Africans and indigenous persons also arise in the historical record. Historian Samantha Seeley's recovery of a shared indigenous and African conception of a "right to remain" in the early years of the American Republic further buttresses my analysis of the shared experiences of dispossession.[68] "Grounded Freedom" demonstrates that hierarchy and domination across racial formations have been enabled by the denial of access to land and the attendant forced mobility activated by that dispossession.

Given the history of indigenous efforts to regain their ancestral homelands and African American attempts to accrue property, we might ask whether obtainment and possession are possible within the prevailing structures of white supremacy and settlement. Robert Nichols has found cause for concern in the post-emancipation history of African American uplift. Nichols argues that property functions as a system of governance that ascribes possession to "those in positions of weakness and subordination" only in the moment of alienation of that possession. It matters less, Nichols contends, whether "one has a proprietary interest in something" than "the background relations that give property its specific valence in any given context."[69] Seen from this perspective, the African American pursuit of grounded freedom might appear as a chimera, a fool's errand, because it seeks to obtain that which the background conditions will negate once obtained. What do we make of the "promise of possession" in a world where possession arrives only once it has lost its potency or for the sake of its alienation? Nichols offers his own limited response when he concludes that "the radical potential" of social movements does not reside

[67] Sneve, "Tribes Reclaiming Lands 'Actually Happening.'"
[68] "African American and Indigenous communities staunchly protected their right to remain in their homes and homelands. In a period when the dislocations of revolution, state making, and expansion accelerated movement both forced and free, the pursuit of a permanent home mattered deeply to many people." Seeley, *Race, Removal, and the Right to Remain*, 13–14.
[69] Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*, 142.

"exclusively in their achieving a narrow objective."[70] Might we perceive a deeper meaning to the idea of grounded freedom, one that does not exclusively reside in the acquisition of land? What kind of expressivist politics of resignification—to borrow another of Nichols's phrases—can we locate within the African American idea of landed freedom?

Beyond recounting that African Americans and indigenous peoples were both dispossessed of land to enable white capitalist imperial expansion, "Grounded Freedom" provides a useful perspective for thinking about the material conditions of freedom and why an attunement to those conditions is vital for imagining freedom anew in our own time. As I mentioned earlier, the real insight of the theorists of grounded freedom was not in the prescription that only with property in land could African Americans practice their freedom. Rather, the potency of the vision lies in the relationality that a focus on land and space brings to the fore. In aiming to obtain property in land, freedpeople and their successors experimented with activities that could actualize freedom. The desire for land initiated "an ongoing process of turning toward other people" and, in that process, reworking the relationships that undergirded democratic life.[71] Frequently these were contentious relationships with powerful propertied white citizens. Among the four relations that characterize the four chapters, the idea of reclamation helps us think about the reorientations that the African American quest for freedom demands. Reclamation emerges most explicitly in Pauline Hopkins's re-narration of the pre-Civil War abolitionist movement. At the end of the novel, Hopkins portrays the African American characters' return to England as a moment of reclamation, a reclaiming of their

[70] Nichols, 158.

[71] Citation can be found in Rifkin (2019). See also Rifkin (2017) for a discussion of the role of orientation in unpacking indigenous thought. This project emphasizes what Clyde Woods observed in his exploration of African American Southern culture. In the Mississippi Delta one witnesses "the full expression of the rise of an African American culture that was self-conscious of its space and time and, therefore, fully indigenous." Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 2; Rifkin, *Fictions of Land and Flesh*; Woods, *Development Arrested*, 108.

proprietary interests albeit in another national context. Like the other practices or relationships activated by the idea of grounded freedom, reclamation resonates with the broader desires of dispossessed people globally. In reclaiming land and property, African Americans (and their collaborators) not only seek to achieve control over land and space; they also assert that their achievement is the realization of justice and the rightful return of possession. Such a claim recasts the current owners of the land as fraudulent claims-makers and their possessions as ill-gotten.

**A Final Note on the Pursuit of Grounded Freedom**

I want to stress that in tracking the development of an idea, grounded freedom, I have uncovered a vision of freedom and corresponding diagnosis of domination. On the concrete, literal level, grounded freedom refers to the idea that African Americans require ownership of land to practice freedom in a post-emancipation republic. Land—in this rendering—embodies access to capital, the means of subsistence, privacy, and space for world-building. Through violent seizure, legislation, or purchase, African Americans pursued this goal with vigor. Thinkers during the Civil War and Reconstruction Era committed themselves to the idea that freed people needed land and home-space to be free. At the same time, in defending the need for real estate, these early thinkers offered an assessment of how exclusion from ownership of land and space enlivened relations of domination and unfreedom.

I have also delineated a second level of analysis embedded in the lineage of thinking about freedom as a practice grounded in the land. This analysis focused on the relationships between persons that are necessary to enact freedom. As the radical political moment of the postwar period faded, African American thinkers continued to think about land because of its function as an access point to this second order analysis. Land, treated in this case as an

intermediary object among subjects, draws our attention to racialized social arrangements and the practices that secure them. Intrusion, monopolization, dispossession, and privatization were events that pervaded the post-emancipation period. To resist these forces, African American thinkers and their allies experimented with enclosure, confiscation, reclamation, and cooperation. Performing these activities can be understood as a practice of freedom *and* amounted to necessary forms of resistance against prevailing structures of racial domination. Each chapter centers one of the social relationships in practice.

I keep in mind that conceiving of freedom as a grounded practice that has material conditions is not without danger. Toni Morrison dramatizes the possibilities and costs of tethering conceptions of freedom to place and space in her novel *Paradise*.[72] In constructing black settlements, Haven and Ruby, the formerly enslaved and their descendants can outrun and exclude their white tormentors, but they can never entirely escape the specter of domination and hierarchy. Morrison's *Paradise* explores the ways that the successful exclusion of white folk and the independence of the community merely inhibits the direct oppression of white over black. The black townsfolk turn to other forms of difference—most prominently those indexed by gender and color—to reconstruct hierarchical social and political order.[73] So too in recovering and analyzing the idea of grounded freedom, must we remain vigilant in our willingness to criticize the potential pitfalls inherent in a conception of freedom connected to notions of control over space and land. As Morrison lucidly demonstrates, the achievement of landed autonomy, individual or collective, cannot perpetually secure itself against the intensification of new forms of domination or refuse the commands of coercive violence.

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[72] Morrison, *Paradise*.

[73] In words of Audre Lorde, the townspeople conserve the "master's tools." In one of her most famous texts, Lorde argues that the master's tools are weaponizing difference in the service of domination. Instead, she insists that we must learn to "take our differences and make them strengths." Lorde and Clarke, *Sister Outsider*, 112.

Lisa Lowe encapsulates the lessons of Morrison's *Paradise* in her remarks on the always impure realizations of freedom's promise: "the affirmation of the desire for freedom is so inhabited by the forgetting of its condition of possibility that every narrative articulation of freedom is haunted by its burial, by the violence of forgetting."[74] The inability to shake freedom loose from its conditions of possibility, especially when those conditions include violence, domination, and oppression, haunts the thinkers and reformers who champion freedom's universal promise. The thinkers of grounded freedom are not immune or indifferent to this fact. In their hesitations, asides, and silences, the proponents of grounded freedom admit to the frustrations of practicing or imagining a freedom without remainder and without domination. Harriet Jacobs's portrayal of the violent intrusions that property rights cannot repel, Stevens's full embrace of coercive force, Hopkins's unwillingness to represent the obtainment of property rights by her heroes, and Du Bois's turn away from state power all represent the difficulties of practicing grounded freedom. And yet, the following chapters attest to the utility of taking seriously the African American quest for landed freedom. Whether its realization may be temporarily foreclosed or permanently impossible, the new ways of relating to one another to which it gives rise can serve as models for rethinking our political practices in the present.

**Chapter Overview**

Chapter two explores why the freedpeople wanted land. I answer this question by reconstructing the post-emancipation problem-space, showing how the land demands responded to the widespread condition of homelessness. Under the system of chattel slavery in the United States, enslaved peoples sometimes acquired possessions, but rarely held those objects with the force of a right to property. In this chapter, I consider how the institution of slavery shaped the

[74] Lowe, "The Intimacies of Four Continents," 206.

relationship between enslaved people and worldly things. With a reading of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1860), I examine how the experience of 'property-lessness' inspired the enslaved to desire not only self-possession, but also the acquisition of real property to establish homes of their own. This desire spread as freedpeople navigated the perils of postwar poverty and Redeemer violence. To many writers and commentators of the period, life was marked first and foremost by the experience of mass homelessness. I read Bayley Wyatt's 1866 speech to a group of Virginia freedmen and an 1869 article, "The Land Question," in the *New Orleans Tribune* to show how free African Americans tied the quest for home-space to the search for rootedness and community in the post-emancipation period. As Jacobs's narrative demonstrates, the desire for property in home-space was rooted in a desire to enclose one's family and exclude white people from the home.

Though the end of legal bondage appeared to fulfill the promises of the abolitionist movement, the destitution of freed slaves remained an impediment to even the thin conception of freedom inherent in the image of the free laborer—an individual who was able to contract with his employer at will. In the third chapter, I reconstruct Thaddeus Stevens's bid to confiscate and redistribute planter land. Land redistribution, on Stevens's account, would reunite the freed people with the means of subsistence such that they would not be compelled by necessity to contract on the terms of landowners, while simultaneously avoiding making their freedom conditional on the ongoing generosity of private or public provisions. Stevens argued that merely providing land to freed slaves would not guarantee their freedom in the South. To ensure a condition of non-domination, Congress would need to break the power of the slave aristocracy by forcibly revoking their right to large swaths of land. Stevens' bid failed because Northern Democrats feared creating a precedent that legitimated property confiscation and abolitionists

feared that providing land would prevent freed slaves from acclimating to the practices of thrift and economy that were necessary for their survival in the postwar capitalist order. I conclude by comparing this account of the Reconstruction Era effort to secure forty acres and a mule to its reception in contemporary discussions of reparations.

Chapter four raises questions about the racial order that permeated antebellum society and role of grounded freedom in remolding that order. White writers slowly warmed to the idea that African Americans could become equal citizens and share in the popular sovereignty of the American nation. That acceptance was contingent on stark distinctions between African American and other non-white peoples, however. In this chapter, I analyze how African American writers and thinkers dealt with the settler dimensions of claiming equal citizenship. With readings of Martin Delaney's serial novel, *Blake, or the Huts of America*, and Frederick Douglass's 1867 speech, "Our Composite Nationality," I narrate the movement from a pre-Civil war investment in crafting African-Indigenous solidarity through plans of violent resistance toward a Reconstruction Era focus on assimilation. The optimistic re-evaluation of American political institutions generated African American attachments to the American state and a corresponding rejection of indigenous demands to establish independent sovereign communities. While I find that Douglass's version of American citizenship conscripted African Americans into a version of settler citizenship, I turn to Pauline Hopkins's 1902 novel, *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest*, to probe alternative possibilities for imagining African American freedom after emancipation. Reading *Winona* as an anti-imperialist intervention, I show how Hopkins's revisionist portrayal of abolition as well as her emphasis on rightful inheritance promoted values and practices at odds with the treatment of indigenous peoples at the end of the nineteenth century. In championing rightful inheritance as a cornerstone of her

characters' freedom, Hopkins advances a practice that resonates with struggles against settler efforts to eliminate indigenous peoples and cultures.

The dissertation concludes with a chapter that considers the ways in which W.E.B. Du Bois inherited and remade the land question in the twentieth century. Tracking Du Bois's decades long study of the Reconstruction moment reveals that Du Bois came to understand Reconstruction's failure as the formation of a new capitalist regime that continued to operate into the 1930s. I consider how W.E.B. Du Bois remade the land question for the twentieth century. Reconstruction, on Du Bois's account, witnessed the birth of the modern political and economic order and its accompanying ideological projects of atomized individualism and unrelenting profit-seeking. To combat these material practices and mental habits, Du Bois argued for black cooperative organization to rejuvenate principles of communal uplift. I interpret the turn to cooperation as a response to the post-emancipation dilemma of political and economic unfreedom. Du Bois, pessimistic about the use of state power to combat economic forms of domination, argued for an independent project of economic organization to combat domination. Even as Du Bois turned away from the agrarian republican appraisal of land, he simultaneously rediscovered the idea that land ownership could be thought of as a necessary condition of political freedom. His novels and later thought contain a commitment to the idea that reclaiming the land through cooperative ventures made possible a necessary kind of psychic freedom for African Americans.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Political Possibilities of Privacy: The Idea of Home in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

"The Abolition of slavery entailed not simply an adjustment to the demise of one species of property, but a redefinition of property rights in general."[1]

"The instant I enter my own land, the bright idea of property, of exclusive right, of independence exalt my mind… on it is founded our rank, our freedom, our power as citizens, our importance as inhabitants of such a district"[2]

"…and will they drive us from our property and homes, which we have earned with our blood?"[3]

The association of having a home with the land question was a common refrain of freed people during the Reconstruction moment. The invocation of home included a range of meanings from the physical structure in which freed people lived—the literal house—to the domestic relations of kinship to the experience of privacy to an attachment to places where freed people lived. Land grounded the construction of home-space which, in turn, made possible the formation of intentional, intimate relations. Kinship and home-making went hand in hand for the freed people, who looked to the formation of households to realize the freedom they gained in emancipation. To understand the full force of the land question during Reconstruction, we need to first understand the political uses of home-space during and after the antebellum slave regime.

In this chapter, I turn to Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to unpack one set of meanings that the formerly enslaved attached to home-making and home-space. The text, published in 1861 on the eve of the Civil War, serves as a cultural artifact to develop an account of how the particular practices and institutions of Southern slavery shaped the worldviews of the freed people. Though Jacobs wrote about a flight from slavery that occurred

[1] Foner and Hahn, *Nothing But Freedom*, 54–55.
[2] St. John de Crevecoeur, "Letter II: On The Situation, Feelings, and Pleasures, of an American Farmer."
[3] Walker, *Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, But in Particular, And Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America*.

before the war, her understandings of freedom gesture toward the value of home-space in realizing freedom within the deteriorating symbolic and discursive landscape that constituted antebellum slavery. Beginning with Jacobs' concluding remark that her dream was yet unrealized because she did not have a home of her own, I read the narrative with the intention of articulating what was at stake in experiencing homelessness for Jacobs. What kind of freedom did having a home make possible? What kind of relationship did one need to have to the home to secure this kind of freedom? Did this form of freedom appropriate reigning ideas about property in land? What forms of domination did such an imagination of freedom perpetuate?

Scholars have well-documented Jacobs's implication in circulating ideas about true womanhood and a women's proper place within the domestic sphere. By centering the home in her struggle for freedom, I sketch an account of how access to home-space through property rights enabled a kind of exclusive privacy that freed people had not enjoyed under the slave system. Jacobs's narrative of her life as a slave illuminates how carving out spaces of privacy underwrote slave resistance and galvanized political action.[4] To have a home, in Jacobs's account, was equivalent to having a space in which one could choose their intimate relations, tend to their kin, and partake in self-making. As feminist scholars have pointed out, the attachment to home-space as a condition of freedom also functioned as tool of conscription into reigning bourgeois gendered institutions that entailed a host of new forms of domination. In this

[4] By private, I am less concerned with where the space exists than the character of that space. As Arendt has maintained, the private connotates non-appearance, to be deprived of being seen and heard by others, the quality that best characterizes the experience of publicity. Arendt's definition has limitations for my purposes, however. As I will show, the activities of the private are not always so individualized or insignificant. Our understandings of private space and privacy converge on the importance of enforceable property rights to achieve the condition. For further discussion of the character of private space as the opposite of public space see Landes. Arendt, *The Human Condition, 2nd Edition*, 58–67; Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, 3.

chapter, I consider the limitations of a vision of freedom as ownership of home-space in terms of those conscripting processes.

Though the practice of securing land to build homes did not constitute a panacea to the multiple forms of domination that haunted the Southern freed people, the home-space provided new ground on which to contest public abuses. I take the conflicting results of establishing freedom as having home-space to not only intensify the need to think of freedom and unfreedom as a continuum, but also to ask anew what we might think about the always incomplete and imperfect realization of freedom. Jacobs's theorization of home-space underscores the political utility of private space. I conclude with a qualified defense of privacy. Jacobs's narrative teaches us that privacy can be deployed strategically in contexts of domination to broaden marginalized actors' spheres of freedom.

**The Land Question as the Home Question in the Post-Emancipation Period**

As the Union army pushed further into the Confederate States of America during 1864 and 1865, officers and soldiers witnessed the widespread nature of the demand for land by the freed people of the South. I already substantiated the claims for land in the introduction of the dissertation, but what I have not yet shown was how fundamentally enmeshed the demand for land was with the desire for a home. Archives of Freedmen's Bureau documents attest to the ubiquity with which freed people merged their quest for land with their quest for homes. This blending of the land question and—what I call—the home question responded to several problems that the freed people confronted after the war. Where should the freed people live? How could the freed people transition from slavery to freedom? What were the conditions of freedom? The collapse of the slave regime instigated by the Union victory weakened the rules and mechanisms of enforcement that regulated day-to-day life in the antebellum South. And yet,

the discursive context and symbolic economy of slave society had not entirely disappeared. To confront their present condition of destitution and waywardness, freed people looked back toward their lives under slavery to chart new futures. At the center of these visions of freedom was the idea that freed people could own land, construct homes, and attach themselves to particular places. Having a home enabled settlement, privacy, and the opportunity for self-development and communal uplift. Freedpeople and reformers repeatedly emphasized these virtues in their accounts of post-emancipation society.

The destruction of plantations, military confiscations of property, and forced migration of peoples across the South transformed the world of the enslaved, the fugitive, and freed person during the 1860s. As the Union army moved across the South, the flight of enslaved persons from plantations intensified, producing a refugee crisis yet unseen in the United States. These freed people left behind family members and possessions with the prospect of winning real emancipation from bonded servitude. With numbers of runaway slaves reaching into the tens of thousands, Republicans in Congress established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands to alleviate pressure on military officials and designate an institution to respond to the problems of homelessness and destitution generated by emancipation and war.[5] Freed people expected Bureau officials to assist them in settling themselves in the new world of freedom. Their demands for homesteads reflected imaginations of how to respond to the questions of reconstruction and rebuilding that marked the post-war South.

Northern reformers who followed the unfolding refugee crisis understood the central quandary of Reconstruction to be a problem of homelessness. Oliver Otis Howard, Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, reflected on his time at the helm of the wartime

[5] For an estimation of the number of freed people who congregated behind military lines see Westwood, "Sherman Marched."

institution and recalled that homelessness acutely impacted the freed people. While Northern servicemen and Confederate soldiers ended the war with different senses of accomplishment, their experiences of the Union military victory were similar according to Howard in that both groups had homes to which they could return. The freed people, by contrast, were "obliged to flee from their houses, and the homes of their masters who had early deserted them."[6] Their status as fugitives and refugees, a condition in which the freed people were "driven hither and thither" regardless of their own wills, constituted the major challenge facing Howard's Bureau. He resolved from the outset of his career at the Freedmen's Bureau to take care of these "houseless, homeless, and unprovided for" people.[7]

Howard's worries about the unsettled nature of life during and after wartime reflected the thoughts of freed people who pointed to their desire to be settled and situated in the world of freedom. A right to land was the surest solution to the problem of homelessness in the minds of many Southern black people. Bayley Wyatt, a freedman from Yorktown, Virginia, spoke at a meeting of freed people on December 15, 1866. The speech that he delivered, later recounted by himself and recorded by the Superintendent of the Friends' Freedmen's Schools, responded to the Freedmen's Bureau directives to abandon the encampments that former slaves had set up in Yorktown. Local agents of the Freedmen's Bureau advised the freed people to "seek homes in the adjoining communities and elsewhere" without specifying to which communities the freed people should move or if those communities would be the final place of settlement.[8] Distressed at the lack of concrete plans for the freed people and their attachment to the community that they had established in Yorktown, Wyatt defended their right to the land with gusto. Though Wyatt

[6] Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard, Major General United States Army*, 3: Reconstruction:171.
[7] Howard, 3: Reconstruction:171–72 Howard's resolve at the outset of Reconstruction turned to shame when he failed to convince political leaders to formalize Sherman's order.
[8] Wyat, "Report of a Speech by a Virginia Freeman."

nodded to the destitute and impoverished condition of his community members, his characterization of the dilemma facing the freed people constructed the problem as a lack of a situated place in the world. As he asserted in his claim for land, the freed people were not owed just any land; they were owed "the land where we are located."

The particularity of the claim to land pointed to the insufferable condition of being forced to move from place to place with no ability to form a sense of belonging to a community. Wyatt summarized the experiences of his fellow freed people, stating that they "were ordered to pay rent" and "payed de rent" and that the Freedmen's Bureau now ordered them to leave "or have our log cabins torn down over our heads." Wyatt expressed the confusion of the condition of transience in a line of interrogations: "And now where shall we go? Shall we go into the streets, or into de woods, or into de ribber? We has nowhere to go!"[9] The lack of a situated place in the world produced a kind of vulnerability that configured the freed people as prey. He compared their situation to "rabbits" being chased by "hounds" driven "from place to place." Wyatt concluded his reflection on the meaning of land by underscoring that placement in the world was inextricable from the ability to form bonds of trust with other people: "And we must go; and I ask again, where shall we go, and who shall we trust?"[10]

Wyatt's rejection of enforced mobility and transience contributed to an emerging vision of freedom in Southern black thought. Whereas escape and flight had promised freedom from slavery during the antebellum period, the constitutional prohibition of slavery enabled freed people to imagine new ways of practicing freedom.[11] Settlement was always a strategy of the fugitive in the antebellum period; the often-hidden maroon societies that fugitives founded

[9] Wyat.
[10] Wyat.
[11] In the terms of Neil Roberts's excellent study of slave marronage "petit marronage" was eclipsed by its grander alternative as freed people sought to build new communities on a widescale. Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage*.

attested to that fact.[12] With the changing social and political order, however, the choice of where and when to form communities became a publicly acknowledged point of discussion. The demand to choose the terms of settlement and situatedness also responded to changing forms of white domination that marked the shifting racial regimes of the mid-nineteenth century United States. Slavery depended on the enforcement of the location of the slave. To be a slave was to be bound to a place of laboring until sold elsewhere.[13] Freed people took advantage of their newfound freedom by deciding for themselves where and among whom they would live. As Wyatt's experience suggested, angry white Southerners, Bureau officials, and courts readily challenged their choices, revealing that black freedom to settle and situate was dependent on its convergence with white interests. In the chaos of the postwar period, the determination of freed people to settle themselves represented a rejection of the free labor system's reliance on a mobile labor force as well as an effort to build new communities.

The freed people's investment in home-space often took the form of claims of collective ownership in land. A committee of seven freedmen in Halls Hill, Virginia adopted two resolutions pertaining to home ownership during a meeting in August 1865. The first resolution declared that "it [is] very important that we obtain Homes.." and further asserted that such obtainment must culminate in exclusive possession: "...owning our shelters, *and the ground*, that we may raise fruit trees, concerning which our children can say—"*These are ours*"..."[14] Unlike the individualized ownership preferred by Northern reformers, the freedpeople conceived of their exclusive ownership in land and space as a program to delimit black land from white land. To the Virginia committee, the land was not *mine*, but *ours*. Similarly, a group of two hundred and fifty

[12] BLEDSOE, "Marronage as a Past and Present Geography in the Americas."
[13] Slaves moved between plantations to deliver goods and were sometimes rented out as laborers in nearby towns, but they generally were bound to the domain of the slaveowner.
[14] Johnson, "Northern Teacher to the Freedmen's Bureau Commissioner, August 4, 1865."

freedmen formed a joint stock company in August 1865 in Kinston, North Carolina to pursue ownership of land. Seeking approval from the Freedmen's Bureau Assistant Commissioner, Anthony Blunt and his fellow freedmen explained that "we form[ed] ourselves into a *society* to purchase *homes* for ourselves…"[15] The collective nature of freedpeople's efforts to secure land underscored understandings of property that were sometimes at odds with the Northern vision of individual, discrete family holdings. Historian Julie Saville has remarked on the diverse relationships that freed people had to land in the post-emancipation period, reminding readers that "land was not separate from the ex-slaves' sense of community."[16] My reading of Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative further explores how the idea of ownership functioned as a tool to exclude whites after emancipation.

Property-holding by legal title promised freed slaves a relationship to land and one another that was unavailable during slavery. Scholars have noted that a peculiar feature of American slavery was the legal treatment of slaves as simultaneously responsible agents and as the alienable property of a person.[17] This antebellum legal conundrum complicated earlier political pronouncements that sought to clearly demarcate slaves from the realm of legal personhood. James Madison encapsulated this view in Federalist No. 54, stating that "[s]laves are considered as property, not as persons."[18] The legal and political confusion over the character of the enslaved subject did not preclude slaves from accumulating possessions or gaining access to land. Not only did slaves claim articles of clothing albeit without the exclusive right of property, they also frequently possessed their own animals, tools, houseware, and sometimes

[15] Blunt, Hargate, and Blunt, "Committee of North Carolina Freedmen to the North Carolina Freedmen's Bureau Assistant Commissioner, August 7, 1865; and the Latter's Reply."
[16] Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*, 18.
[17] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 79–82.
[18] Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, *The Federalist*, 265.

even homesteads through a series of compromises between slave owners and the enslaved.[19] As historian Dylan Penningroth has shown, the enslaved had access to land, though varying in amount, throughout the South and most restrictions on slaves focused on their access to leisure time rather than their access to land.[20] While the enslaved could not substantiate their claims to land in court in the antebellum period, informal recognition among the enslaved and by their owners resulted in tenuous rights to land and things.[21] The desire to own land and hold it with the force of legal title admitted a recognition that property rights, a privilege of white citizens in the prewar period, provided a more secure way to ensure the perpetuity of family possession.[22]

While the framing of the land question as a home question responded to the refugee status of the freed people in concrete terms, it also connected land ownership to fundamental concerns about the kind of freedom enabled by having a proper domestic life. Charles Stearns, an abolitionist physician who moved to the South after the war, contended that land ownership was "the great desideratum for the colored population."[23] In his 1872 pamphlet, *The Black Man of the South and the Rebel*s, Stearns admitted that though he would never "decry other efforts for the elevation of this long injured race," he maintained that the "necessities of the Southern freedmen… cannot be effectively provided for, without making him among other things, the industrious owner of the land he cultivates."[24] Stearns's defense of land ownership as the basis of freedom, however, reached beyond odes to agrarian republican conceptions of economic autonomy. For Stearns, the land question defined the transition from feudal societies to

[19] Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk*, 1–12; Edwards, *Only the Clothes on Her Back*.
[20] Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk*, 49–50.
[21] See Penningroth for a discussion of the possessory entitlements of the enslaved Penningroth, 55.
[22] Laura Edwards has provided a succinct, but powerful summary of the preeminence of rights discourse in the thinking of freed slaves. Edwards, *A Legal History of the Civil War and Reconstruction*, 127–37.
[23] Stearns, *The Black Man of the South, and the Rebels ;or, The Characteristics of the Former, and the Recent Outrages of the Latter.*, 15.
[24] Stearns, 15.

republican ones because that transition exposed the landless masses to a new form of tyranny, forcing "human beings" to obtain their own homes:

> "From the close of the Feudal ages until to-day, the struggle of human beings has been for homes that they could call their own, free from the tyranny of heartless landlords. Previous to the abolition of the Feudal system, the laborer and the land were sold together. To-day, the land can be sold, the laborer never."[25]

Stearns's analysis of historical development offered reasons for why homelessness undermined freedom. Within the feudal order, peasants lacked legally defensible claims to privacy. Having a home that one could call their own referred to the existence of property rights in space that would exclude the claims of lords and ladies—the heartless landlords of the previous age. This demarcation of domestic space, in turn, produced new possibilities for education and self-development, practices that were foundational to the individual freedom promised to liberal citizens. "The spur of having a home of their own enables [the freed people] to overcome some of these most inveterate of their evil habits; and they will become saving, and even very penurious, under its magic influence."[26] Settling oneself in a home resisted the need to be constantly on the move while simultaneously providing space and time for one to manage their wayward inclinations.[27] Stearns remained silent about the specifics of how this "magic influence" worked, but he did hint at the necessity of private, individual ownership. He discussed the situation of black laborers and the attendant anxieties of domination, worrying foremost about the emasculation of southern black men. These men could only feel "shame" when digging and delving on land "belonging to another."[28]

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[25] Stearns, 512.

[26] Though Stearns shared reformist worries about the moral behavior of the freed people, he cautioned the reader not to view "the moral deliquencies herein described" as fixed and natural practices of the freed people, arguing that "moral buzzards" should see themselves as "patially accountable." Stearns, 512; xiii (for footnote citation) For a discussion of the disciplinary projects incited by and enable through black home-making see Hartman. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 157–61.

[27] Shah offers an important interrogation of liberal philosophy's investment in framing the household as a ground for "emotional, intimate, and ethical training." Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 8–9.

[28] Stearns, *The Black Man of the South, and the Rebels ;or, The Characteristics of the Former, and the Recent Outrages of the Latter.*, 513.

Black writers expounded on the concerns of Northern reformers like Stearns, arguing that establishing homes and carving out a private, domestic life was essential to realizing freedom. The black newspaper, The *New Orleans Tribune*, published an article early in 1869 titled "The Land Question." This article represented the popular connection between the proposal to provide land to freedpeople and the fulfillment of their desire to craft homes. Like Wyatt and Stearns, the unnamed author cast the widespread refusal among "planters and landowners" to sell or cede land as an attempt to disrupt black home-making:

> "The most vital interests of the colored people are concerned in the proper settlement of this question. Until then, we may be a free but we are a homeless people—a state of things in which our progress must necessarily be very slow and attended by many embarrassments and humiliations, if not in very many cases absolutely hindered."[29]

Though black people were formally free in the sense that they were no longer treated as slaves before the law, true freedom required the opportunity to self-develop and strive for personal advancement in education, employment, and social status. These activities required a home in which "strength is matured," "true manhood and womanhood is developed," and "civilization is advanced." The article proposed two reasons for the home's foundation in uplift and development. First, the home provided the occasion for human beings to establish intimate relationships which conditioned individuals learn to coexist in harmony. The demands of cohabitation marked the home as "a nursery of virtue." The article also tied the intimacy of homelife to the ability to sustain family relations, practices that were immensely difficult under slavery. The family, the article contended, was as important as the church and the schoolhouse in forming new members of the community and ensuring the progress of the collective. Second, the article equated having a home with owning a house, which inculcated the inhabitants with ideas of "efficiency, usefulness, and dignity."[30] Residents who lacked rights of ownership in their

[29] "The Land Question."
[30] "The Land Question."

homestead also lacked inducements to make the residence "more pleasant and attractive." Taken together the passages suggested that homeownership, like landownership, underwrote manly independence in the minds of reformers, while the intimacy of man and wife prevented men from overindulging in that independence and developing anti-social dispositions.

Stearns and the article in the *New Orleans Tribune* repeated the messages of Northern reformers who sought to instill ideas about the Northern free labor system and bourgeois home life in the freed people of the South.[31] Perhaps the most famous documentation of these lessons was the Freedmen's Book edited by the abolitionist Lydia Maria Child and circulated by philanthropists, school teachers, and Bureau officials. References to the importance of home life spread across the pages of the text. A chapter on the Haitian radical Toussaint L'Ouverture emphasized that his manhood led him to desire "a home of his own" and insinuated that his accomplishments derived from the proper formation of family life through marriage and cohabitation.[32] Frances E. W. Harper included her poem "Thank God for Little Children" which taught that family life and a proper home was more valuable than the accumulation of large fortunes: "the humblest home, with children/ is rich in precious gems/ better than the wealth of diamonds/ or golden diadems."[33] No section of the guidebook defended the value of home-making more forcefully than the two reprinted speeches by Republican politicians in front of African American audiences in Charleston, SC. Senator Henry Wilson reminded the freed people that their "duties commence with [their] liberties."[34] Among the duties he listed was the responsibility to carry pay "home to… wives and the children of your love." Judge Kelley

[31] For an interrogation of the investment in reproducing specific heteropatriarchal familial relations see: Mcclintock, *Imperial Leather*; Stevens, *Reproducing the State*; Kandaswamy, *Domestic Contradictions*, 34–39.
[32] Child, "Toussaint L'Ouverture."
[33] Harper, "Thank God for Little Children."
[34] Wilson, "Extract from a Speech to Colored People in Charleston."

extended the duties to women, who ought to understand their responsibilities to marry men and mother children. Freedom, as Kelley presented it, allowed freed people to "no longer live in slave huts," "to make [their] homes comfortable," and "to make them happy."[35]

The Freedmen's Book and other documents from newspapers, pamphlets, and speeches disavowed plans for land redistribution or public gift. While Wyatt's speech boldly advocated that the government provide land on which the freed people could construct homesteads, the writers of the various chapters in Child's collection did not address the possibility of government intervention on the issue. The chapters that provided the most direction on how to practice freedom instructed the freed people to work hard, accumulate wealth, and improve their condition through spending. The freedoms that attended homeownership—self-development, chosen intimacy, privacy, and situatedness—would only be securely available to those freed people who could succeed at accumulating wealth. Recognizing the widespread desire for homes, reformers sought to attach the virtues of thrift, personal responsibility, and individualism to the acquisition of homes, acculturating freed people to the practices of Northern bourgeois social and economic life. Thus, the response of many reformers to the land demands of the freedpeople demonstrated ignorance or indifference to the idea that white middle-class society might itself be premised on forms of oppression.

The post-reconstruction problem space came to be defined by homelessness, but what that condition entailed, which freedoms it stymied, and to what extent the government ought to alleviate the problem remained contested. At times, the speeches and writings of Northern reformers, like those of the Freedmen's Book, portrayed homeownership as an end in itself, not a ground on which to enjoy or experiment with other freedoms. By contrast, freed people wanted

[35] Kelly, "Extract from Speech to Colored People in Charleston."

homes to situate themselves, carve out spaces of privacy, and control their intimate relations. Further confounding reformist visions of Reconstruction and responding to the aftermath of the slave system, freed people demanded publicly guaranteed property ownership, viewing it as the surest way to achieve those results and hold them with the force of law. Thus, the wedding of the land question to the home question extended the list of wrongs that characterized post-emancipation life and transformed the terms through which the debate over post-emancipation freedom was understood. In the next section, I explore in greater detail what was at stake in the access to home-space by reading Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative.

**Freedom's Remainder: The Home in Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl***

Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, allows for a closer examination of the uses of home-space in the imaginaries of the freed people. Written in the decade preceding the Civil War and published in 1861, *Incidents* recounts Jacobs's escape from slavery and purchase of freedom.[36] Though Jacobs wrote before the formal abolition of slavery as inaugurated by Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation" and the thirteenth amendment to the constitution, her narrative nonetheless provides a window into the desires and hopes of the post-emancipation moment. Enslaved people who purchased themselves from their owners in the antebellum period could never entirely guarantee their safety from re-enslavement, but they did experience a degree of legally recognized freedom that anticipated the day-to-day experiences of southern freed people in the post-emancipation South. The enslaved who purchased their

[36] Historians and literary scholars long held that Jacobs's narrative was a fictionalized or fabricated account. Jean Fagan Yellin's careful historical work not only proved this early consensus false, but also raised questions about why *Incidents* faced such strict scrutiny. One reason that feminist scholars advanced was that *Incidents* offered such a profound and nuanced departure from the kind of freedom that was made possible in the act of fugitivity found in the slave narratives of men. Braxton, "Harriet Jacobs' 'Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl'"; Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*; Smith, *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative*.

freedom, the fugitives who became free in the act of stealing themselves away, and those who claimed their freedom after the thirteenth amendment entered a world marked by discrimination, precarity, and general confusion. Jacobs's biographer, Jean Fagan Yellin, concluded that Jacobs "had led a rootless life… [h]er inability to plant roots [was] emblematic of the condition of her people."[37] Jacobs's experience dealing with the promises and disappointments of formal freedom offers insight into the responses that the formerly enslaved had to their newfound condition.

Jacobs's narrative recasts her own story from the perspective of a pseudonym, Linda Brent. For clarity's sake, I will refer to Jacobs when speaking about the author and the interventions of the text and Linda when analyzing the narrative. The narrative follows Linda from her naïve upbringing among her mother and grandmother, Aunt Martha, to her eventual transfer to Dr. Flint on a plantation in North Carolina. Scholars have noted that *Incidents* represented a powerful exposé of the particular forms of abuse and exploitation directed toward and enacted upon enslaved women. In portraying the specificity of her experience, Jacobs intended to rally white, middle-class women in the North around the abolitionist cause. To achieve such an aim demanded that Jacobs articulate her experience in the nineteenth century language of proper womanhood and domesticity. The violations of the virtues associated with the ideal of womanhood--piety, purity, submission, and domesticity—that Jacobs's story enumerated had the potential to elicit sympathy from the reader and highlight the violence of the slave system.[38] And yet, as Hazel Carby has argued, in appropriating the cult of true womanhood that permeated nineteenth century public discourse, Jacobs developed an "alternative set of definitions of womanhood and motherhood."[39] Following the work of numerous scholars, I take

[37] Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs*, 255.
[38] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood."
[39] Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 55–56.

Carby's injunction to understand the reformulation of womanhood to be an essential guideline for interpreting Jacobs's text.[40]

My reading of Jacobs centers one such aspect of the cult of true womanhood, the ideal of having a home. Taking the home seriously as a category of interpretive analysis allows us to see the home as a remaining dissatisfaction aring from the obtainment of formal freedom. Though Linda concludes her story by announcing that her "story ends with freedom… I and my child are now free!" there is something that disturbs her, a desire unfulfilled to which she directs the reader's attention: "the dream of my life is not yet realized. I do not sit with my children in a home of my own."[41] The dream of a home of her own represents the partialness of her free condition—that freedom from bondage does not exhaust the concept of freedom—as well as an ongoing desire to secure further conditions of freedom once one's status as slave was terminated.[42] By taking Linda's yearning for home-space as a point of departure, we can read the text backwards to understand how the institutions of slavery shaped the imaginations of freedom within the antebellum slave community. How did the home figure into Jacobs's recollection of life as an enslaved woman? What kinds of activities or subjectivities did home-space make possible?

In writing about the home in Jacobs's narrative, I join a wide-ranging discussion about Jacobs's vision of freedom and her relationship to prevailing ideas about womanhood and

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[40] Both Valerie Smith and Krista Walter argue that Jacobs provides a rigorous critique of patriarchal power in her version of womanhood. Smith, *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative*; Walter, "Surviving in the Garret."

[41] Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 164.

[42] Critics have sometimes foreclosed the open-endedness and forward-looking character of the narrative's conclusion. Centering freedom's remainder refutes the idea that we are directed upward toward heaven at the end of the narrative, as Bruce Mills contends. I also want to think with and against Nick Bromell's interpretation which asserts that Jacobs's major charge is to understand how to inhabit a present that has no tenable future. Mills, "Lydia Maria Child and the Endings to Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," 257; Bromell, "Harriet Jacobs: Prisoner of Hope."

domination. Both the existing literature on *Incidents* and the feminist scholarship on emancipation challenges the equation of having a home of one's own to a universal form of freedom. Historian Amy Dru Stanley has shown that abolitionists and reformers in the post-emancipation period figured the home as a private space impervious to market forces while simultaneously casting it as a domain ruled by men. Free laborers were free, in part, because they monopolized economic power within the family unit, allowing them to "maintain the traditional dependency relations of the household."[43] As the sole wage-earner of the household, the free laboring man could rely on the labor of his wife and children to keep the home.

Freedmen expounded upon the ideas of familial dependency and economic power about which reformers boasted. "Independent land ownership" not "wage labor," freedmen believed underwrote the autonomy of their families. Ownership of land represented ownership of the family's unpaid household labor, a "reward of the free labor contract."[44] From the perspective of the freedmen, homeless free laborers were as precarious as slaves because they could not truly claim a right to the household. There was an emphasis on the power that homeownership conveyed; that to have a home was to have the ability and capacity to practice mastery over wives and children.[45] Abolitionists refuted this line of thinking, defending the idea that if a worker's earnings were his, then "his comforts would be his—his wife, his children would be his…" The sale of labor entitled the freedman to be "master at home."[46] Why did freedpeople

[43] Stanley, "The Testing Ground of Home Life," 140.
[44] Stanley, 144.
[45] There was a reciprocal relationship between public and private power, between claims to independence in both spheres. As Laura Edwards has argued, "African American men often began their demands for political rights" by referencing their obligations to care for and protect their families. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion*, especially 184-217; 196.
[46] Stanley, "The Testing Ground of Home Life," 143.

insist on the ownership of land to make real the benefits of the free labor system? How did freedwomen understand the free laborer paradigm?

The reformist concern with ensuring a proper home in which men ruled has led feminist scholars to criticize desires for homelife in the nineteenth century. bell hooks, in her analysis of the transformation of sexism in the nineteenth century, disparaged the visions of freedom that arose after emancipation for their appropriation of the ideal of the white propertied family. hooks argued that black enslaved women craved the rights and privileges that white women held, mistaking another form of domination—the domination of men over women—for a robust form of freedom. Even though that version of freedom was difficult to achieve, hooks suggested that its acceptance as an ideal of freedom rendered freed women "accomplices in the crimes perpetuated against women and the victims of those crimes."[47]

Readers of *Incidents* have assessed the extent of Jacobs's investment in the institutions associated with the cult of true womanhood, interpreting her narrative as simultaneously appealing to the mores of the day and resisting their total embrace. Carby reminds us that the ideal of womanhood was both dominant—"the most subscribed to convention governing female behavior"—and recognizably "dominating"—a source of discomfort and frustration for many women, especially black women.[48] While the literature and writings of black women substantiate "a feminized black political desire" for the performance of proper womanhood and its material conditions, *Incidents* "mourns the persistent violation of black womanhood, maternity, family and home."[49] Within the space between Jacobs's desire and her mourning emerges a portrait of home and domesticity that departs from dominant narratives of womanhood in the period, what

[47] hooks, "Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience," 49.
[48] Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 23.
[49] Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire*, 24, 26.

one scholar calls "a radically new portrait of a southern home."[50] By outlining this vision of home, I seek to move beyond Jacobs's failure to "find a conventional home" and the well-trod lesson that "patriarchal, racist society has failed her" toward an understanding of what the home could mean as an aspiration for Jacobs and, by extension, freedwomen.[51] How did Jacobs's desire for home-space appropriate the conventions of ideal womanhood? And did that appropriation rework or remake the politics of womanhood and freedom?

To explore the contours of Jacobs's "renovated domesticity" is to consider the political understanding of the home and probe the intimate meanings of land ownership.[52] I follow the literature of the past three decades by placing Jacobs in the ideological context of womanhood to interrogate the ways that womanhood functioned as an access point to or threshold for citizenship status.[53] I read *Incidents* to think about the specific political acts that possession of home-space was thought to enable or ground. Such a reading demonstrates that Jacobs understood privacy to be an important condition of political action and freedom, a condition that was difficult to realize under slavery. Her desire for home, and the broader references to a private home of one's own throughout the text, indexes various figurations of freedom from slavery by representing the kind of actions made possible by possession of space. My reading centers two major possibilities that arise from ownership of home-space: the capacity to exclude others and the plotting enabled by one's concealment from the public. Both characteristics underscore the importance of securing privacy in the post-emancipation order. Freed people imagined that ownership of land and one's dwelling place could function as a bulwark against white

[50] Chambers, Watson, and Warner, "Harriet Jacobs at Home in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," 324.
[51] Becker, "HARRIET JACOBS'S SEARCH FOR HOME," 411–12; For an understanding of freedwomen's complicated negotiations of the ideas of womanhood see Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion*, 145–83.
[52] Larson, "Renovating Domesticity in Ruth Hall, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, and Our Nig."
[53] Carby addresses the ways that homelife enabled black women to assume a position of relative power. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 47.

encroachment, reconstituting the spatial organization of black resistance by carving out literal spaces within which to fashion kinship and social ties.

*Property in the Home as a Mechanism of Exclusion*

Throughout *Incidents* Linda figures a home of one's own as the ultimate realization of freedom from slavery. Her concluding yearning for a home echoes her recollections of life during enslavement. Detailing the "snug little home" of her grandmother, Aunt Martha, Linda explains that she and her brothers "longed for a home like hers" so that they could "be situated as she was."[54] As a free woman, Aunt Martha owned her home and could withdraw into her abode to escape surveillance by slave owners and their agents. The home also empowers Aunt Martha by granting her an opportunity to acquire useful skills that curry favor with her neighbors. Many members of the town recognized Aunt Martha's skill at home-making tasks, extending her a level of credibility and leeway unknown to the enslaved laborers. In the case of Aunt Martha, homeownership provides the conditions to perform the duties of respectable womanhood, gaining social status, and winning the respect of white folks. Linda repeats her view of the necessity of homelife in freedom when her brother William laments over the agony of slave life, wishing he had died with their father. Linda reminds him that a happier, more fulfilling life—one with a home of their own—was still possible. She implores him to accept that "every body was *not* cross, or unhappy" and that "those who had pleasant homes…were happy."[55] To be free from bondage was not only the end of direct forms of domination of the master, it was also the possibility of having a home of one's own.

[54] Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 17–18.
[55] Jacobs, 18.

As I stated earlier, Jacobs offers two reasons that take the reader beyond the dominant cult of womanhood at the time of publication. The first reason that Jacobs provides is that possessing a home amounts to a power to exclude, to choose one's intimate cohabitants. Jacobs articulates this reason during Linda's visit to England with Mr. Bruce, her employer, and his daughter Mary. Linda exclaims that her arrival in England felt as if a "great millstone" had been lifted from her chest. She describes the feeling as "pure, unadulterated freedom" that derives from her experience being "ensconced in a pleasant room."[56] That positionality, the one of an established and secure person, re-emerges in her observance of the English peasants in Berkshire. Linda notes that the poor of England lived in better conditions than "the most favored slaves in America."[57] Linda justifies her comparison by stating that the poor of England are engaged in self-directed labor: "they were not ordered to toil…"[58] But Linda found the grant of privacy even more foundational to their experience of freedom:

> ""Their homes were very humble; but they were protected by law. No insolent patrols could come, in the dead of night, and flog them at their pleasure. The father, when he closed his cottage door, felt safe with his family around him. No overseer could come and take from him his wife, or his daughter."[59]

The English example underscored the difference that possessing a home could make even between situations of relative penury. Linda dreamed of being like the father to her children, closing the door of a home against the troubles of the social world, refusing the advances of domination-seeking actors. Her satisfaction at the kind of ensconcing that English law established gestured toward the importance of access to a home as a bulwark against interference by the wealthy, propertied—and white—classes.[60]

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[56] Jacobs, 149.
[57] Jacobs, 150.
[58] Jacobs, 150.
[59] Jacobs, 150.
[60] Davie, "'Reader, My Story Ends with Freedom': Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," 104.

No episode in the narrative demonstrates the extent of the exclusive power of the home-owner than Aunt Martha's dramatic rebuke of Dr. Flint. Upon entering Aunt Martha's home, Dr. Flint notices that Rose, a slave that he sold days before, is communing with Linda. Enraged at the sight of his former property freely socializing, but unable to touch her, Dr. Flint vents his anger on Linda. Aunt Martha, drawn by the noise, confronts Dr. Flint directly, exclaiming "Get out of my house!"[61] Dr. Flint argues with her about the reasonableness of her demand, but he ultimately concedes and exits "in a great rage."[62] The power of Aunt Martha's claim to determine who can enter and dwell in her house captivates even a stubborn and proud plantation owner. Within the home she exudes confidence; amid the rigid Southern racial order she can refuse the shouts of an angry white man—one who owns her granddaughter—and insist on her authority to do so.

Jacobs's connection between claims to one's home space and the power to exclude reflected an emerging reality of Southern politics and law—the tightening of private ownership rights to land.[63] Over the course of the antebellum period, judges and legislatures reinterpreted or amended colonial statutes that protected common rights to land. In South Carolina in 1827, the legislature rewrote the 1694 statue on fencing, transforming the meaning of the practice. Whereas earlier fencing laws were intended to prevent the theft of small livestock by "evilly minded farmers," the emphasis in 1827 was to support the property of large landowners and their crops.[64] Upholding the new consensus on the exclusivity entailed by rights to real property, the South Carolina Court of Appeals broadened the definition of enclosed land and ruled in favor of

[61] Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 70.
[62] Jacobs, 70.
[63] A thorough treatment of the rise of a "right to exclude" can be found in Freyfogle, "Agrarian Production and the Right to Exclude in Early America: A Preliminary and Tentative Interpretation."
[64] Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 4.

the landowner in Fripp v. Hasell.[65] On the rare occasion that common rights were vindicated, judicial dissenters aired their frustration in stark terms. Judge John Bealton O'Neal did just that in 1831, asserting that, once land was enclosed, the proprietor held "the right to be as churlish as he pleases with his own."[66] O'Neal's complaint was symptomatic of a broader trend in Southern legal thought. A "progressive planter" movement during the antebellum period disparaged common rights, framing them as undue and unfair burdens on the propertied class.[67] Between the ratification of the federal Constitution and the Civil War, common rights to space were limited (recast as a privilege, not a right) and protections for private ownership of land were vigorously protected by law across the South.

The privatization of space via the grant of exclusive authority to owners strengthened the political-economic power of landholders and cemented ideas about the privacy afforded to domestic space by law. Southerners regularly commented on the sacrosanct character of the home. Historian Stephanie McCurry summarizes this ideological transformation: "as the boundaries of the household and proprietors rights were more vigorously regarded by law, public recognition of a masters' legitimate power over the households…deepened in proportion."[68] Such notions of the man as "master at home" justified his authority to exclude, punish, and command any subjects who crossed the threshold.[69] While the erosion of common rights in the South precipitated a consolidation of legalized private power in the master of the house, it also reduced resources available to women. Enclosure eroded non-wage sources of subsistence

[65] Evans, Fripp v. Hasell.
[66] Cited in McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 13.
[67] Hahn, "Hunting, Fishing, and Foraging," 42.
[68] McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 13–14.
[69] As the white planter William Elliot counseled his son, it was good that he had not attacked a yeoman farmer in the latter's own home because "his house was his castle" cited in McCurry, 6.

available to women and children and intensified their dependence on formal wage-earners.[70] The apotheosis of private property rights in Southern states tended to reflect a convergence of property law between North and South. Reconstruction era laws and amendments further unified the institution of property rights. Thomas M. Cooley, Northern judge and author of a popular legal treatise, wrote in 1868 that "the right to private property is a sacred right." His *Treatise on the Constitutional Limitations Which Rest Upon the Legislative Power of the States of the American Union* reacted to the nationalization of constitutional guarantees by the fourteenth amendment and spent considerable ink outlining the protections afforded to owners of property to enjoy their possessions as they pleased.[71]

Jacobs's commentary responded to this political and legal change. Noting the authority granted to the owner of property, Jacobs sought to secure a realm of privacy for herself and her children that would enable her to exclude white people, particularly men, who were so often agents of violence and domination in her narrative. She imagined that she too could act with the confidence of the law to banish unwanted intrusions from her private life and, thus, diminish a major source of torment that haunted her during slavery. The right to exclude others from home-space may well have been secured by robust protections for renters, but the particularities of tenancy in the South prevented such legal protections from taking hold. In contrast to the more urbanized areas of the Northern states, where landholders' hands-off approach often created unsafe and unsanitary dwellings, Southern landowners retained an interest in the personal lives of their renters who also served them as laborers.[72] Given the legal context of antebellum and

[70] Humphries, "Enclosures, Common Rights, and Women."
[71] Cooley, "A Treatise on the Constitutional Limitations Which Rest upon the Legislative Power of the States of the American Union," 357. Such a defense of the owner's enjoyment private property can also be found in the enumeration of rights in the 1866 Civil Rights Act.
[72] Wolkoff, "Possession and Power," 30–31.

Reconstruction South, ownership of land and home was the sole method to claim the right to exclude that impressed Linda during her time in England. And yet, Jacobs never entirely endorsed ownership as the surest method for achieving privacy. Her remarks as a reformer during the Reconstruction Era suggest that she believed that ownership was a worthy goal, she left open the possibility that other arrangements would be acceptable so long as they produced private space.

Linda recognized the distinction between having a home and having a *home of one's own*. In an effort to exert more control over Linda, Dr. Flint twice offered Linda "a small house...in a secluded place."[73] Dr. Flint reminded Linda that having a home would provide her the opportunity to claim her title as "a lady."[74] Linda rebuffed Dr. Flint's proposals, knowing full well that accepting the offer would increase her dependence on him: "I was determined that the master… should not, after my long struggle with him, succeed at last in trampling his victim under his feet."[75] Instead of enabling greater freedom, the kind of forced isolation that Dr. Flint's home entailed would have stifled Linda's self-determination by regulating her social ties. Linda's anxieties around enforced housing convinced her that she needed to find "something akin to freedom" in choosing her own lover, Mr. Sands, and mothering his children.[76] This episode in Linda's life revealed that unless homeownership was won for oneself, the home could just as easily become a tool of domination and a space of violence and oppression. Dr. Flint enticed Linda to fall further under his control once more by promising her "a home and freedom"

[73] Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 47.
[74] Jacobs, 47.
[75] Jacobs, 47.
[76] Jacobs, 48.

if she ceased her contact with Mr. Sands.[77] Like her earlier rejoinder, Linda denied Dr. Flint the opportunity to deepen her dependency and expose her to greater surveillance.

Rights to property were also fallible. Though Linda valorized the legal protections afforded to property owners in *Incidents*, she also acknowledged the shortcomings and imperfections of relying on legal rulings to guarantee privacy. In a chapter on the white fear of insurrection, Jacobs identifies the limits of privacy for Southern free blacks. At least once a year, the white people of the county would organize a "muster," a parade of anti-black violence and white debauchery that intruded on the privacy of homeowners.[78] White patrol bands would enter homes, steal possessions, commit outrages upon women, falsely accuse black neighbors of resistance, and commit extralegal violence. Aunt Martha and Linda experienced one such intrusion unscathed because Aunt Martha lived "in the midst of white families" who supported her.[79] Amid the disorderly ordering of the white patrols, Jacobs exposes the limits of a right to property to enforce privacy. When the "administrators of justice" are "[a] rabble, staggering under intoxication," crimes will be committed "with impunity".[80] The ferocity of white patrols pointed to the need for extra-legal support to ensure that privacy could be safely enjoyed. In the case of Aunt Martha's search, social support from the dominant racial class prevented her from experiencing the worst of the intrusions undertaken. And yet, Jacobs's attachment to possessing home-space throughout the text suggests that she remained captivated by the legal and social authority granted to member of a household regardless of the impossibility to secure that authority.

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[77] Jacobs, 72.
[78] Jacobs, 55; Hannah Rosen details the force and purpose of the slave patrol and its later iteration, "night riding," in the period of Redemption. Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South*, 183–94.
[79] Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 56.
[80] Jacobs, 58.

*The Home as a Place of Plotting/Emplotment*

Privacy and the ability to elude white overseers allowed freed people to assemble and conspire about their public action. During the antebellum period, restrictions on the private spaces of the enslaved targeted the revolutionary potential of home-space. Plantation owners and their agents sought to surveil enslaved laborers and control their organization both by regulating leisure time and enforcing geographic restrictions. These bids at total control were merely aspirational. Enslaved people carved out liminal spaces on the plantation terrain on which to meet. As J.T. Roane has argued, enslaved and freed black Southerners plotted a black commons, creating a "distinctive" and "often furtive social architecture rivaling, threatening, and challenging the infrastructures of abstraction, commodification, and social control developed by white elites before and after the formal abolition of slavery."[81] Homes of the enslaved functioned as common spaces of political activity across the South. When home-space was insufficient or dangerous for holding gatherings and muffling whispers, enslaved people established alternative geographies of resistance in forests or bogs or utilized covert languages to communicate with one another.[82]

To place oneself in space and time enabled groups of enslaved persons to plot against the slave regime. Choosing where and how to place oneself constituted a form of resistance to a system of control that enforced one's place *and* positioning oneself in space generated new strategies of resistance by forming a commons in which to plot. I contend that the kinds of emplotments that enabled resistance and community before the Civil War gave way to new imaginaries after the formal abolition of slavery. Whereas antebellum efforts to plot a black

[81] Roane, "Plotting the Black Commons," 241.
[82] The fact that gathering was often called "stealing a meeting" underscores that the enslaved understood the production of private space to be a direct affront to the slaveowner's authority. Perdue, Barden, and Phillips, *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*, 276.

commons aimed to undermine enclosure of land to mark it as white land, later visions of plotting sought to re-common the land by transforming private spaces like the home into spaces of black communal life. Harriet Jacobs's narrative elaborates on the ways that possession of home-space represented efforts for more stable emplotment and richer plotting.

Jacobs portrays the home, specifically Aunt Martha's cabin, as the ground of black sociality. Aunt Martha's home serves as a meeting place throughout the narrative. In the confines of her home, white and black friends share the recent goings-on and offer support.[83] The home often provided the place and space for constructing new social infrastructures for "it was only [in domestic life] that [the enslaved] might be inspired to project techniques of expanding it further by leveling what few weapons they had against the slave-holding class whose unmitigated drive for profit was the source of their misery."[84] Historian Stephanie Camp describes the slave cabin as a vital landmark in the "rival geography" that enslaved people crafted. Enslaved women claimed their quarters as private space against white encroachment and treated that space as a place of politicization.[85] The association of the slave cabin with domestic activities dissuaded slaveowners from frequenting the abodes of slaves, making the cabin a space of relative privacy. The home offered a form of concealment to its inhabitants that rendered the actions taken within invisible to the outside world.[86]

Linda recognizes the shroud that privacy casts around home-space. Four of Linda's hiding places are homes. Her escape, which famously entails her fashioning a hiding place in the

[83] Miss Fanny, Rose, and the kind white woman respectively: Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 75–76; 69–70; 83-84.
[84] Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," 115.
[85] Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 93–116.
[86] As Tom Dumm points out, the home both facilitates fraternization and allows for respite, conditions that I associate with public-action. Sara Ahmed puts a finer point on it: "A shut door can be how we work on the institution; who knows what we might be plotting behind the door." Dumm, *Home in America*, 19–20; Ahmed, *Complaint!*, 302.

garret of her grandmother's house, depends upon the privacy of the home-space, its unknowability to outsiders. In this "loophole of retreat," Linda contends that "there was no place, where slavery existed, that could have afforded me so good a place of concealment."[87] The privacy and seclusion of the garret represent more than "freedom from" oppression, as one commentator puts it; they amount to a "freedom to" survive, communicate with her family, watch her children grow, and—eventually—escape the South.[88]

Though Jacobs located the possibility of concealment most readily in the home-spaces of enslaved and free black characters, she also performed that concealment in and through her writing. Commentators have frequently emphasized the opacity with which Jacobs recorded her abuses.[89] For many scholars, Jacobs invoked her right to hide the details of her life to avoid explicit descriptions of the licentiousness enacted upon her and other slaves. Saidiya Hartman casts "the displacement of violence and the omission of injury" as one tactic of an "urgent and desperate" strategy to "keep the reader within the narrator's authority."[90] While Jacobs intended to avoid carrying "the burden of the indecent and the obscene," a commonality she shared with many nineteenth century women writers, I want to recognize the power she exercised in keeping certain details private and highlight the extent to which she wields authority in her selective revelations. Jacobs's equivocations materialize her authority to determine what the reader can and cannot know. In her unwillingness to admit the entirety of her history, Jacobs seizes upon an

[87] Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 98.
[88] Reference to the freedom enabled by the garret can be found in Kaplan. Green-Barteet mobilizes Kaplan's reading to explore Jacobs's theorization of interstitial space. While I find Green-Barteet's reading incredibly useful to spatialize one's reading of the narrative, I disagree that we need to read the garret as a "public space" to recognize that it enables freedom. Jacobs confounds any easy distinction between action and publicity on the one hand and seclusion and privacy on the other. Kaplan, "Recuperating Agents: Narrative Contracts, Emancipatory Readers, and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," 281.; Green-Barteet, "'The Loophole of Retreat,'" 55.
[89] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 392; hooks, "Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience," 24–28.
[90] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 107.

important resource that privacy affords—mainly the ability to control the public's perception of one's activities. Indeed, Jacobs's acknowledgement that there "may be sophistry in all this" evidences her own exercise of willful agency in the writing of the narrative.[91] The concealment that home-space promised, but could never perfectly secure, was most acutely realized in writing her own story.[92] Thus, privacy in Jacobs's account was not necessarily a physical condition accessible in the acquisition of property rights, but rather a condition one could craft through experimentation in public speech.

**The Need for Privacy**

Reading Jacobs in context highlights a particular orientation toward space that forces us to examine the importance of privacy in the search for land and home during the post-emancipation period. In sum, Jacobs's valorization of the home draws our attention toward the liberatory uses of private space in contexts of domination. Jacobs's identification of the home as a basis for the exclusion of white people as well as a place for strategizing provides an opportunity to rethink the possibilities inherent in practices and institutions of enclosure, individuation, and privatization. Jacobs's desire for home did not entail property in land. Though privacy is often associated with the ownership of private property rights in liberal democracies, Jacobs teaches us that privacy is a condition that must be claimed for oneself regardless of the property regime. My reading of Jacobs invites us to extend current projects of re-commoning and

[91] This quotation comes after a lengthy discussion of the moral reasonableness of Jacobs choice to have children with a man of her own choosing. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 48.

[92] Indeed, Jacobs wrote her narrative alone in her room at night to avoid the scrutiny of her landlord, who was a pro-slavery man. Davie argues the "final freedom" arrives in the forming of the narrative. Berlant agrees with this interpretation, stating that "the imagination of sexual privacy these women [including Jacobs] express is a privacy they have never experienced..." Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 47.; Davie, "'Reader, My Story Ends with Freedom': Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," 106.; Berlant, "The Queen of America Goes to Washington City," 552.

publicization to consider how we can both share space on Earth and allow everyone access to privacy.

Enclosure and privatization have long been associated with the rise of capitalist economies in the early modern period.[93] Karl Marx assessed the transition from feudalism to early modern capitalism, arguing that such transformation required the mass enclosure of common land. In *Capital vol. 1*, Marx referred to enclosure as a "series of thefts, outrages, and popular misery" and rearticulated the process as "the forcible expropriation of the people." Enclosure, as Marx perceptively identified, was a necessary condition of capitalist production because it cleared the ground for the construction of stable, perpetual rights of ownership in land. Marx's analysis of primitive accumulation linked the privatization of land to the formation and accumulation of capital and the production of a proletariat. By denying peasants the right to remain on the land that they worked, landed proprietors destroyed both the basis of home-space and access to capital. Privatization and enclosure enabled the reckless pursuit of profit by the capital-holding class by divorcing laborers from the means of production.[94]

More recently, scholars have lifted the language of enclosure—and its opposite, the commons—to think about the dilemmas and crises of contemporary capitalist formations and the degradation of public space.[95] Silvia Federici, in her broad effort to resuscitate the idea of a shared commons, turns to the practices of Native American tribes to criticize the effects of private property. Federici locates the fundamental incongruency in the life forms of European settlers and indigenous peoples in a contrasting view of property relations:

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[93] Johnson, *An Archaeology of Capitalism*; Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England*; Blomley, "Making Private Property"; Thompson, *Customs in Common*.
[94] Marx, "Expropriation of the Agricultural Population from the Land."
[95] Vasudevan, McFarlane, and Jeffrey, "Spaces of Enclosure"; Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public"; Honig, *Public Things*; Federici and Linebaugh, *Re-Enchanting the World*.

"Whereas private property was the condition of freedom in bourgeois political philosophy and the distinguishing mark between civilization and savagery, liberty for the Native nations depended on its absence."[96]

For Federici, indigenous practices offer us an alternative to the contemporary regime of propertied capitalism and therefore a way out of our destruction of the environment and alienation from one another. She presses the argument further, casting any commons that does not fundamentally alter our "social relations" as a "co-opted" or "gated" commons.[97] Housing co-ops, land trusts, and consumer co-ops demonstrate the "power of collective action," but "they do not construct different social relations and may even deepen racial and intra-class divisions."[98] These are conservative projects according to Federici because collectivizing ownership of space and capital always promotes cooperation and sharing as the benefits due to insiders against the exclusions of outsiders. While Federici somberly reminds us of the depth of reimagination that is required to rethink the basis of our social and political lives under late modern capitalism, she emphasizes that universally accessible common spaces can serve as a starting point for liberating us from capitalist oppression.

Jacobs's account of home-bound privacy provides a rejoinder to contemporary political programs that only seek to undermine the privatization of space that buttresses our current economic system. Reading Jacobs, we find the insight that in our quest to re-common land and space, we must also attend to the need for privacy. Because privacy has become most readily associated with the private ownership of space, we will need to image communal living arrangements and rules of use that enable seclusion for it members.[99] And boundaries are not merely tools of the dominant capitalist class. Boundary-work can also function as a tool of the

[96] Federici and Linebaugh, *Re-Enchanting the World*, 79.
[97] Federici and Linebaugh, 89–91.
[98] Federici and Linebaugh, 91.
[99] Johnson maintains that the enclosure of the commons entails "a series of actions….of creating new forms of boundary." We will need ways to form boundaries in a re-commoned world that doesn't depend on rigid rules of perpetual exclusion. Johnson, *An Archaeology of Capitalism*, 71.

dominated and oppressed.[100] In claiming private property freed slaves enacted targeted exclusions with which to enjoy a greater realm of freedom. In the post-emancipation context, the exclusion of outsiders was often a tool aimed at securing spaces of black intimacy and socialization. Jacobs's narrative advances a particular feminist imagination of the home ruled by a woman . Like her Aunt Martha and many freed women, Jacobs's vision of the home as a place marked by matriarchal order subverted the "masculinist ruses" that embedded the domination of husband over wife and children in an ideal of freedom as homeownership.[101]

This re-evaluation is not a suggestion that the practice of acquiring landed property is or was without hazards. Many scholars have accurately unearthed the centrality of property in land to the ongoing settlement of the Americas and the continued displacement of members of the global precariat.[102] I suggest that in addition to these important condemnations of private property's entanglement with exploitation, dispossession, and unfreedom we also explore how historical actors in contexts of domination sought to redeploy or appropriate the institution of private property in land to combat the particular forms that oppression and domination assumed. To this end, the post-emancipation period constitutes fertile ground for investigating the strategies of resistance that peoples have assembled through creative deployment of prevailing property regimes.

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[100] After considering how institutional authority often materializes in the act of shutting doors, Ahmed admits that shutting doors can have an additional purpose. Like the power to exclude via private property rights, "[a] door is a sorting system; you sort people out by shutting some people out." Ahmed, *Complaint!*, 255–56.

[101] Hortense Spillers's groundbreaking article on the familial arrangements produced through the institution of American chattel slavery gives greater credence to the matriarchal character of ownership in Jacobs's narrative. One of the effects of slavery's insistence on partus sequitur ventrem was the perverse empowerment of enslaved women. That legacy has gifted black women a peculiar perspective on responsibility and freedom that is worth sustaining according to Toni Morrison. Morrison, "What the Black Woman Thinks About Women's Lib"; Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe"; Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, 196.

[102] Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native"; Vasudevan, McFarlane, and Jeffrey, "Spaces of Enclosure"; Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property and Empire, 1500–2000*; McElroy, "Property as Technology."

Privacy as realized in enclosed space can harbor dangers for those seeking emancipatory potential as well. Jacobs's refusal to accept Dr. Flint's offer of a conditional home gestured toward the potential for private space to become a place of violence and domination. The realization of the desire for home, as bell hooks observed, could be coterminous with the formation of new kinds of domination within the home-space—the subordination of women to men. The problem, however, cannot be encompassed by focused attention on external agents alone. Shatema Threadcraft, in her reading of Jacobs's narrative, presses beyond the simple patriarchal violence enabled in the home to criticize the insufficiency of a conception of freedom that does not deal with the internalization of sexist and racist norms. Threadcraft, drawing on the work of Nancy Hirschmann, maintains that "[freedom] for women, then, requires transforming the (racist) sexist social contexts in which they act so that those contexts provide the help they need."[103] In the terms of my interpretation, carving out spaces of privacy and inhabiting enclosed spaces are not enough to realize the freedom that we might now pursue. To transform the world and the contexts that perpetuate domination, we must periodically exit the home, forgo the privileges of solitude and privacy, and engage in public acts.

Jacobs's narrative also serves as a reminder that private space and privacy are vital to the freedom that we practice in public spaces. Recent scholarship that mourns the dissolution or degradation of the public sphere in Western democracies sometimes overlooks the parallel destruction of privacy and private space occurring through increasing potent technologies of surveillance and intrusion. Such tools of power threaten "not just the development of our personal identities but of our political ones as well."[104] Jacobs's portrayal of the home as a place

[103] Threadcraft, *Intimate Justice*, 63.
[104] Richards, *Why Privacy Matters*, 132.

of plotting and strategizing emphasizes the role of private space in taking public action. The political theorist Bonnie Honig qualifies her otherwise one-sided defense of public space with an addendum that we ought to take seriously the "role of private things and private spaces to provide the orientation and belonging that fill fundamental needs and generate the capacity for care… and concern."[105] Jacobs's theorization of private space in the home moves us beyond a conception of privacy that nourishes care and concern of others toward one that underwrites or propels action altogether. As Richard Iton contends, marginalized and excluded subjects' entrance into public space demands not only the self-participation in "substantive, open-ended deliberation," but also "the related commitment to the nurturing of potentially subversive forms of interiority through and by which private geographies are made available to the public."[106]

**On Incomplete Projects of Freedom**

We are left with the charge of how to make sense of Jacobs's portrayal of the necessity of home and the broader quest for land on which to build houses and construct homes. How do we square the the post-emancipation yearning for exclusion, authority, concealment, and privacy and the historical fact that many freed people never actualized that desire? What strategies did they concoct to realize this desire? What obstacles stood in their way? And what significance does the quest for home-space reveal about the meaning of freedom after slavery? Were ideas of home grounded in an impossible ideal that was always out of reach? Should we read the desire for home as a form of "cruel optimism"—a misguided, but powerful faith that homelife would embellish their practice of freedom?[107] Or can we call freedom cast as homeownership a kind of

[105] Honig, *Public Things*, 48.
[106] Iton identifies the urgency to probe cultural artifacts with the fact that increased repression or exclusion in/from the decision-making process forces agents to rethink their forms of expression. Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, 16.
[107] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.

"ugly freedom" that gained traction only through the cultivation of new modes of domination?[108]

Harriet Jacobs's narrative offers some provisional responses to these difficult questions. For Jacobs and the freed people of the South, precarity, rootlessness, and public scrutiny characterized the experience of post-slavery. A home offered refuge from these ills. While reformers aimed to extract compliance from the freed people by enforcing norms about homelife, freed people experimented with new ways of ordering the home. In reviewing letters, speeches, and publications, I have reconstructed a few visions of home that animated the quest for land. Freed people sought their own home-spaces because they believed that it could promote privacy, empower them to exclude oppressors, and enable them to build lasting communities through place-making. Property in land alone could not secure these practices. The historical record attests to the frustrations and failures of the freed people in achieving a grounded freedom.

Freedom from slavery, as Jacobs's narrative so vividly dramatized, produced various "remainders" because it took a particular shape, the legal destruction of enslavement. The system of slavery at which abolitionists took aim was predicated on a series of practices and institutions spanning a diverse array of material realms—cultural, economic, social, political, and legal. To eradicate the legal foundation of slavery was a powerful blow to the racial hierarchy and domination that it entailed, but it was not a total measure of eradication. That reality did not surprise observers in the 1860s and it is even less startling to contemporary audiences who have witnessed the implications of partial abolition. Such observations can serve as a basis for further critique and the generation of new imaginaries that might dislodge enduring remnants of slavery's legacy. Freedom as homeownership can be thought of as incomplete in two ways. First,

[108] Anker, *Ugly Freedoms*.

freedom as homeownership was incomplete because, as a vision of freedom, it lacked the necessary aspirations to eradicate all forms of racial domination that persisted after legal abolition. In this sense, freedom as homeownership was *insufficient* or *imperfect* as an imagination of resisting slavery's afterlives. Freedom as homeownership was also incomplete in the sense that it was *unfinished*. Perhaps this meaning of incomplete best stifles any contemporary effort to assess its worth because we do not know what broad-based land ownership would have made possible in the post-emancipation South.

The archive that I considered demonstrates that many historical actors were undeterred by this reality—by the incompleteness of freedom. The abolitionist Lydia Maria Child reminded the freed people that the difficulty of their situation should not impress upon them a sense of discouragement because "[s]uch a great change as it is from Slavery to Freedom cannot be completed all at once." Jacobs concludes her narrative with the sober acknowledgement that her story—like her free condition—evokes the "dreary" (incomplete, unredressed) as well as the hopeful (actualized, satisfied). She states that her "gloomy recollections" have corresponding "[happy] memories…like light, fleecy clouds floating over a dark and troubled sea."[109] It was the lightness of the clouds, her happy memories, that inspired her to persevere in the moments of distress. Jacobs's daughter, Louisa, shared a fondness for weather metaphor and deployed it on at least one occasion to capture the pragmatic disposition of her age: "There is no [cloudless happiness] in this life. If we hold and regulate the sunshine that lies within our reach we shall not be deeply scarred by the cloud that will sometimes mar its brightness"[110]

[109] Jacobs mobilizes the weather imagery twice: once in characterizing Mrs. Flint and once at the end of the narrative. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 78; 164.
[110] Cited in Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs*, 210.

## CHAPTER THREE

## To Break the Slave Power: Thaddeus Stevens, Land Confiscation, and the Politics of Repair

"[Stevens] knew that rebel leaders were conquered and not subdued, and appreciating the power they derived from the ownership of the land on which the body of the people were to labor and live, he would deprive them of that power."
- Congressman William D. Kelley [1]

"Have negroes the right to be walking about our plantations with guns or pistols in their hands, claiming a right, because they have been pronounced free, to the stock of their former owners, & in some cases, contending even, for a right to the land itself?"
-Joint Letter to Brig. General J. P. Hatch[2]

On September 30, 1867, Aaron A. Bradley, a former South Carolina slave who escaped North in the 1830s and studied law, stepped onto a platform in the middle of Savannah, Georgia to address a growing group of freedmen. Denouncing the formal Republican meeting in Chippewa Square, Bradley presented himself as a righteous leader of the impoverished and tormented freedmen. The crowd was captivated. The Savannah Daily News and Herald reported with alarm that rural freed people gathered in town, one "large party armed with muskets" and many others "armed with clubs, or sharpened ramrods, or bars of iron, or sections of gas-pipes, converted into canes." After being elected president of the out-of-doors meeting, Bradley proclaimed "land for all negroes" and implored the attendees to "confiscate a portion of the lands of the rich whites in the State of George and divide it among the colored gentlemen and the poor whites." Bradley did not have the opportunity to see his plan brought to fruition, however. The confrontation of a conservative black city dweller with one of Bradley's guardsmen served as

[1] Kelley, *Memorial Addresses on the Life and Character of Thaddeus Stevens*, 24.
[2] Hahn et al., *Land and Labor, 1865: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, 1:97–99.

cover for local police officers and federal forces to charge the square, arrest protestors, and disperse the crowd.[3]

Though unsuccessful, Bradley's plan of action addressed a central political question raised by the turn to a conception of freedom tied to the ownership of land: how should freed people acquire property in land? Jacobs's *Incidents* explained why property in land was useful to the formerly enslaved—it provided a space of privacy to its inhabitants. Jacobs's narrative, however, offered no instruction as to the proper method of obtaining that land.[4] Most Northerners agreed that the only proper way to acquire land would be sale by owner. Bradley, joining a chorus of freed people and radical abolitionists, articulated an alternative answer to the reformist program of hard-work, thrift, and purchase—confiscation. Rather than settle the contentious debate over land that racked postwar public discourse, the allure of confiscation proliferated new questions. If confiscation was the best method to secure property in land among the formerly enslaved, by whose force should that confiscation take place? Was confiscation to be realized through the deployment of violence by bands of freedmen? Or could the freed people demand that the victorious Union government enact largescale seizures?

Perhaps no political figure responded to these questions more forcefully than Congressman Thaddeus Stevens, the radical Republican from Lancaster, Pennsylvania.[5] For his efforts, he received both glowing praise and damning assaults on his character.[6] Although

[3] "City Intelligence."

[4] In a letter written during her time working with freedpeople in Alexandria, VA, Jacobs endorsed the popular consensus that freedpeople ought to accumulate wealth to obtain property in land. She and her daughter Louisa wrote: "[The freedpeople] have had to struggle along and help themselves as they could. But though this has been discouraging, at times, it teaches them self-reliance; and that is good for them, as it is for everybody." Jacobs and Jacobs, "Letter from Teachers of the Freedmen."

[5] Perhaps no politician, save Rep. George Julian of Indiana, fought harder than Stevens to enact a confiscation plan.

[6] Examples of this admiration and hatred can be found in the newspapers of the Reconstuction Era. While Harper's Weekly defended Stevens's plan as "very far from ridiculous," the Nation accused Stevens of "playing the bugaboo for recalcitrant Southern politicians" "Mr. Thaddeus Stevens and Confiscation"; "The Week."

Stevens produced no original work for publication, his speeches and letters depict a man with a sharp political acumen and an almost unparalleled will for achieving sweeping reforms during the Civil War and Reconstruction Eras. Born in poverty and raised by a single mother, Stevens was disabled from birth due to a clubfoot. He suffered his entire life from an autoimmune disorder which claimed the hair on his head at an early age. Stevens attended Dartmouth at the insistence of his mother and moved to Pennsylvania where he taught school and, after much preparation, practiced law. He took a seat in the United States Congress for the first time as a member of the Whig Party in 1848, but only won election to two terms. On the eve of the Civil War, Stevens again ascended to the highest legislature in the land this time as a Republican, serving until his death in 1868.

In this chapter, I return to the political thought of Thaddeus Stevens to gain critical traction on our contemporary moment. Stevens's problem-space, the questions he thought worth asking and the answers he thought might resolve those questions, provides us an opportunity to better understand the formation and operation of racial domination in the present. Stevens's quest to break the slave power offers us an alternative conceptualization of the challenges facing post-emancipation republics, one that forces us to rethink the terms with which we understand slavery and its afterlife. Conceived of as a form of "investment," "compensation," or "repayment," reparations discourse figures democratic repair as an act of giving. The plan devised by Stevens during the height of Reconstruction, by contrast, suggests that we widen the scope of our analysis from the question of how to make amends for the destruction and injury perpetuated

under slavery to the question of how we might dismantle the ongoing structures of domination that slavery has born through an active taking of material power.[7]

I make this argument in several successive steps. First, I reconstruct the Civil War moment to provide context for Stevens's support of confiscation. Stevens's plan of confiscation and redistribution responded to an ongoing contest over land ownership in the South as well as the national, postwar question of how to reincorporate the former Confederate states. Next, I turn to Stevens's speeches and writings. With a close reading of his Reconstruction era orations, I isolate the important intervention that he was trying to make. Stevens wanted to break the slave power in the South with a program of land confiscation and redistribution. I also consider the arguments against confiscation and redistribution to explore how political opponents neutralized reformers and mobilized conservatives to defeat the plan. Finally, I reclaim my position in the present, explaining how Stevens's defense of land confiscation can revitalize contemporary approaches to democratic repair by reorienting our focus on the ways that imbalances in material power enable economic domination and stymy the realization of republican citizenship.

**The Twin Projects of Emancipation: Ending Property in Humans, Expanding Property in Land**

The emancipation of millions of slaves was the central event that unfolded in the United States during the 1860s.[8] The fashioning of freedom from conditions of servitude and slavery has been the topic of an extraordinary array of scholarly works. While we often associate the Civil War Era with the abolition of property in human beings, we less frequently recall the intertwined struggle to reconstruct the property relations between humans. I briefly outline the

[7] As historian Eric Foner put it, Stevens's confiscation scheme consisted of two related, but separate goals: "One was to destroy the power of the planter class; the other, to create a new class of black and white yeomen as the basis of future southern political and social power" Foner, "Thaddeus Stevens, Confiscation, and Reconstruction."
[8] This statement is imaginable because of the revisionist history writing of W.E.B. Du Bois who placed slaves at the center of the narrative and showed how emancipation from human bondage was made possible by their collective efforts to thwart the slave regime. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*.

interconnected problems of slave abolition and land ownership as they developed over the course of the war to provide context for Thaddeus Stevens's plan. Though Stevens's legislative proposals constituted a novel and provocative scheme for breaking the slave power, he was not alone in his belief that guaranteeing land ownership to the freedpeople of the South would be a necessary step in securing their condition of freedom. Stevens inherited several unsuccessful attempts to rearrange property relations in the South between 1862 and 1865.

By the end of 1861, the federal government had already enacted the First Confiscation Act, which provided a statutory reiteration of commonsense notions about the seizure of property employed during wartime. The First Confiscation Act proved weak in the face of Southern successes on the battlefield. Many Northerners worried that the simple seizure of property employed in direct battle was insufficient to weaken the Confederate war machine. A group of radical Republicans led in the Senate by Lyman Trumbull of Illinois and in the House by George Julian of Indiana pushed for a new bill that would enhance the confiscatory powers of the United States military. Foremost among these enhancements was the permanent revoking of rights over property in persons from any person found to be in a "state of rebellion"—a more inclusive classification than those in direct military engagement with the Union army.[9] This Second Confiscation Act passed with qualifications that upset the radicals in Congress: individuals would have a right to due process in military courts and confiscation could only last the lifetime of the current owner.[10]

[9] In effect, the Second Confiscation Act declared mere residence in an "insurrectionary state" a criminal offense. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 284.

[10] The original bill authorized the seizure of property beyond the lifetime of the owner, but a clarificatory resolution aimed at calming President Lincoln's nerves revoked that authorization. George Julian persisted in his fight to permanently revoke the property of persons in rebellion against the United States throughout the period of the war, but no joint measure was ever sent to the desk of the president. The Second Confiscation Act went largely unenforced as a means for claiming land and non-human capital; there were a minimal number of instances in which the Union army claimed the land of a Confederate citizen under the singular reasoning of seizing the property of a disloyal citizen. Instead, lands came under Union control for failure to pay taxes or their general abandonment by

The confiscation acts provided the Union military meager access to land, but they became a vital legal resource for the seizure of property in persons. Military victories across the South in late 1862 generated a growing problem for Union generals. The mass flight of slaves and their refusal to maintain the productive capacities of the Confederacy—what Du Bois termed the general strike—produced a refugee crisis for the Union armies.[11] Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, signed in January 1863, further complicated the situation as military leaders could no longer treat the refugees as slaves, exercising despotic authority over them and reducing them to mere instruments of war. Within this confusing context, the efforts of freedpeople to construct a semblance of community out of newfound destitution inspired bold experimentation. The Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, had already directed General Rufus Saxton in 1862 to oversee a group of former slaves and Northern abolitionists who had founded free communities on the coastal islands of South Carolina. At this "Port Royal Experiment," freedpeople demonstrated their interest in securing titles to land, raising homes, and producing their own sustenance.[12] Similar experiments broke out across the South. After the meeting with a group of Black leaders in Savannah, General William T. Sherman threw his support behind the freedpeople, announcing that three large swaths of land had been "made free by the acts of war" and "were reserved and set apart" for settlement by former slaves. [13]

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the owner. As I show in the next section, the Confiscation Acts are important for the ways in which they inspired Stevens's thinking about the precarious nature of private property rights and the figuring of Southerners as enemies of war. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 283–85; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 51, 68, 158.

[11] By the time that General Sherman reached Savanah—to give an example of numbers—between seven thousand and fifteen thousand former slaves had joined his ranks. Westwood, "Sherman Marched," 35.

[12] The best book on the profound transformations that took place on the South Carolina coastal islands remains Willie Lee Rose's 1964 text. Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*.

[13] Westwood, "Sherman Marched," 40.

Sherman's directive, known as Special Field Order No. 15, blew open new vistas of emancipated life for the freedpeople of the South.[14] No longer property themselves, freedpeople would now also have access to property in land. Yet it was only a provisional military act. General Saxon moved quickly to divide the land and compose titles for freedpeople, but the elevation of a new man to the presidency of the United States stymied his efforts. Andrew Johnson entered office in the spring of 1865 and, by the end of May, released two orders outlining his approach to Southern Reconstruction. Against the wishes of the radical wing of the Republican Party, Johnson assumed control of state re-entry, offering clemency to many Southerners who signed loyalty oaths and personally determining the fate of the members of the planter class.[15] Johnson's generosity in pardoning former landowners dissolved the legal basis for military control of confiscated and abandoned land on which rested the new communities of freedpeople.

Alongside efforts to secure titles to land by military officials, radical Republican politicians in Congress fought for more permanent, legislative solutions to problems of land ownership in South since the height of the war. Vigorous debate during the first and second Freedman's Bureau bills erupted in response to various proposals to allot land to the freedpeople. In its final form, the Freedman's Bureau Act included a curious dilemma: the Bureau could sell land to the freedpeople, but only with "such title as it could convey" [16]. Congress had not specified which lands and on what basis those lands were under the control of the new agency. Many Bureau officials worked in earnest to confirm as many titles to the freedpeople as possible

[14] More detailed coverage of Sherman's reservation can be found in: Oubre, *Forty Acres and a Mule*, 46–71.
[15] It was the shocking leniency with which Johnson pardoned the planter class that made his policy dangerous to the Republican efforts at establishing freedom for the former slaves. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 185–91.
[16] Cox, "The Promise of Land for the Freedmen," 433.

in places like Port Royal, but many freedpeople lost possession after months of toil on the new land [17].

As political allies of the freedpeople failed to concretize Sherman's order with new legislation, relations between freedpeople and landowners deteriorated. If the government would not take an active role in facilitating the accumulation of land among the freedpeople, they would have to obtain titles through the usual means—sale by owner. Empowered by the new president, plantation owners reasserted their control with a vengeance. Southern planters, like the one who anxiously wrote to the Freedman's Bureau during the summer 1865, disavowed the land claims of freedpeople. Their tactics of refusal ranged from manipulating freedpeople into signing onerous contracts to displays of individual and mob violence to intimidate those who pursued economic advancement.[18] As Freedman's Bureau agents spread throughout the South during 1865 and 1866, they encountered this obstinate class firsthand. Hamilton Wilcox Pierson, a Northern minister who moved south for ministerial work after the Civil War, wrote to Senator Charles Sumner in order to update him on the "outrages upon freedmen." In his letter, Pierson included a statement by a Georgia freedman, Cane Cook, who resisted an attempt by the planter, Mr. Hodge, to overcharge him for syrup. For his act of self-assertion, Mr. Hodge assaulted the freedman, leaving him with lifelong injuries [19]. Cook ended his statement, not with a call for military protection, but rather with a plea for access to land: "Mr. Hodges, I am told, owns about six thousand acres of land… He refuses to sell any of his land to the colored people, and will not

[17] Oubre, *Forty Acres and a Mule*, 68–71.
[18] One planter wrote the local Freedman's Bureau agent and demanded answers: "Have negroes the right to be walking about our plantations with guns or pistols in their hands, claiming a right, because they have been pronounced free, to the stock of their former owners, & in some cases, contending even, for a right to the land itself?" Hahn et al., *Land and Labor, 1865: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, 1:97–99.
[19] Pierson, "A Letter to Hon. Charles Sumner, with 'Statements' of Outrages upon Freedmen in Georgia, and an Account of My Expulsion from Andersonville, Ga., by the Ku-Klux Klan," 4–5.

allow them to build a school-house on it… If we could only get land and have homes we could get along; but they won't sell us any land " [20].

With the dissolution of the Confederate government, the political conditions of the South neared anarchy. Though Freedmen's Bureau officials and military leaders attempted to implement the will of the federal government, the lack of a widespread, loyal constituency to realize those goals precipitated public and violent power struggles. Journalists, government agents, and politicians anxiously watched the slave power regain control. The twin projects of emancipation unleased at the height of wartime—to end property in humans and expand property ownership in land—unwound as Republican politicians abdicated their commitments to improving the material conditions of the freedpeople and instead focused their efforts on civil rights legislation. It would require immense conviction and what Frederick Douglass would later call "the strong arm of justice" to complete the emancipatory vision inherent in the demands of the freedpeople.[21] Thaddeus Stevens intended to deploy that very legislative authority to suture together this growing abolitionist divide.

**To Break the Slave Power: Thaddeus Stevens's Plan for Post-Emancipation Repair**

By the time of the American Civil War, confiscation had a long history in Western legal tradition. Fashioned from the Latin *confiscare*, meaning to seize for the public treasury, confiscation became increasingly associated with indefensible acts of power during the nineteenth century.[22] The Scottish jurist, James Mackintosh, in his 1815 treatise *On the State of*

[20] Pierson, 5.
[21] Douglass, "Address Delivered on the 26th Anniversary of the Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia," 15.
[22] Pashman, "The People's Property Law"; Palfreyman, "The Loyalists and the Federal Constitution"; I refer exclusively to the seizure of loyalist property and not the dispossession of Indigenous lands because the Civil War Era confiscation discourses drew upon the rhetoric of the War for Independence in a way that does not square with settler discussions of dispossession. The establishment of the settler nation required mass expropriation of indigenous land, but actors did not understand that expropriation to consist of confiscation. Confiscation referred to

*France* channeled this popular sentiment when he declared that "[a]ll confiscation is unjust."[23] American political thinkers long shared Mackintosh's views. During the War for Independence, Alexander Hamilton criticized confiscations made by the committees of sequestration, declaring them arbitrary and counter to the intentions of the war for independence.[24] Hamilton argued that allowing state legislatures or local governments to confiscate land would disrupt the unity of the people who formed a common government, suggesting that the sanctity of private property underwrote the bonds of sociality among men in political society. The patriots who characterized confiscation as a just response to national disloyalty "put in motion all the furious and dark passions of the human mind." To take property without due process, Hamilton contended, made a mockery of natural rights and republican principles of government.[25]

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the revoking of property rights in land within the settler political scheme. For a discussion of the relationship between confiscation and dispossession see Robert Nichols's book. Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*, 16–51.

[23] Mackintosh, *Miscellaneous Works.*, 186.

[24] Hamilton, "A Letter from Phocion to the Considerate Citizens of New York," January 27, 1784.

[25] The Framers of the federal constitution of 1789 confronted a political conundrum in their simultaneous embrace of the republican ideal of popular self-rule and a classical celebration of cultivators of the Earth. What if the people rule in the interest of the propertyless so that they can more easily secure the conditions of freedom and independence ascribed to landholders? Early support for unmixed democracy embodied in unicameral legislatures produced startling legislative results in the young nation. State legislatures established under the Articles of Confederation passed a variety of bills on behalf of debtors, the propertyless, and laboring classes (404 Wood). Those victimized by confiscations and paper money schemes sought to rein in the power of legislatures, particularly their authority over property rights. James Madison reacted to these developments, arguing that the tyrannical nature of the legislatures arose not from the manipulations of a select few men but rather from the representativeness of the legislature itself. He wrote in his *Vices of the Political System* that such despotic power raised questions about "the fundamental principle of republican Government, that the majority who rule in such governments are the safest Guardians both of public Good and private rights." Without indicting the middle class farmers who many took to be the ideal citizen, Madison questioned if the propertyless could participate in self-government without tyrannizing their wealthier fellow citizens.

Underlying Madison's suspicion of popular rule was a connection between property rights and the public good that marked a departure from earlier republican thinking. Whereas earlier theories of civic virtue figured the public good as prior to and strictly demarcated from individual, private interests, the American revolutionaries sought to blend the concepts together. As Isaac Kramnick put it, "virtue was becoming privatized in the latter part of the eighteenth century" (Great National Discussion 22). For these early American thinkers, accruing private property represented one's ability to ascertain the public good, one's fitness for self-rule. To seize and redistribute property was to disrespect the virtue of the landholder and deny oneself the opportunity to cultivate that virtue. This transformation in conceptions of virtue from a characteristic attributed to the individual by the mere ownership of property in land to a characteristic cultivated through the process of acquisition manifested most clearly in the debates over constructing upper houses of state legislatures. Given that unicameral institutions conceded too much power to the average citizen and led to anarchy and licentiousness, the upper house had to embody and perpetuate wisdom and firmness. Without a hereditary nobility on which to rely, the framers settled on property ownership as a

Stevens dissented from these views. Drawing on the rhetorical force of confiscation as a strategy of wartime, Stevens imbued confiscation with new meaning, pressing its potential uses beyond military operation for the purpose of founding an interracial, republican society.[26] In order to recuperate Stevens's vision of democratic reconstruction and the centrality of confiscation within that vision, I offer two interpretive arguments. First, Stevens's support for the confiscation acts during the Civil War demonstrated that Stevens was already interested in appropriating the practice for abolitionist ends before the war concluded. Second, by revisiting his speeches on Reconstruction, I show that *taking* land was at least as important if not more important than the practice of *giving* land in his goal to break the slave power. Stevens held out hope that these methods of intervening in arrangements of material power would enable freed

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next best standard for deducing who had the necessary virtue to serve as a counterbalance to the sometimes wily people. The Essex Convention of 1778, a general referendum outlining principles for a new state constitution for Massachusetts, declared that no law "ought to be enacted, without the consent of the majority of the members, and of those also who hold a major part of property." (Wood 218). Property, standing in for the wisdom of nobility, now required representation to ensure that the lower orders would not corrupt republican society.

Thinkers who endorsed additional representation for the propertied classes also responded to the political economic conditions that developed over the course of the 1770s and 1780s. Republican notions of civic virtue hampered the economic development of the young nation by de-prioritizing the advancement of private interests and the accumulation of wealth. In effect, the legislative acts that rearranged property rights in the late 1770s had a firm basis in republican ideas about the need to secure conditions that could perpetuate public virtue and independence. Liberal visions of self-government, especially the sanctity of the right to private property beyond the reach of legislatures, emerged as a vital ideological condition of expanding commercial pursuits. By assigning special protection to one's property, liberal constraints on governing institutions promised that accumulations of capital would be forever for the private enjoyment of the individual proprietor. Liberal ideas were born of a necessity to update and remold the spirit of republicanism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, 218; 404; Kramnick, "The 'Great National Discussion,'" 22; Kalyvas and Katznelson, *Liberal Beginnings*; MacGilvray, *The Invention of Market Freedom*; Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History*; Oakes, "From Republicanism to Liberalism"; Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*, Chapter 1.

[26] Of course, the agrarian republican tradition had long wrestled with the question of how to reconfigure standing property relations. Thomas Paine feared the exercise of state power and instead supported taxation to create widespread ownership. Thomas Skidmore advocated for collective appropriation of all property via state conventions in 1829. Thaddeus Stevens remains novel in his application of agrarian republican principles to the specific problem of forming an interracial republic after slavery. Paine, *Agrarian Justice: Opposed to Agrarian Law and to Agrarian Monopoly Being a Plan for Meliorating the Condition of Man, by Creating in Every Nation a National Fund*, 16–18; Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property! Being a Proposition to Make It Equal among the Adults of the Present Generation*, 137–38.

slaves to become participating members in the economic and social life of the nation and underwrite their capacity to accept the burdens of republican citizenship.

## I. Pushing Confiscation Beyond Wartime

On August 2, 1861 Thaddeus Stevens took to the floor of the House to speak on slave emancipation and confiscation. The logic of confiscation, according to Stevens, rested on the suspension of Constitutional protections for members of the Confederacy: "We are told that because the Constitution does not allow us to confiscate certain species of property, therefore we cannot liberate slaves. Mr. Speaker, I thought the time had come when the laws of war were to govern our action." By imagining wartime as the suspension of Constitutional norms and the reprioritization of the laws of war over and against Constitutional guarantees, Stevens argued for a temporary and restricted ground for the seizure of private property. Such a figuring of wartime powers relied on a strict boundary between citizen and rebel. Stevens asked, "Who says the Constitution must come in, in bar of our action?" and responded to himself, "[i]t is the advocate of rebels." While citizens may appeal to "[o]ur Constitution," the Confederate rebels are left without an appeal to any superior legal code for the protection of their rights [27].

Stevens defended a limited form of confiscation from the beginning, but his opening remarks generated anxious questions from members of Congress who sought to secure a verbal guarantee that Stevens was only defending confiscation in wartime. John Logan, a Democrat from Illinois, interjected with the claim that Stevens was recanting his oath to support the highest law in the land. In reply, Stevens offered a quotation from Cicero's *Pro Milone*: "*Inter arma silent leges"*; during war the law falls silent. A Unionist from Kentucky, Alexander Mallory, understood Stevens to "admit that this bill is unconstitutional, but to place his defense for urging

[27] Stevens, *The Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens, Volume 1*, 221.

its passage upon the ground that during the existence of the rebellion… this Congress has the right to do an unconstitutional act."[28] Stevens initially refused to quell their nerves with the ambiguous pronouncement that the seizure of property was constitutional, but he eventually capitulated with the admission that "if you were in a state of peace you could not confiscate the property of any citizen. You have no right to do it in time of peace, but in time of war you have the right to confiscate the property of every rebel."[29] Stevens relinquished this stance as the war drew to a close.

The main target of the speech was the Crittenden amendment, which intended to clarify that the aim of the war was to restore the Union. Stevens wanted to make it clear that a policy of confiscation, though limited to wartime, could have a lasting impact on Southern life. To make this point, he turned to Emer de Vattel's concept of the law of nations, which he saw as an extension of the United States Constitution. The law of nations, according to Stevens, justified the taking of "every dollar of property" if that would strengthen "[our] hands" [30]. More directly in response to the Crittenden amendment, Vattel contended that the freeing of an "oppressed people" could not be easily reversed if that process was initiated during the course of war. Therefore, Stevens' defense of confiscation early in the war revealed his intention to make confiscation a strategy for ending slavery in the South. His final sentences expose the logic of this defense: "I would rather, sir, reduce them [the South] to a condition where their whole country is to be repeopled by a band of freemen than to see them perpetrate the destruction of this people [slaves] through our agency. I do not say that it is time to resort to such means, and I

[28] Stevens, 222.
[29] Stevens, 222–23.
[30] Stevens, 223.

do not know when the time will come… It is not a question with me of policy, but a question of principle."

Stevens' opponents took his evaluation of principle before policy to be a reference to the abolition of slavery. The congressman from Pennsylvania, however, had other ideas of what principles might be at stake in the ongoing war. While the constitutional abolition of slavery certainly ranked among Thaddeus Stevens's highest priorities, his vision of a South "repopulated by a band of freemen" hinted at more sweeping reforms that he had yet to articulate. Early in 1862, Stevens gave a firebrand speech on subduing the rebellion in which he proposed emancipation as a further strategy for ending the rebellion. His ringing endorsement for the end of slavery was short: "Universal emancipation must be proclaimed to all."[31] But his reasoning presented condemnation of the southern economic system that surpassed the typical abolitionist speech. Thaddeus Stevens characterized the Confederacy as a "slave oligarchy" that consisted of political economic arrangements that made a mockery of republican principles.[32] The Southern fear of "freedom and of equality of man before the law" was apparent in the institution of slavery. Stevens extended his condemnation to broader economic policies such as the "free-trade system, which impaired our revenue, paralyzed our industry, and compelled the exportation of our immense production of gold."[33] Striking at the institution of slavery with a policy of emancipation would enable the Union to reject the unfree system of labor that, according to Stevens, had perpetuated Southern political and economic power.

These forward-looking remarks on land confiscation depict a Congressman embroiled in the controversy of how to interpret the Constitution during wartime, but they also betray his

[31] Stevens, 246.
[32] Stevens, 241.
[33] Stevens, 241–42.

deeper interests in the capacity of the legislative branch to enact sweeping wealth reform and to transform the economic and political institutions that enabled the rise of the slave power. In the first two years of conflict, Stevens argued for the suspension of "normal" Constitutional protections for Southerners as a necessary condition for executing the war and funding its liabilities. That argument required Stevens to take two clear stances on major Congressional issues. The first stance was that the Confederacy had left the Union and, therefore, ought to be treated as an enemy belligerent engaging in a public war. The second admitted that during wartime the law of nations provided the clearest guide for political action and justified the confiscation of enemy property without condition. Less clear, but readily present was an analysis of Southern society that sought to eradicate the causes of the war by reshaping Southern political and economic arrangements, thereby dismantling the slave aristocracy. By the end of armed resistance, with the political clout granted through a Union victory, Stevens began to emphasize that last argument, raising alarm among his fellow Republicans who thought that confiscation was a limited and provisional practice aimed at a military defeat of the Confederacy.

## II. Stevens's Reconstruction Plan: Taking Land, Giving Land

As Union forces came closer to a victory on the battlefield, the ascendency of the radical wing of the Republican Party appeared to be a real possibility. President Abraham Lincoln's dismissal of General Benjamin Butler in early 1865 as well as his gradual warming to the extension of the franchise to black men indicated that the chief executive was amenable to the arguments of the radical Republicans. That possibility was shattered on April 14, 1865. The man who succeeded Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, grew up in North Carolina and made his political career in Tennessee. Although Johnson eventually supported emancipation as a means to win the war, he held markedly more conservative views than Lincoln on how to reconstruct the South.

And if Johnson's previous political positions were insufficient cause for concern, his first two months in office suggested that a more forgiving restoration was in store. Johnson acted with haste during the Congressional recess to restore the Southern states to their proper relation with the federal government. Thaddeus Stevens wrote Senator Charles Sumner in early May: "I fear before Congress meets he will have so be-deviled matters as to render them incurable."[34] Stevens then penned a letter to the new president. He cordially asked to "be excused for putting briefly on paper what [he] intended to say" in person. "Reconstruction is a very delicate question."[35] A month later Stevens wrote the president but included more direct criticism of the presidential plan.[36] Noting the president's steadfast commitment to meager conditions for re-entry into the Union, Stevens entered his most pronounced phase of political radicalism.

Thaddeus Stevens argued that postwar reconstruction, properly understood, would not merely reunite the Southern states with the rest of the Union. Reconstruction—in Thaddeus Stevens's imagination—would entail a total transformation of Southern society such that a re-emergence of slavery would be averted. In the former Confederacy, ownership of the land provided access to the means of production, signified social status, and created the conditions for political action. Evidence for the relation of land to power could be found in the extent to which landowners resisted the claims for land among the freedpeople. Within this context, the abolition of slavery required changes to the prevailing property regime to remold those arrangements of power. Stevens understood this goal to be the fundamental issue before Congress and provided an answer: the confiscation and redistribution of planter land.

[34] Stevens, *The Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens, Volume 2*, 4.
[35] Stevens, 5.
[36] Stevens, 7–8.

Anxiously awaiting the next session of Congress, Stevens addressed a group of constituents at the Lancaster courthouse on September 6, 1865 in what would become his most famous speech on Reconstruction. Unlike his wartime speeches, which spent considerable time providing a legal rationale for Republican policy, Stevens succinctly summarized his context in the first few paragraphs. The Confederate States of America had made a public war and in their defeat they could only appeal to rudimentary principles in the U.S. Constitution or the law of nations. Stevens turned to the important question facing Congress. "Within these limitations, we hold it to be the duty of the Government to inflict condign punishment on the rebel belligerents, and so weaken their hands that they can never again endanger the Union."[37] Stevens outlined how the Congress might accomplish this goal. In meting out punishment the Union must remake Southern life "and so reform their municipal institution as to make them republican in spirit as well as in name."[38]

The distinction between governments republican in name and in spirit was central to Stevens's vision of how Congress might efficiently destroy the slave power. Already having rebuked conservative schemes that allowed the former Confederate states re-entry with no political reform, Stevens mobilized the distinction between republican governments in name and in spirit against his moderate Republican colleagues. Resuscitating pre-Civil War state constitutions with only minimal changes to outlaw chattel slavery, Stevens believed, would not produce a political environment that could foster republican principles. Stevens stressed this point again when describing the process of re-entry: "They [former Confederate states] would be held in a territorial condition until they are fit to form State Constitutions, republican in fact, not

[37] Stevens, 13.
[38] Stevens, 13.

in form only…"[39] To realize these republican spirits, the South would need to be transformed. Steven highlighted the destruction necessary to enact this transformation: "the foundation of their institutions, both political, municipal and social, *must* be broken up and *relaid*, or all our blood and treasure have been spent in vain."[40] Returning to his earlier argument about the suspension of Constitutional protections, Stevens defended remaking Southern life with "the strict rights of war, as anciently practiced."[41] "The character of the belligerent," "the justice of the war," and "the manner of conducting it" all justified the extreme rights of war "to execute, to imprison, to confiscate."[42]

The audaciousness of his pronouncements required solid support. How did Stevens imagine that Congress could make these changes? How could a political body legislate a new foundation of "habits and manners"?[43] For a solution to these questions, Stevens turned to land confiscation. "…[W]e propose to confiscate all the estates of every rebel belligerent whose estate was worth $10,000, or whose land exceeded two hundred acres in quantity."[44] The selective nature of Stevens's class politics was rooted in a particular republican understanding of power. The "poor, the ignorant, and the coerced should be forgiven" because they alone would "never" have begun the war.[45] To understand these lines, readers must return to Stevens's

[39] Stevens, 16.
[40] Stevens, 16.
[41] Stevens cited Henry Wagner Halleck's *International Law: OR, Rules Regulating the Intercourse of States in Peace and War*. Halleck defended private property from "seizure or confiscation" even in cases "of absolute and unqualified conquest," but he also cited classical political thinkers and their modern readers who did not protect private property with such vigor. Stevens referred to Emer de Vattel who he argued lent support to his cause: "A conqueror, who has taken up arms not only against the sovereign but against the nation herself, and whose intention it was to subdue a fierce and savage people, and once for all to reduce an obstinate enemy, such a conqueror may, with justice, lay burdens on the conquered nation, both as a compensation for the expenses of the war, and as a punishment." Henry Wager Halleck, *International Law*, Sect. 13; Stevens, *The Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens, Volume 2*, 17.
[42] Stevens, *The Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens, Volume 2*, 18.
[43] Stevens, 23.
[44] Stevens, 18.
[45] Stevens, 18.

characterizations of Southern society as a slave oligarchy. For Stevens, the political decisions of the Confederacy were made by a ruling group of men whose wealth had enabled them to capture political office and use it for their own gratification. Because wealth was a condition of political power, wealth ought to be regulated to secure the political equality of persons: "As the landed interest must govern, the more it is subdivided and held by independent owners, the better" [46]. Reconstruction—following these lines of thought—could not fall short of reworking the political and economic arrangements of power in the South. A society of independent laborers would have had no need for slavery let alone a war to defend an institution founded on the idea that some men should labor and others should monopolize the realm of politics.

Taking the land of the planter class, moreover, would "revolutionize their [Southern] principles and feelings" [47]. Stevens contended that land redistribution would alter the habits and feelings of men because there existed a relationship between an individual's role in the economy and their role in politics. Wide scale land ownership combatted the problem in a bifurcated manner. On the one hand, it would destroy the planter stranglehold on capital in the South therefore destroying a major source of political domination. On the other hand, land redistribution would secure a minimum amount of capital for individuals such that they would not be driven to unfair contracts and dehumanizing wages. The mere presence of spaces of domination and inequality could jeopardize the republican spirit that Reconstruction needed to instill. In a later Congressional speech on Reconstruction on March 10, 1866, the Lancastrian repeated the primary object of his confiscation scheme: "Strip a proud nobility of their bloated estates; reduce them to a level with plain republicans; send forth to labor, and teach their children

[46] Stevens, 23.
[47] Stevens, 22.

to enter the workshops or handle the plow, and you will thus humble the proud traitors."[48] Stevens's imagined, redistributive society denied the planter class their source of power and limited the opportunities for individuals to learn modes of relating to one another that underlie oligarchic and aristocratic governments. Without land redistribution, Stevens maintained, "this Government can never be, as it never had been, a true republic."[49]

Stevens's plan was not a one-sided solution merely concerned with the status of the former planters. Confiscating land constituted only one component of Stevens's plan to break the slave power. Equally important was his argument for the granting of land to the freedpeople of the South. In March of 1867 the Lancastrian offered his final sustained speech in favor of confiscation and redistribution. Known as "Damages to Loyal Men," the speech sought support for H.R. 29, a confiscation bill, by emphasizing the benefits it would have for men who aided the Union—black and white. Stevens began with a summary of the five "classes of people" to whom the bill was "important": wounded veterans, bereaved wives and parents, loyal men, four million "injured, oppressed, and helpless men," and the "delinquents" who executed a war with the Union. The fifth class, according to Stevens, would forfeit their property as a fair and just punishment, while the first four classes would receive either property or the value of that property in federal benefits.[50]

Stevens's policy of confiscation rested on the same ideas defending the suspension of Constitutional protections for former slaveholders and promoting the enforcement of the law of nations that he alluded to during the wartime debates. He admitted that he was "treating these belligerents simply as enemies, and their property as enemies' property now in possession and

[48] Stevens, 18.
[49] Stevens, 23.
[50] Stevens, 267–7.

power of the conqueror."[51] The confiscation of property amounted to a "punishment" of these enemies, though one that was "certainly too small…for so deep a crime, and too slight a warning to future ages."[52] Stevens argued that confiscation and redistribution not only constituted a punitive measure to reprimand rebels; H.R. 29 also sought to prevent the reemergence of oligarchic conditions and, therefore, future outbreaks of disloyalty to the Union. Citing the "language of Vattel," Stevens implored Congress to "do ourselves justice respecting the object which has caused the war" by telling Southern landowners "on what terms [they] may arise and depart or remain loyal."[53] He cautioned his colleagues against embracing the former Confederate "too hastily," reminding them to "[b]e sure that there is no dagger in his girdle."[54] To pacify these hostile and disloyal residents, Stevens proposed that redistribution would fashion "guardians of republican liberty" out of the freedpeople and poor whites of the South.[55]

Still present in his vision were republican ideals animating the rationalization of confiscation and redistribution. Stevens paused to comment on the fourth section of the bill which guaranteed title to forty acres as well as one hundred dollars to any head of household—regardless of gender—and to any single adult freedperson. He singled out this provision among the rest and prioritized mass landownership over the "immediate" extension of political rights for freedpeople:

> "Whatever may be the fate of the rest of the bill, I must earnestly pray that this may not be defeated. On its success, in my judgment, depends not only the happiness and respectability of the colored race, but their very existence. Homesteads to them are far more valuable than the immediate right of suffrage, though both are due."[56]

[51] "Claims of Loyalists for Damages," 204.
[52] "Claims of Loyalists for Damages," 204.
[53] "Claims of Loyalists for Damages," 204–5.
[54] "Claims of Loyalists for Damages," 205.
[55] "Claims of Loyalists for Damages," 206.
[56] Stevens, *The Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens, Volume 2*, 283.

Sounding hasty in his prioritization of confiscation, Stevens explained that only an economic reconstruction could break the historical power relationships of the slave system and deny the rebirth of slavery. Slavery had ensured that freedpeople were "unacquainted with business transactions" and "kept systematically in ignorance of their rights."[57] These two realities prevented freedpeople from guarding against fraud or receiving fair wages for work. Without the protections that independent ownership of land might afford, ex-slaves would necessarily "be the servants and victims of others."[58] Then Stevens surprised his fellow Republicans with a critique of the Freedman's Bureau. Though "benevolent," the Bureau was impermanent, a fact that Stevens believed spelled trouble for black people in the South.

To avoid the possibility of a "war of races," Congress needed to provide freedpeople the economic power to confront their former masters: "Make them independent of their old masters, so that they may not be compelled to work for them upon unfair terms, which can only be done by giving them a small tract of land to cultivate for themselves, and you remove all this danger."[59] Stevens also drew a connection between his guarantee of land ownership and the republican desire to nourish a common good among men. Freeholders made "good citizens" because their ownership of private property within a given nation attested to their collective belonging and provided the means for the satisfaction of basic necessities.[60] Thus, confiscation and redistribution also solved the perennial republican problem of the impoverished masses tyrannizing their wealthier counterparts, by eliminating the poor, landless class.

**Architects of Ruin: Critiques of Stevens's Plan and the Failure to Enact Land Reform**

[57] Stevens, 283.
[58] Stevens, 284.
[59] Stevens, 284.
[60] Stevens, 284.

Stevens concluded his March 10, 1866 speech on confiscation by declaring Reconstruction "this last and greatest battle of freedom."[61] While Stevens may have overstated the finality of his moment, he certainly grasped its drama. Between 1865 and 1868 Stevens became an active participant and central figure in the national discussion about Reconstruction.[62] Newspaper outlets across the political spectrum referred to Stevens as the "unquestioned leader" of the Republican majority in Congress and association with his name came to convey judgments of one's radical proclivities.[63] Newspaper articles and Congressional speeches from the 1860s provide insight into the public reception of Stevens's confiscation plan. A diverse coalition of Unionists, Democrats, Republicans, and reform-minded abolitionists inadvertently joined forces to quash Stevens's confiscatory hopes. By and large, the broadest criticism of confiscation arose from continuing disagreements about the constitutionality of the practice and the legal status of the Southern states. This wartime political hangover raised further questions about the nature of despotism and whether confiscation enacted dangerous political precedents antithetical to republican government. Opponents also worried about the economic ramifications of meddling with property rights in the post-emancipation South. Though Stevens had the fervent support of such luminaries as Wendell Phillips and Senator Benjamin Wade, an abolitionist hesitation about confiscation resulted in ambivalence in the activist community. Recounting the critiques of Stevens's plan exposes the political divides activated by confiscatory schemes and demonstrates how the conditions which offered the strongest defense of confiscation, those of wartime, also elicited stark challenges to the possibility of mustering a winning coalition.

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[61] Stevens, 25.

[62] A short biography in Harper's Weekly in April 1866 presented the celebrity that Stevens obtained during the early years of Reconstruction: "The figure which in the present Congress looms up above every other is that of Thaddeus Stevens, of Pennsylvania. Certainly if we were to select the portrait of that Congressman which would be most interesting to our readers it would be the portrait of Stevens." "Thaddeus Stevens."

[63] "The Policy of the Radicals--Proclamation of Thaddeus Stevens."; "Politics and Prospects in Northern Indiana."

Congressional debate on the confiscation plan renewed controversy over the relation of the former members of the Confederacy to the national government. The anxiety on display during debates over the Confiscation Acts re-emerged in a more drastic way after the war. In response to Stevens's confiscation scheme, his fellow Republican and co-founder of the New York Times, Henry Jarvis Raymond, addressed Stevens's plan in a speech on the House floor. Raymond gently drew a distinction between his own views and those of the Republican leader, stating that "there were features in his exposition of the condition of the country with which I cannot concur."[64] For Raymond, the mere declaration of secession by Southern officials and politicians did not invalidate the obligations of individual states' membership to the Union: "it was nothing more than an abortive attempt—a purpose unfulfilled…"[65] The Union victory on the battlefield, therefore, made real what was always already true in law. The rebel States "never for one moment… carried themselves beyond the rightful jurisdiction of the Constitution of the United States."[66]

If the Southern states never exited the Union, then Stevens's scheme could not find justification in the suspension of normal Constitutional protections and the substitution for the dictates of the law of nations. Republican congressman James A. Garfield, future president of the United States, agreed with Raymond. Garfield contended that even if secession precluded claims to constitutional protections, "the five great publicists"—Grotius, Pufendorf, Bynkershoek, Burlamaqui, and Vattel—would not condone Stevens's plan: "None of them could be thought to be speaking of a state in the Union when discussing states for the "constitution destroyed all the

[64] "PEACE AND RESTORATION.; The Policy of the President in Regard to the Southern States. Remarks of Mr. H. J. Raymond in Reply to Hon. Thaddeus Stevens on Reconstruction."
[65] "PEACE AND RESTORATION.; The Policy of the President in Regard to the Southern States. Remarks of Mr. H. J. Raymond in Reply to Hon. Thaddeus Stevens on Reconstruction."
[66] "PEACE AND RESTORATION.; The Policy of the President in Regard to the Southern States. Remarks of Mr. H. J. Raymond in Reply to Hon. Thaddeus Stevens on Reconstruction."

sovereignty which those States were ever supposed to possess…"[67] Without addressing Stevens's argument that secession created new relationships between the southern states and the federal government, Garfield's disagreement demonstrated that Stevens's legal presuppositions left Republican colleagues unconvinced that the lives and property of plantation owners were at the mercy of the victors.

Democrats seized upon Republican disunity and argued that even if the law of nations was the best guide to postwar legislative action, they could not support the taking of Confederate land. Perhaps no politician posed as serious a challenge to Stevens's attempt to sidestep the Constitution as Democrat Charles Eldridge of Wisconsin. A self-proclaimed proponent of "restoration," Eldridge moved seamlessly between personal insults and devastating rebuttals in an 1867 speech before the House. Eldridge was disturbed by the notion that "the God of battles" could grant the Union "the right to dispose of [ten or twelve million human beings] as we see fit." Reaching deeper than the Constitution to protect the property of Southerners, the Wisconsin Congressman declared that "there is no law, human or divine, by which "we have all their property and lives at our disposal."[68] In addition to celebrating an enduring natural right to property, Eldridge questioned Stevens's dependence on the law of nations to support his scheme. The Democrat responded to Stevens's fondness for Vattel with his own reading, arguing that the modern rights of war granted fewer privileges to the conqueror, taming the potential terribleness of war:

"His quotation from Vattel relates to a case between two different nations, and refers to the ancient, not the modern rule. The same author says, page 454: "Formerly in conquests even individuals lost their lands, and it is not at all strange that in the first stages of Rome such a custom should have prevailed." * * * * "But at present war is less terrible to the subject."[69]

[67] "Speech of Hon. J.A. Garfield," 65.
[68] "Confiscation--Again," 113.
[69] "Confiscation--Again," 113.

Eldridge again cited Vattel, pointing out that the renowned jurist never valorized the ancient methods of making war. Restored tranquility and trials "according to the laws" were the appropriate postwar procedures in the lawyer's judgement. By contrast, Stevens's version of postwar Reconstruction, particularly his bid to confiscate planter land, amounted to "cruel despotisms," "wicked usurpations," "violated law," "unfulfilled promises," and "civil liberty trampled under foot."[70]

Reactions to Stevens's confiscatory scheme gestured beyond constitutional debates about the individual rights of the former Confederates to worries about the effects of enacting such a radical plan. Confiscation, once brought into reality through legislation, would become an arbitrary tool of future legislative majorities to punish their opponents. Congressman Eldridge concluded his speech warning the chamber about the consequences of "law-makers" becoming "law-breakers:" "[t]he lessons they teach once learned, they will invoke the law in vain. Having sowed the whirlwind, they, too will reap the storm."[71]

The Congressman's fear of a future inability to control the dangerous precedent set by confiscating property echoed Stevens's reception in the press where descriptions of Stevens referred to his haphazard and unrestrained support for confiscation. A review of the Pennsylvania legislator in *Harper's Weekly* described Stevens as lacking the characteristics of a worthy republican statesman, calling him "reckless, unsparing, vehement, vindictive…"[72] The *Arkansas Gazette* imagined that radical Republicans wished "to have a Confiscation Department permanently established at Washington."[73] The Arkansan editor asserted that this policy was "a

[70] "Confiscation--Again," 112.
[71] "Confiscation--Again," 116.
[72] "Mr. Stevens and the Radical Press."
[73] "The Policy of Confiscation."

grave and dangerous error." While "despotic Governments" allowed unchecked "municipal confiscation," "our Government… is given and limited by the Constitution" [74]. The *Chicago Tribune* responded to Stevens's introduction of H.R. 29 and accused him of coaxing the government "out of its legitimate functions" by making it "the great landlord and lessor of half the real estate in dominion on which an empire may be founded, having always an army of dependents ready to do its will."[75] Republican governments, these critics believed, were limited by a natural right to property. Any attempt to forcibly reconfigure property relations degraded the necessary institutions and virtues of republican politics.

Other critics focused on the economic ramifications of confiscating property. In an editorial, "The Policy of Confiscation," in his New York literary magazine *The Galaxy,* William C. Church attacked the "influential advocates" in Congress for their "arbitrary" designs. Talk of confiscation produced "insecurity of real estate titles," stunting industry in the South.[76] Mirroring Alexander Hamilton's fears about a wily people enacting fatal precedents, Church argued that the matter of confiscation in the South would have implications for "those broad principles of national policy which concern themselves with the interests of all sections alike."[77] Criticisms in this vein emphasized the war's devastation of the southern economy and connected strong protections for property rights to the potential productiveness of the people. A writer for the *New York Times* also chided the *Raleigh Standard* for its endorsement of confiscation. According to the article, confiscation "introduces a new element of uncertainty into the South, intensifies its industrial paralysis, and heightens the distrust which already deters capitalists from embarking in

[74] "The Policy of Confiscation."
[75] "Confiscation."
[76] Church, "The Policy of Confiscation."
[77] Church.

its enterprises."[78] Newspaper reports testified that there were widespread fears among Southern white landowners that their land would be forcibly taken and blamed the lack of interest in developing the land on the regional mood.[79] Stevens's plan constituted "sugar-coated agrarianism" and threatened to "inaugurate an era of spoilation and anarchy" in the South.[80]

Fears of despotic socialism and unchecked government interference with property rights called forth and consolidated nationwide audiences. At the same time, reformers and public intellectuals of the abolitionist stripe were largely reticent to join the political struggle to pass a confiscation and redistribution bill. Wendell Phillips, one of Stevens's most vocal supporters in the movement, urged his compatriots to understand the necessity of rearranging property relations in the South. Phillips agreed with Stevens that "the class that holds [land] must, in the long run, give tone and character to the Administration."[81] Without confiscation, the former planters "are certain to wield great power" and "naked justice to the former slave" could not be accomplished. Yet Phillips stood out among his contemporaries. Frederick Douglass, though a longtime critic of land monopoly, never publicly supported a federal policy of confiscation.[82] For some reformers, the bid to secure widespread landownership was too politically costly. Instead, these radicals believed that Republicans ought to focus their energies on the extension of the franchise to Black men.[83]

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[78] "Confiscation--The Extremists and Their Threats."
[79] "Political Summary."
[80] "Sugar-Coated Agrarianism."
[81] Phillips, "Confiscation."
[82] David Blight described Douglass's Reconstruction vision as ignoring "a thoroughgoing economic analysis:" "Like virtually everyone else, Douglass lacked viable solutions on the land question." Jack Turner notes that although Douglass did not support a centralized policy of confiscation and redistribution, he "believed that the federal government could and should play a role in facilitating freedmen's acquisition of the land" through a National Land and Loan Company. Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War*, 195–202; Turner, *Awakening to Race*, 57–59.
[83] The Reconstruction Era movement to expand suffrage in the United States has been documented by historians. Stevens thought that Black male enfranchisement was an important part of any effort to break the slave power, particularly because before the war the three-fifths compromise and later Black disenfranchisement enhanced the representative power of the slaveholding class. However, as I explained, Stevens prioritized land ownership in his

Part of the activist wing of the party held serious doubts as to the efficacy of a policy of confiscation and redistribution in securing long term economic freedom for former slaves. Lydia Maria Child, in a yet unpublished letter to Representative George Washington Julian, provided a more explicit rationale for the relative silence of the abolitionist crowd on this account.[84] While Child admitted that she had "almost as strong an aversion to Land Monopoly, as [she had] to Slavery" and that land monopoly was equivalent to "another form of the absorption of Labor by Capital" that undergirded slavery, she wanted to relay "some doubts concerning the method by which [Julian proposed] to advance the interests of cultivators."[85] Child argued that her "experience and observation[s]" taught her that "men are generally injured by having property given to them."[86] Worrying about the effects of providing a handout to laborers in the South, Child explained that men who receive property as a gift "don't prize it so highly, keep it so carefully, or improve it so diligently."[87] This ambivalent relationship to the land would not only result in financial ruin for black and white laborers who would not have the accrued the necessary skills and practices to compete in a free labor economic system; it would enable the re-emergence of the very kind of aristocratic class that Republicans aimed to eliminate: "…the chief [idlers and vagabonds] would care about the land would be to secure a title to it for the purpose of selling it; a circumstance of which land monopolists would speedily take advantage."[88]

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Reconstruction speeches and contended that land more than formal institutional political power threatened a reversion to the prewar settlement. DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, 53–79; Dudden, *Fighting Chance*; Foner, *The Second Founding*, 55–123.

[84] Scholars have yet to notice the value of this letter in deciphering why abolitionists remained wary of the post-emancipation land reform debate. Although the letter contains the views of a single reformer, Child's public stature and central role in Reconstruction Era politics suggests that her views were not just the musings of a lone, disgruntled activist.

[85] Child, "Letter from Lydia Maria Child to Rep. George Washington Julian," March 27, 1864, 1, 3.

[86] Child, 3.

[87] Child, 3.

[88] Child, 4.

Unlike the conservative and moderate critics of the land policies of the radical Republicans, Child was less worried about the confiscation aspect of the scheme than the redistributive one. Her anxieties about the efficacy of redistribution of land exposed her commitment to an ideology of personal responsibility for one's economic prosperity.[89] This commitment aligned her with a broad coalition that spanned the postwar political spectrum, believing that government provision was a despotic method for pacifying the republican citizenry. However, Child's reticence also contained a genuine, reformist worry about the long-term economic conditions of the freedpeople of the South. If freedpeople were to fail at cultivating their forty-acre parcels, they would end up in the same condition of destitution as before, but with a newly empowered class of land monopolists. Abolitionist ambivalence dovetailed with conservative and moderate arguments about the unsteady legal basis for confiscation, the dangers of meddling with property rights, and disastrous effects on production. Within this ideological milieu, Stevens and his supporters appeared as "architects of ruin" who were hellbent on destroying the republican foundation of American life. [90] Instead, Republicans coalesced around policies that required no forceful takings to be enacted and better fit a narrative of the expansion of inherent, but unrealized rights like the extension of the franchise to Black men and the codification of civil rights in legislation.

Stevens's untimely death bears some responsibility in his ultimate failure to pass legislation. In his second to last speech before the House on July 16, 1868, Stevens raised the

[89] Child's concern with the proper virtues of free laborers was part of a boarder effort to inculcate a sense of responsibility for one's economic position in the freedpeople of the South. Saidiya Hartman tracks the contours of this disciplinary project as well as illuminates how it remade conceptions of freedom in the post-emancipation period. While Child's letter to Congressman Julian underscores her participation in the project of fashioning obligation out of the newfound conditions of Black freedom, Child's worry about the effectiveness of land redistribution in granting the freedpeople economic power reveals a less oppressive concern. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 125–63.
[90] "Confiscation at the South."

issue of homesteads for freedpeople one final time: "For ages of unrequited toil we gave them mere enforced freedom and degradation, and now prevent their acquiring means of becoming independent proprietors. Such men cannot become useful citizens; such a government cannot escape the shame of their conduct." [91] Stevens sounded as though he was trying to absolve himself of the sins of his colleagues when he said "I cannot reproach myself with any of the blame" [92]. Less than a month later, Stevens lay on his deathbed in Washington, D.C. too ill to return home. Historical accounts of his final day suggest that Stevens never found peace in the nation's failure to radically remake the South [93]. Like the historiography of the coming one hundred and fifty years, Stevens' contemporaries varied in their reaction to his death. Some hurled insults and others praised his aggressive politicking. Regardless of the reactions, the United States Congress had lost its most powerful advocate of applying republican economic principles to the question of how to inaugurate an interracial republic after slavery.

The republican critique of Southern political economy arrived at an important moment for the American nation. With the progression of industrialization, republican attempts to prevent economic forms of domination would shift from discussing the need for landownership to the ownership of capital. Analogous to these economic shifts was an increasing focus on the concerns of the Northern business community in Republican Party politics. The passing of Thaddeus Stevens signaled the beginning of the end of a Republican Party dominated by earlier nineteenth century ideas about freeholders and activists organizing around abolition. These

[91] Stevens's July 1868 Congressional speech was made in response to the passage of an amendment to the Alaska purchase appropriation which asserted that Congress—both the House and the Senate—must approve treaties. Stevens aired his disagreement with the constitutional rationale of the amendment, asked his colleagues to take the necessary steps to build a naval station in the West Indies, and then pivoted to discuss the freedpeople of the South. "Bay of Samana," 4136.
[92] "Bay of Samana," 4136.
[93] Trefousse, *Thaddeus Stevens*, 239–40.

transformations and their overlapping development highlight how the period of Reconstruction witnessed an unusual moment of radicalism in which an aging political ideology sought to control the forces of domination emerging in a new economic order. Thaddeus Stevens's bid at land reform was indeed a splendid failure.

**Reparations in the Shadow of Reconstruction**

It remains to be said what a contemporary audience can glean by returning to a political vision from the nineteenth century. Clearly, we no longer inhabit the problem-space of the 1860s. There is no wartime sense of emergency that can reasonably unsettle the sanctity of the constitution as it pertains to the property rights of the citizenry. Yet our politics discloses an aspiration to interracial democracy and its attendant investment in political equality, an aim that was not alien to Stevens. Returning to the political thought of Thaddeus Stevens on the question of post-emancipation repair offers us another perspective from which to understand our own time as much as it is an occasion to rethink the historical record and rescue his vision of freedom. Thaddeus Stevens understood confiscation and redistribution not simply as a method for repaying former slaves, but rather as a method for reconstituting the basis of republican life, the construction of a "true" democratic republic. Stevens's emphatic support for confiscation invites us to focus on how material arrangements of power prevent colonized peoples from participating in the economic and political life of the American nation. Achieving true republican government free from economic and political domination requires not just the granting of resources to members of the polity, but an active taking from those who wield them to practice domination.

Scholars frequently cast Stevens's plan and the broader effort to provide land to freedpeople as an origin of the American slave reparations movement. Jeremy Levitt declares that efforts at reparations were "futile" until Stevens championed the idea in Congress. F.

Michael Higgonbotham refers to Stevens's confiscation and redistribution plan as a "reparations bill," while David Hall contends that reparations are needed in the twenty-first century only because "it was not provided in 1865…" These citations merely sample a wide-ranging pattern of scholars claiming that the 1860s attempt to confiscation and redistribute land was an early reparations scheme.[94]

My study of the Lancastrian's political thought complicates this historical intepretation. Unlike Stevens's scheme, contemporary claims for reparations often disavow how the act of taking constitutes an important part of post-emancipation repair and occlude the distinctive outcomes that rearranging ownership of land—and not simply wealth—make possible. The stakes of figuring Stevens's vision of land reform as a reparative scheme are even more pressing given the prominence of reparations as the American left's favored solution for issues related to racial domination and the legacy of slavery in the United States.[95] While the ascendency of reparations discourse is a political feat that deserves recognition, returning to Stevens to reconsider the meaning of his plan raises the question of how proponents of reparations conceptualize the political problems facing interracial democratic societies like the United States.

[94] Aberto B. Lopez similarly situates the contemporary movement for reparations in the Reconstruction moment. Lawrie Balfour draws attention to the possibility of a "third Reconstruction" in her call for reparations and Robin D.G. Kelley begins his story of the dream of reparations with the demand for "forty acres and a mule." Stevens's most recent biographers appropriate the language of reparations in defining Stevens's politics. Though Roy Brooks covers reparation-adjacent efforts before the Civil War period, he agrees that the Reconstrcution Era bid fits in the narrative. Lopez, "Focusing the Reparations Debate Beyond 1865 Book Review"; Balfour, *Democracy's Reconstruction*, 35-45.; Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 115–18; Trefousse, *Thaddeus Stevens*, 1997; Brooks, *Atonement and Forgiveness*.

[95] Few ideas capture present concerns about interracial democracy as prominently as the idea of reparations for black Americans. In June 2019, the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties of the United States House of Representatives held a hearing on H.R. 40, a bill to establish a commission to study the consequences and impacts of slavery. Foran, "House Panel to Hold Hearing on Reparations for Slavery next Week"; Goldberg, "How Reparations for Slavery Became a 2020 Campaign Issue"; Atkinson, "Here's Where Each of the 2020 Democratic Candidates Stand on Reparations"; King, "A Voter's Guide to Reparations."

Reparations are, first and foremost, a method for compensating or repaying the victims of slavery, Jim Crow, and racial discrimination. Lawrie Balfour captures the political and moral sensibility undergirding these demands when she poses the movement as a question for public consideration: "What does the United States owe the former slaves and their descendants?" [96]. The twentieth and twenty-first century movements for slave reparations have focused on claims of redistribution of wealth and compensation for injury. In his famous 1969 demand for reparations, James Forman emphasized the centrality of repayment for past injuries in propelling the movement. "We the black people assembled," Forman wrote, "are fully aware that we have been forced to come together because racist white America has exploited our resources, our minds, our bodies, and our labor."[97] Forman claimed that white Christian churches and synagogues could pay out five hundred million dollars to empower black people and begin to rectify the wrongs committed. Such a dispersion of wealth would represent an initial repayment for Black victimization and colonization.

As I uncover in my reading of his political speeches, Stevens's political vision is only partially reflected in the rhetoric of the current slave reparations movement. Stevens was concerned with doing justice to the former slaves in giving them land, but he was also interested in fundamentally altering the power imbalances that perpetuated white, planter dominance in the South. Following Stevens's conception of post-emancipation repair, we must ask a further question beyond what we owe to the descendants of slaves. What forms of material power enable the ongoing practices of Black disenfranchisement and discrimination that operate in our present? How can we build a politics around disempowering those who take advantage of

[96] Balfour, "Unreconstructed Democracy," 39.
[97] Van Deburg, *Modern Black Nationalism*, 183–87.

material imbalances to impede the full economic and political participation of black Americans? Asking these questions will not produce a single, agreed upon answer, but it can revitalize conversations about the movement for reparations and transform the current terms of debate.

Furthermore, Stevens's focus on the confiscation and redistribution of a particular resource, land, pushes us to consider whether reparations as a wealth transfer can adequately fulfill the conditions of republican membership. Nineteenth century agrarian thinkers understood that land was a vital accessory in modern democratic life. Not only did land embody access to productive property in the agrarian context of the rural South; it also denoted a social and political status derived from the control of space.[98] Having access to one's own plot of land enabled American citizens to practice self-government within the domestic sphere and nourished a sense of belonging to the broader community. To confiscate and redistribute the land was to provide freedpeople with the conditions for privacy, political action, and community building as much as it constituted a transfer of wealth from white to black Americans. Our current moment of democratic repair inherits a new constitutional regime in which federal taxation of income has enabled massive expansions of the federal government's capacity to provide goods and services as well as a shift toward using the tax code to subsidize any effort to repay the descendants of slaves. Although this constitutionally legitimized method of expropriation avoids the polarizing pitfalls of land confiscation, it also falls short of inaugurating the kind of citizenship that Stevens hoped to establish.

[98] Though many proponents of reparations are invested in satisfying past wrongs and compensating for past injuries whether materially or symbolically, there is disagreement about the need to recapture the importance of land when constructing reparative schemes. Lee Harris champions the persisting, though marginalized, demand for not just monetary or cultural compensation, but repayment by way of the creation of a nation or land for Black peoples. James Forman was similarly attentive to the particularity of land in his Manifesto, demanding the establishment of a land bank to secure Black ownership. Harris, "Political Autonomy as a Form of Reparations to African-Americans"; Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries;a Personal Account.*, 547.

Recovering Stevens's approach to repair cannot entail a simplistic imitation of the politics of the 1860s. If we merely rehearsed his plan, we would likely be reminded that a hostile reception remains a lively possibility. On the eve of an armistice with single party control of Congress established, there was no major confiscation and redistributive policy enacted in the South. Political opponents found confiscation a worrying precedent and allies questioned if redistribution would improve the conditions of the freedpeople. Perhaps most interestingly, in losing the language of condign punishment and confiscation, we have not dulled the edges of the debate over post-emancipation repair or quelled nerves about the threats posed by enacting a reparative scheme. Most Americans still refuse to support federal reparations programs, believing that descendants of slaves are not deserving of targeted programs or payments.[99] Stevens's example cautions us against assuming that there is an easy solution to widespread disapproval of reparative programs.

And yet, the history of post-emancipation repair was not a list of unfulfilled proposals. New Constitutional amendments and federal laws codified civil rights for all Americans regardless of their race, color, or condition of previous servitude. Southern state governments and philanthropists erected schools for freedpeople. Black men ascended to national office for the first time in the nation's history. These advancements were not the unfolding of a self-evident progressive history, but rather the hard-won outcomes of attentive reformers and bold politicians building legislative coalitions. Americans failed to combat novel forms of economic domination arising in the post-emancipation settlement, but the legislative victories created new conditions of possibility for the struggles awaiting the next generation. Part of that inheritance was

[99] Nteta and Rhodes, "UMass Amherst/WCVB Poll Finds Nearly Half of Americans Say the Federal Government Definitely Should Not Pay Reparations to the Descendants of Slaves"; Scott, "Analysis | Support for Reparations Has Grown. But It's Still Going to Be a Hard Sell for Congress."

Stevens's insistence that Americans confront economic domination as an impediment to full citizenship and subsequently consider how material forms of power demand reconfiguration to achieve the promise of political equality embedded in the idea of a true republic.

**Conclusion**

Though short-lived, the idea that confiscation was a means to achieve grounded freedom flourished in the early Reconstruction period. Thaddeus Stevens, its most powerful proponent, sought to remove confiscation from the purview of the freedpeople by advancing a legislative plan in which confiscation would be framed as a legitimate wartime action to restore republican society in the South. Given the militarized context, Stevens did not shy away from the punitive connotation that confiscation held. His failure to muster a legislative coalition, however, proved that Northerners lacked the necessary political will to undertake a bold redistribution of property. By initiating a program of confiscation, beyond seizing material conditions of freedom, the freedpeople challenged the relationships between black and white in the South. Confiscation asserted the power and authority of freedpeople, often violently, and recast the formerly enslaved as potential possessors of the Earth. Although many programs for confiscating white land failed, this idea—that freed people were possessors of the Earth and that they could employ forceful takings—spurred further plans for action. And in undertaking forceful seizure, the freedpeople came to articulate a powerful justification for their practice. As Eliphalet Whittlesey, the assistant commissioner of the North Carolina Freedmen's Bureau explained, freedpeople understood full well the meaning of property rights. "…but they have an idea that they have a certain right to the property of their former masters, that they have earned it…"[100] Confiscation in the minds of many freedpeople was not a wartime punishment; it was the process of rightfully

[100] Cited in Foner and Hahn, *Nothing But Freedom*, 56.

reclaiming one's just deserts. In the next chapter, I turn to Pauline Hopkins's magazine novel, *Winona*, to sketch this emerging idea of reclamation and its development in the context of an expanding settler state.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Reclamation of Rightful Inheritance in Pauline Hopkins's *Winona*

> "For the Negro will share the continent with us and be a part of our people so long as we are a people. We shall eliminate the Indian—we shall not assimilate the Asiatic—but the African was imported, as we Europeans were imported, to become an American."[1]

> "Reclaiming that from which one has been disinherited is a good thing... Yet claiming for myself a heritage the weft of whose genesis is my own disinheritance is a profoundly troubling paradox."[2]

The emancipation of slaves during the Civil War transformed discussions of racial difference and hierarchy in the United States. With millions of newly minted free persons living in the United States and growing political agitation around federal protections for civil rights, European descendants desperately clung to their racial identities as a badge of honor and a justification for greater deserts. The writer of the New York Times article that opens this chapter argued that the emancipation of the "Negro race" raised a fundamental question for Americans: "What becomes of a weaker race brought into close relations with a stronger one?" Rather than assert the sole primacy of European Americans, the author argued that Africans were unlike Asiatic and Indian peoples. While "Chinese settlers" refused to accept American customs, dress, and company, the "aborigines'" "halt animal nature" resisted any attempt to make them "a very useful or valuable part of our population." Africans, however, could become Americans and, with the aid of their European brethren, ascend to their "true place," joint rule of "our common continent."[3]

The European American writer who composed the article articulated a gradual, but measured acceptance of African Americans as fellow citizens of the American nation. He was

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[1] "Red, Yellow and Black."
[2] Williams, *Alchemy of Race and Rights*, 217.
[3] "Red, Yellow and Black."

not alone in his sentiments. Despite groups of recalcitrant Confederate sympathizers and racial conservatives, white Northerners slowly warmed to the idea that African Americans could partake in the popular sovereignty of the American nation during the Reconstruction Era. Scrutiny of the very idea of racial hierarchy did not accompany this changing racial attitude, however. As the article demonstrates, tenuous acceptance of African Americans as fellow citizens occasioned a more exacting and stark distinction between African Americans and members of the other colored races.

From one perspective, African Americans had traded places with members of indigenous tribes. Before the Civil War there was a brief legal articulation of racial difference enshrined in Chief Justice Roger Taney's infamous decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*. Taney held simultaneously that Africans "are not included, and were never intended to be included as "citizens" in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for…" and that Native peoples could "without a doubt…become citizens of a State, and of the United States, and if an individual should leave his nation or tribe and take up his abode among the white population, he would be entitled to all the rights and privileges…"[4] The addition of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments as well as cultural changes brought about by the Civil War had forced a realignment in the racial order. One motivation for the realignment was the growing realization that no matter how insistent whites would be about their indigenous 'neighbors' joining their ranks, there was widespread refusal to renounce one's belonging to tribe and nation. Indigenes were re-categorized from potential citizens to hostile impediments to American nation-building. Senator Stephen A. Douglas's pre-war speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act urged this reformulation of feeling

[4] Taney, Dred Scott v. Sandford, U.S.

between white men and indigenous peoples, arguing that "the Indian barrier… filled with hostile savages" must give way to farmers, commerce, and economic development.[5]

The previous two chapters of this dissertation tracked the demand for land by African Americans in the United States after formal emancipation. Given the nature of a demand for land in a nation founded on settler expansion and violence, assessing how African American thinkers conceived of indigenous peoples and their claims allows us to better understand how the development of post-emancipation African American politics intervened in broader conversations about racial hierarchy. This chapter considers how African American thinkers discussed topics of Indian removal, portrayed indigenous peoples in their critical engagements, and navigated African-indigenous encounters. To claim land as territory or property was not an abstract demand without precedent in the Americas. The land that African Americans sought had already been expropriated (or was under threat of being expropriated) by the American nation-state and its agents. Did African Americans understand their demand for land in relation to the claims for control over land by dispossessed indigenous peoples? To what extent did African Americans accept the invitation of the author of the article to partake in exclusive joint-rule over the lands of the Americas? How did African American thinkers resist or reimagine their relationship to the land given their disenfranchised and diasporic experiences?

I approach these questions by way of an engagement with the African American novelist Pauline Hopkins's 1902 magazine novel, *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest*. *Winona* was a crucial intervention in late nineteenth century African American thought. My reading emphasizes that the novel, which centers a story of hybrid racial identity and border crossings, serves as a ground on which to stage relationships among differently raced

[5] Cited in Unrau, *The Rise and Fall of Indian Country, 1825-1855*, 148.

characters and probe the possibilities of interracial solidarity in the quest for African American freedom. Hopkins's return to the pre-Civil War period as well as her choice to narrate abolition in the context of settler expansion and indigenous dispossession allows her to reclaim a tradition of freedom fighters without occluding the limitations of a freedom project that remains indifferent to the injustices perpetrated against the original inhabitants of the continent. By focusing on the relationship between characters, the presence and absence of indigenous voices, and the key role that land—as a commodity to be owned, a territory to be governed, and a terrain on which action takes place—plays in the narrative, I isolate what Pauline Hopkins's novel can teach us about the African American recollection and treatment of indigenous life.

While Hopkins never wrote extensively about the agrarian republican tradition or the Reconstruction Era bid for land ownership, the centrality of land and property in the novel allows me to theorize their relationship to post-emancipation freedom. For Hopkins, African Americans realize freedom through the act of reclaiming white land and property. Hopkins's novel both questions desires for land, territory, and state power that propel indigenous dispossession and presents the necessity of a shared practice of reclamation among non-white peoples living in a colonized world. Before offering a reading of the novel, I consider two texts that predate Hopkins to get a sense of how African American thinkers portrayed indigenous politics in late antebellum and post-emancipation eras.

**African American Reflections on the 'Indian Question' Before *Winona***

While the Reconstruction Era witnessed brief glimmers of African American political and social influence followed by a powerful white backlash known as 'Redemption,' indigenous peoples residing within the boundaries of the United States experienced increased hostility, violence, and measures aimed at control. Radical Republican control of Congress enabled the

passage of historic civil rights legislation in addition to a slew of pro-settler policies encouraging Americans to move west of the Mississippi River. The Homestead, Morrill Land Grant, and Pacific Railway Acts all laid claim to land formerly reserved as "Indian Country" by the Indian Trade and Intercourse Act of 1834. The mass execution of Dakota men in response to an uprising instigated by widespread starvation and governmental indifference in 1862 forecast a growing willingness to use indiscriminate violence against indigenous resisters. By the conclusion of the Civil War, twenty thousand Union soldiers were stationed in the western United States.[6] The war machine constructed to defeat the Confederacy and free enslaved Africans—including new weaponry, leadership, and recruits—now turned toward the west to extract compliance from indigenous peoples who asserted their collective rights to remain on the land.

The post-Reconstruction period was marked by a political culture that marginalized and excluded African Americans, rolling back the short-term gains of the immediate post-war period, as well as indifference to the violent repression of indigenous peoples.[7] As white Americans second-guessed their brief experiments with African American equality, they also developed a determination to rid the land of its original inhabitants either by forced assimilation or extermination. Within this period of pronounced racial hierarchy, African Americans appear to be tragic conscripts of the American settler project. To join the wars against indigenous groups and identify with European settlers was to practice a commonplace form of citizenship in the nineteenth century United States. The histories of African American participation in explicit settler activities such as 'buffalo soldiering' and 'exodustering' are well documented.[8] These examples have led scholars to theorize the anti-indigenous entanglements characterizing the

[6] Smith, "Lost Soldiers"; Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land*, 262; Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism*, 118.
[7] Gates, Jr., *Stony the Road*.
[8] Weaver, "A Latern to See By: Survivance and a Journey into the Dark Heart of Oklahoma"; Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*; Painter, *Exodusters*; Meacham, "The Exoduster Movement."

African American quest for freedom. In this section, I revisit two texts by African Americans to establish the contours of African American thinking about indigenous social and political life before Hopkins wrote *Winona*. Martin Delaney's pre-Civil War novel, *Blake: Or, the Huts of America* and Frederick Douglass's speech in 1867, "Our Composite Nationality" provide ideological context for Hopkins's foray into portraying indigenous life for the growing African American literary public.

## I. Martin Delaney's *Blake*

Martin Delaney stands out as one of the major African American intellectuals of the antebellum period. His work as a journalist, speaker, doctor, ethnographer, and politician brought him fame during his life. Perhaps best known for his advocacy of African American emigration, Delaney spent years before the Civil War surveying land and raising funds to establish colonies for African Americans across three continents. Between 1859-1862 Delaney released *Blake* serially in the *Anglo-American Magazine*. The story follows the character Henry Blake across the United States, into Canada, and then to Africa and Cuba. A multilingual, free-born African, Blake searches for a way to emancipate African peoples globally by uniting black peoples across the Atlantic in a rebellion against enslavement, white possession, and Euro-centric notions of national belonging.

In the first section of the narrative Blake travels the United States, at one point crossing territory held by "the United Nation of Chickasaw and Choctaw Indians."[9] Delaney offered readers a rich, albeit brief, encounter between indigenous characters and Blake in a chapter titled, "Advent Among the Indians." Blake desires to know where the Indian characters stand in relation to white and black men with hopes they will join an African uprising. To assess the

[9] Delany, *Blake; or, The Huts of America*, 89. The association between the Chicasaw and Choctaw Nations was dissolved in 1856, but Delaney still refers to them with the outdated title.

situation, Blake speaks to three members of the tribe: Mr. Culver, the "intelligent old Chief," his nephew, Josephus Braser, and Dr. Donald, a white medical officer adopted by the tribe.[10] The conversation dramatizes tensions between African American and indigenous peoples through a clarification of misunderstandings between Blake and his interlocutors. While Blake explains that he mistrusts the indigenous characters for their practice of slaveholding, Mr. Culver's narration of European-African relations also belies a misunderstanding of African peoples.

Blake opens the dialogue by communicating his surprise at the fact that the Chickasaws and Choctaws hold African men and women in bondage. Mr. Culver insists that Blake misunderstands the practice of slavery among the tribes, arguing that their standards of treatment are "not like the white men."[11] Blake pushes the point further inquiring how "a man like you"—referring to Mr. Culver's experience with oppression at the hands of white men—could "reconcile your principles with the holding of slaves…"[12] Dr. Donald, frustrated with the perceived impetuous nature of the African traveler, interrupts Blake with a "tone of threatening authority."[13] Rather than accept the white doctor's support, Mr. Culver and Josephus disavow Dr. Donald's attempt to silence Blake. Josephus appears particularly upset by Dr. Donald's treatment of Henry Blake and he defends his angry retort with the exclamation: "He'll make the Indians slaves just now, then negroes will have no friends."[14] As Dr. Donald storms off, he mutters the n-word to accentuate his disapproval of Blake's warm welcome in Indian territory.

Mr. Culver returns to his earlier point that Indians are unlike their white antagonists. Referring to Dr. Donald's exit, he argues "[n]ow you see…the difference between an Indian and

[10] Delany, 86.
[11] Delany, 87.
[12] Delany, 87.
[13] Delany, 87.
[14] Delany, 87.

white man holding slaves."[15] Mr. Culver and Josephus's respect for Blake and willingness to hear him out underscores their belief that Africans, even when enslaved, are human beings deserving of respect. Mr. Culver assures Blake that black and Indian men inhabit similar spaces, labor together, and respect one another as equals. The underlying belief that black men are like Indian men culminates in the most intimate of social relations, marriage: "In our Nation Indian and black all marry together."[16] While the indigenous men's apology for slavery fails to entirely convince the African explorer, Delaney's fair-minded portrayal of Mr. Culver is distinct from the world-foreclosing anger of Dr. Donald, suggesting that there is space to build solidarity with indigenous peoples.

Delaney also uses the encounter between Blake and Mr. Culver to interrogate another misconception, this time about enslaved Africans. Mr. Culver muses that "Indian like black men very much, only he don't fight 'nough."[17] Blake corrects this "slight mistake" by drawing attention to differently situated positions of Africans and indigenous peoples in the Americas. Whereas Indians are "in their own country…united," Africans are "scattered thousands of miles apart."[18] Blake contends that Mr. Culver might as well say that Africans are better fighters than indigenous groups given that "Africa today is still peopled by Africans" and America…is possessed and ruled by foreigners."[19] Mr. Culver changes his rhetorical strategy in response to Blake's stubborn defense, asking Blake if he thinks that white men will ever rule Africa. Blake responds that only a combination of white peoples against a scattered African continent would allow conquest. Mr. Culver sighs in agreement.

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[15] Delany, 87.
[16] Delany, 87.
[17] Delany, 87.
[18] Delany, 87.
[19] Delany, 88.

After confronting misconceptions between the two parties—that all Indians are cruel enslavers like the Southern whites and that Africans do not have the will to resist white encroachment—Blake is poised to ask the fundamental question: "What I now wish to learn is, whether in case that the blacks should rise, they may have hope or fear from the Indian?"[20] Mr. Culver provides a lengthy reply that narrates a common destiny for indigenous and black peoples:

> "I'm an old mouthpiece, been puffing out smoke and talk many seasons for the entertainment of the young and benefit of all who come among us. The squaws of the great men among the Indians in Florida were black women, and the squaws of the black men were Indian women. You see the vine that winds around and holds us together. Don't cut it, but let it grow till bimeby, it git so stout and strong, with many, very many little branches attached, that you can't separate them. I now reach to you the pipe of peace and hold out the olive- branch of hope! Go on young man, go on. If you want white man to love you, you must fight 'im!"[21]

Culver's response warrants two important observations. First, Mr. Culver employs the example of African and indigenous cooperation in Florida as evidence for the importance of solidarity in struggle and coexistence in peace. He refers to the successes of the black-Indian alliances of the three Seminole Wars during the antebellum period (1817-18; 1835-42; 1855-58). Though each war resulted in reduced territory for the Seminole people in addition to mass casualties, the ability of the Seminole forces to sustain multi-year campaigns against white settlers inspired hope in indigenous resistance fighters. And, second, Mr. Culver reaffirms Blake's mission to win African freedom by way of violent rebellion. His concluding statement that white love can only be won through physical confrontation provided a means to unite black and indigenous people, emphasizing their shared status as undignified and undeserving subjects under white rule. After hearing about Blake's project for African resistance, Mr. Culver cheers him on with excitement: "Go on young man, go on! May the Great Spirit make you brave!"[22]

[20] Delany, 88.
[21] Delany, 88.
[22] Delany, 88.

Delaney's twentieth chapter represents an important artifact of nineteenth-century African American thinking about indigenous politics and history. Delaney purposefully stages an encounter between white, black, and indigenous characters to demonstrate the need for building solidarity among non-European peoples. Dr. Donald's refusal to engage Blake as an equal person creates a space for non-white fraternization. In that space, Blake and Mr. Culver directly engage one another, locating the sources of mutual misunderstanding. Mr. Culver never concedes the injustice of slavery, but rather defends a less hierarchical (and possible non-chattel) version of the institution. And yet, his celebration of African resistance and violence contains the recognition that oppressed peoples always have the potential to free themselves from their condition. It is a shared interest in resistance to white rule that binds Mr. Culver and Blake together. Delaney's *Blake* establishes the hopeful possibility of black and indigenous solidarity in the face of a consolidating white power. A project of violent revolution enables Delaney's characters to imagine that solidarity.[23]

## II. Frederick Douglass's "Our Composite Nationality"

Delaney's interest in African resistance to white rule reflected the desires of a small group of radical thinkers and activists. Many Africans and African Americans in the United States aspired to become members of an integrated, multi-racial American polity. Frederick Douglass articulated and encouraged such a view. His change of mind during the antebellum period, from attacking the Constitution as a pro-slavery document to embracing it as an abolitionist tool, was accompanied by the belief that American political institutions could be reconstituted to align

[23] Toward the end of the novel, Blake and his company in Cuba declare that their proximity to indigenous peoples as fellow members of a colored race justified their "superior claim" to the Western hemisphere. The imagined solidarity against white rule at times sought to supplant white fictions of brotherhood with indigenous peoples to claim a right to govern the Americas. See Janara, "Brothers and Others" for a discussion of white antebellum discourses about the relationships between indigenous and white peoples.

them with the higher ideals of the Declaration of Independence. The Union victory and the legislative successes of Reconstruction bolstered his view that the American Republic promised freedom, equality, and justice to anyone willing to undertake the burdens of citizenship and participate in the life of the nation.[24]

This optimistic interpretation of American politics influenced Douglass's representations of indigenous politics in his speech, "Our Composite Nationality," first given in 1867. Unlike Delaney, Douglass argued for Indian assimilation into the American nation to curtail the growing violence of the Reconstruction removal efforts. In his 1867 speech, Douglass figured anti-indigenous violence as a failure to welcome new citizens without considering the sources of indigenous discontent.[25] By lumping together all peoples of color, Douglass argued for more liberal citizenship laws in the United States, but failed to address the ongoing colonization and settlement of the continent that threatened indigenous alternatives to American citizenship. Douglass thus exemplified an approach to African-Indigenous solidarity that required the acceptance of certain political commitments—primarily the legitimacy of the American nation-state—to clear a pathway to freedom.[26]

Invited to participate in the Parker Fraternity Lecture Course in December 1869, Douglass took the occasion to address the rising tide of anti-Chinese sentiment that marked even

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[24]Douglass's faith in the perfectibility of American institutions included a defense of American nationality, as we will see. Douglass generally blamed unfreedom and injustice on corrupt officeholders and perversions of the American creed. For an example of such criticism see his 1888 speech on the twenty-sixth anniversary of emancipation in D.C. Douglass, "Address Delivered on the 26th Anniversary of the Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia."

[25] Douglass first delivered his "Composite Nation" speech in 1867, but the most famous circulating copy of the address is a reprint of the 1869 iteration given as part of the Parker Fraternity Lecture Course. I use the 1869 version because of the extent of its reach. See Blight for his discussion of the speech. Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 528; 544.

[26] In 1893, Douglass redeployed his famous "Self-Made Men" speech at the Carlisle Industrial School for Indians. Douglass similarly refused to discuss the specific obstacles facing indigenous people who did not want to become subjects or citizens of the United States in that address. Both texts demonstrated how Douglass, uninterested in probing the differences between racialized populations, called for a kind of interracial solidarity premised on indigenous assimilation into American institutions.

the enlightened circles of the Boston literati. Wendell Philips, Douglass's acquaintance from his days as an abolitionist, gave the previous lecture. To consolidate support for his probable run for governor of Massachusetts, Philips enflamed fears concerning the changing demographics. Speaking of a "bold" and "indestructible" people from Eastern Asia, Philips warned that Chinese immigration presented an "enormous danger" to the "principles that [lie] at the root of our Government."[27] Douglass's address, commonly referred to as "Our Composite Nationality," departed from Philips's overtures to popular xenophobic tropes and argued that increased diversity would strengthen American democratic principles.

Douglass set out to disarm critics of Chinese immigration by defending a universal human right to migration. At the outset, Douglass asked "whether we are the better or worse for being composed of different races of men[?]" To answer that question, Douglass understood himself to be responding to "the croakers by nature—the men who have a taste for funerals…" who firmly maintained that "[y]ou will *never* see this Government harmonious and successful while in the hands of different races." Douglass argued that the existence of the United States disproved the prejudices of these men because "[w]e are a country of all extremes, ends and opposites; the most conspicuous example of composite nationality in the world." The success of the American nation, which appeared self-evident to Douglass, supported the fact that diversity was integral to the durability of political institutions. Moving beyond the question of diversity's usefulness, Douglas defended the existence of "human rights" that "rest[ed] upon no conventional foundation, but [were] eternal, universal and indestructible." Among these human rights was a right to migration for all peoples, not just the "blue-eyed and light-haired races of America."

[27] "WENDELL PHILLIPS.; What He Asks of Congress."

Though the speech centered the permissibility of Chinese immigration, the questions raised by new immigrants drew attention to the existing inequalities between peoples already on the American continent. Douglass pointed out that the American nation included three races since its inception: Europeans, Africans, and Indians. Whereas African American discontent solely stemmed from "a lack of humanity" in the treatment of black people within the United States, Douglass portrayed indigenous peoples as partially participating in their own destruction by renouncing American citizenship:[28]

> "[The Indian] stands here today between the two extremes of black and white, too proud to claim fraternity with either, and yet too weak to withstand the power of either. Heretofore, the policy of our government has been governed by race pride, rather than wisdom."[29]

Douglass's diagnosis of the partial integration of African Americans and indigenous peoples relied on a differentiation between the two nonwhite groups. Both groups were victims of white exclusion, but the "[pride]" of indigenous peoples intensified the problem because they could neither assert their sovereignty nor would they join the American nation as citizens. Douglass argued that the American government shared the blame for their failure to assimilate, but he also disavowed any claims for indigenous self-rule. Whether more convincing "attempt[s]… to inspire… patriotism" or less forceful policies "of keeping Indians to themselves" would tempt indigenous peoples to claim status as citizens was left underspecified.

The day before Douglass's redeployment of the speech, President Ulysses S. Grant addressed the violent confrontations on the frontier in a message to Congress. Douglass's sympathetic, but forceful appreciation of American citizenship echoed the policy of the U.S. federal government under Grant. The President admitted that he did not hold "either legislation or the conduct of whites…blameless for these hostilities."[30] And yet, Grant asserted that past

[28] Douglass, "Our Composite Nationality," 286.
[29] Douglass, 285.
[30] Grant, "December 6, 1869."

misdeeds did not justify unending resistance to American expansion: "[t]he past, however, cannot be undone, and the question must be met as we now find it." To aid in the establishment of more peaceful relations between settlers and aborigines, Grant defended the transition to military supervision of reservations. The lifetime appointment of military offices as well as military officials' personal interest "in living in harmony" made them more effective administrators than civil servants appointed by the president. Though these policy changes were meant to uphold peace, Grant recognized that the unavoidable collisions between "civilized settlements" and "the tribes of Indians" would eventually amount to "one or the other… [giving] way in the end." If indigenous peoples refused the mantle of American citizenship, the only solution that could circumvent "the extinction of a race" was "placing all the Indians on large reservations, as rapidly as it can be done, and giving them absolute protection." Unlike Douglass, Grant imagined that indigenous collectivities could "set up Territorial governments" that would secure their protection and institute self-government. This possibility, however, was predicated on moderating expansionist appetites and commanding the federal war machine to respect territorial boundaries. The coming decades would prove his optimistic view a shortsighted one.

Grant's evaluation of indigenous fitness for self-rule also invoked racialized evaluations of fitness that were predicated on the imperial aspirations of the different races. Douglass's disapproval of anti-Chinese sentiment contrasted with his account of indigenous segregation. He directly confronted those who claimed that Chinese people could not become citizens because they were "secretive and treacherous."[31] Douglass admitted that these rumors might be true if only because it resonated with "the account of [any] man's heart given in the creeds" (300). Douglass cast doubt on the idea that "the Chinese are more untruthful than any other people"

[31] Douglass, "Our Composite Nationality," 300.

because trust was the "foundation of society" and a people who had grown a prosperous civilization and "extended their empire in all directions…" must have had a strong foundation.[32] The imperial ambitions of the Chinese empire both combatted the negative stereotypes that Americans held and created parallels to Douglass's vision of the United States. In his opening paragraphs, Douglass depicted the American nation as an attractive polity for its ability to expand and develop, stating that "American statesmanship, worthy of the name, is now taxing its energies to frame measures to meet the demands of constantly increasing expansion of power, responsibility, and duty."[33] Like a "grand old forest," the United States was "destined to grow and flourish."[34]. These allusions to American imperial potential culminated in Douglass's observation that the United States already held under its control "land…capable of supporting one-fifth of all the globe."[35] The imperial standards of success that attributed greatness to the United States also functioned as a metric by which to refute critiques of Chinese narrow-mindedness. Indigenous "[weakness]," following the same logic, arose from a stubborn anti-assimilationist pride and simultaneous impotence to resist encroachment and expand their territory.

Thus, the case of the Indian who refused American citizenship exposed a knot in Douglass's otherwise humane critique of Reconstruction Era xenophobia. Douglass could not make sense of the demands of a people for independent self-rule, particularly a people unable to secure land and build a civilization in the image of European nation-states. The claims of the Chinese immigrant or freed slave only became legible to Douglass insofar as they were claims to

[32] Douglass, 301.
[33] Douglass, 281.
[34] Douglass, 281.
[35] Douglass, 285.

join the American nation and participate in American nation-building. Two years later, Douglass celebrated the Dominican vote in favor of American annexation for similar reasons. He cheered on the Dominican people for recognizing that it was not possible to "preserve their independence" and so "[sunk] their nationality" and supported dissolution into a nation "with free institutions."[36] But what about the peoples who—regardless of their ability or willingness to qualify for the standards of civilized empires—nonetheless want to retain self-rule? In the case of the Dominican Republic, Douglass took the desire for integration to be the very evidence of a "capacity for self-rule."[37] (Santo Domingo—No. 4 NNE April 27. 1871). Douglass characterized the capacity for self-rule as a capacity that was dependent on the decision to assimilate into another polity. This characterization extended the possibility of an attenuated right to self-rule via integration, but it denied an outright, independent claim to self-rule for any people or collective who refused or failed to meet a set of imperial standards. Though Douglass was not a fervent supporter of hierarchical imperial control in which targeted populations became mere subjects of the metropole, his vision of self-rule reduced the options available to any people who lacked civilizational merit.

Furthermore, highlighting the example of indigenous refusals to assimilate exposes tensions within Douglass's vision of a universal human right to migration by drawing attention to problems of defending unlimited demographic movement. The races that formed Douglass's composite nation were differentiable by their specific histories of relocation and movement that placed them in the Americas. Europeans arrived as settlers and immigrants, Chinese laborers navigated to the United States for work opportunities, and Africans were forcibly taken as slaves

[36] Humanities, "San Domingo: Report of the Commissioners," 1.
[37] Douglass, "San Domingo--No. 4."

to the New World. Indigenous peoples claimed the Americas as their home before these relocations occurred. Whereas Douglass understood the composite character of the United States to be a testament to the importance of free movement, he left untouched the right of an already existing community to have a say in the parameters of migration. His silence on that dimension of the issue not only cleared the ground for an uncomplicated celebration of migration, diversification, and integration, it also eclipsed the conditions that generated indigenous reluctance to accept a vision of freedom that was predicated on their participation in American nation building.

"Our Composite Nationality" advanced an important "commitment to multiracial democracy" without confronting the challenges of promoting migration within a settler society like the United States.[38] Rather than read the speech as a nefarious anti-indigenous argument, I argue that Douglass's optimistic interpretation of American political institutions led him to believe that indigenous people could best guarantee their freedom by assimilating as American citizens and defending their practices and culture within the republican institutions of American politics. Such a view emphasized white exclusion—and even mistreatment—of indigenous peoples, but it presented a limited view of what freedom might look like for the peoples who inhabited the continent before European settlers arrived on its shores. It is possible that Douglass's vision of a composite nation comprising of indigenous peoples was the most pragmatic or surest guarantee of their freedom. Even so, the absence of any alternative vision of freedom risked absolving the perpetrators of anti-indigenous violence or mischaracterizing indigenous peoples as unworthy of or uninterested in a form of collective life outside the confines of the American nation-state.

[38] Hooker, "'A Black Sister to Massachusetts,'" 690.

**Pauline Hopkins and the Formation of a Mass African American Literary Public**

Douglass's approach to the so-called Indian Question came to define African American public discourse about the violent indigenous removals of the latter period of the nineteenth century. The emphasis on assimilation attracted the attention of reformers who aided the formation of boarding schools to "kill the savage; save the man." At one such school, Douglass presented his "Self-Made Men" address in 1893, where he implored the students to simultaneously cultivate themselves and the nation through hard work. With the ongoing dismantling of Reconstruction policies and precedents, few African American leaders reproduced Delaney's vision of a nonwhite rebellion against white rule; most, instead, clung hopefully to the memory of the Republican Party's commitment to black political power. Pauline Hopkins stepped into this context and leveraged her access to the burgeoning magazine public to think about the settler dimensions of America's past.

Pauline Hopkins was born in Portland, Maine in 1859 to a father with roots in Virginia and a New England mother. Though little is known about her early years, Hopkins's celebration of New England culture in her writing, particularly its place as the cradle of American abolitionism, suggests that she found the political and social climate invigorating. Her creative writing skills first emerged when she won an essay competition by the Congregational Society of Boston for an essay on the "Evils of Intemperance and their Remedy" at age fifteen.[39] By 1880, Hopkins had written the play "Slaves' Escape; or, the Underground Railroad." Renamed "Peculiar Sam; or,the Underground Railroad," the drama ran five performances at Boston's Oakland Garden with Hopkins singing the lead. Hopkins, sometimes called "Boston's Favorite Soprano," gave recitals and lectured on African American history, bringing her minor celebrity

[39] Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 122.

in New England.[40] Unable to generate stable income from her writing and performing, Hopkins spent the last decade of the nineteenth century performing secretarial labor and working as a stenographer for Republican politicians and the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics.

Her fortunes changed with the debut of her first full-length novel, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* in 1900. The novel's warm reception propelled Pauline Hopkins into the literary and artistic circles of New England. Within a year of publishing her first novel, the African American writer helped found the *Colored American Magazine*. A symptom of "the magazine 'revolution,'" the *Colored American Magazine* participated in the explosion of new publications produced between 1880-1910 with the intention to craft mass audiences and generate revenue through advertisements. The magazine was headquartered in Boston, but by 1901, it also included eight branch offices in major cities, eighty-three agents in thirty-three states, and an international office in Liberia. At its height, readership amounted to roughly one hundred thousand people with fifteen thousand regular subscribers.[41]

The *Colored American Magazine* was distinct from other magazines of the period both because it was run cooperatively and because it explicitly aimed to "create the boundaries of a black magazine-reading public."[42] The initial issue laid out the goals of the publication, remarking on the "development of Afro-American art and literature" and describing itself as "a medium through which [the colored people of the United States] can demonstrate their ability and tastes, in fiction, poetry, and art, as well as in the arena of historical, social and economic

[40] Bruce, *Black American Writing from the Nadir*, 145; Gruesser, *The Unruly Voice*, 3.
[41] Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 124; Cook, "Colored American Magazine."
[42] Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 125.

literature."[43] Pauline Hopkins shared these goals, having defended the need for African American literature in the preface of *Contending Forces*:

> "Fiction is of great value to any people as a preserver of manners and customs--religious, political and social. It is a record of growth and development from generation to generation, *No one will do this for us; we must ourselves develop the men and women who will faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history,* and, as yet, unrecognizable by writers of the Anglo-Saxon race."[44]

Hopkins believed that fiction writing was a means to influence and cultivate new manners and habits among the readership. She also contended that "writers of the Anglo-Saxon race" could not—or perhaps would not—accurately represent the thoughts of African Americans. Her work both as a journalist and as a fiction writer amounted to the faithful reconstructing of the inner lives of African American characters and informing audiences of the complexity of their political and social views.

This fundamental commitment to enlarging the body of African American fiction writing led Hopkins to compose three magazine novels, numerous short stories, and two biographical compendiums of important African American thinkers during her four years on the editorial team of the *Colored American Magazine*. Hopkins published *Hagar's Daughter. A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* in 1901-1902, *Winona* in 1902, and *Of One Blood; Or, the Hidden Self* in 1902-1903. All three serialized novels narrated the experiences of African Americans in the United States and dramatized the politics of African American freedom.

Hopkins had another more distinctly political goal in writing her stories: the revival of abolitionist organization and activity. Here again, Hopkins's narration in *Contending Forces* provides insight into her devotion to the abolitionist culture of antebellum America:[45]

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[43] Carby, 123.
[44] Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 13–14.
[45] The style of this moment is consistent with Hopkins's magazine fiction wherein Hopkins occasionally broke from the narration to speak directly to the reader.

"The Negro while held in contempt by many, yet reflected the spirit of his surroundings…his love of liberty, which in its intensity recalled the memory of New England men who had counted all worldly gain as nothing if demanding the sacrifice of even one of the great principles of freedom."[46]

For Hopkins, the spirit of abolition—embodied by the three virtues of courage, responsibility, and independence—lived in the hearts and minds of African Americans. In her fiction, she represented the abolitionists as men and women with heroic impulses and grounded the virtuous actions of post-Reconstruction characters in this earlier political tradition.

As Judith Madera reminds us, Hopkins wrote in the shadow of the "race men" of her day.[47] During her most active writing years, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois framed national debates about racial uplift within the African American public sphere. Hopkins was no stranger to public debate and actively participated in women's civic life in Boston.[48] Given the option between an accommodationist Washington and Du Bois's strategy of political agitation, Hopkins opted for the latter. Though Pauline Hopkins did not explicitly write in favor of the policies of either leading man, her fiction offered critical interrogations of characters who chose indifference or accommodation to the racial order. These characters—like the tellingly named Mr. Maybee of *Winona*—recognized their wrong-doings or became targets of violence. In *Contending Forces,* the Washington-like figure was represented as somebody craving popular acclaim in Boston, while stubbornly assenting to the oppressive culture of the South.[49] These subtle interventions in the political debates of her day made Hopkins's work at the Magazine increasingly difficult as the culture of the journal tended toward Booker T. Washington's views. Once Washington purchased the magazine in 1904 and moved its operations to New York City, Hopkins departed.

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[46] Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 114–15.
[47] Madera, *Black Atlas*, 153.
[48] McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 184, 230–31.
[49] Madera, *Black Atlas*, 178.

Her fiction and editorial work sought to elevate the race as well as make space for women in a male-dominated industry. Hazel Carby refers to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the "black women's renaissance" because of the rise of such African American luminaries as Ida B. Wells, Francis Harper, Anna Julia Cooper, and Hopkins.[50] The emergence of celebrated African American women writers, however, did not amount to a seachange in the magazine industry. By the summer of 1901, Hopkins was one of two women on the editorial team for the magazine and the only woman working in the Boston office.[51] As a contributor to the publication, Hopkins wrote biographies of historical African American women and her stories resisted and reformed confining gender norms. A sharp shift in editorial and visual focus suggested that her insistence on centering African American women caused professional problems for Hopkins and reception issues for the journal.[52] Hopkins did, however, retain supporters in her efforts to popularize stories of famous African American women. When commenting on Hopkins's work at the *Colored American Magazine*, writer R.S. Elliot noted that Hopkins had "struggled to the position which she now holds in the same fashion that ALL Northern colored women have to struggle—through hardships, disappointments, and with very little encouragement."[53] In Elliot's estimation "a grim determination to 'stick at it'" enabled Hopkins to succeed and become a literary sensation in the African American public sphere at the turn of the century.[54]

Hopkins's decision to exit the magazine resulted in her waning influence on American literary conversations. She spent the remaining two and a half decades of her life writing, editing,

[50] Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 7.
[51] Alberta Moore Smith acted as the Chicago correspondent. Elliot, "The Story of Our Magazine."
[52] Bergman, "Everything We Hoped She'd Be."
[53] Elliot, "The Story of Our Magazine," 47.
[54] Elliot, 47.

and speaking about African American history and the obstacles to realizing African American freedom. *Voice of the Negro*, an Atlanta based organ of anti-Washingtonian views, immediately hired her as a journalist after her departure. In 1916 Hopkins in conjunction with her former boss at the *Colored American Magazine*, Walter Wallace, founded the *New Era Magazine.* The publication failed to garner sufficient attention and folded after two issues. Hopkins never returned to composing full-length novels after her productive and famed years at the Boston literary magazine. Yet her work in publishing as well as the content of her fiction left a lasting imprint on the African American literary imagination. As a colleague noted in a sketch of Hopkins after her first year at the *Colored American Magazine*: "Let us have a few more Pauline Hopkins to help forward the brighter and better day for the race."[55]

**Staging Abolitionist Politics in a Settler Nation: Hopkins's *Winona***

Until 1972, few scholars recognized the importance of Hopkins's participation in the development of African American thought. In that year, Ann Allen Shockley rescued Hopkins from obscurity with a biographical article.[56] By the end of the 1980s, the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers had reissued her novels. The bulk of the scholarship on Hopkins has focused on her first novel, *Contending Forces,* because of its length, mature literary style, and representative quality, allowing commentators to generalize about Hopkins's literary imagination.[57] More recently, scholars have turned their attention to Hopkins's three serialized novels. The literature on the three later works covers a variety of topics from

[55] Elliot, 47.
[56] Ann Allen Shockley, "Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins"; Bergman, "Everything We Hoped She'd Be."
[57] Hazel Carby argues that Contending Forces was "the source of figures and narrative devices that developed throughout her later work." Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 128; Madera also follows Carby's emphasis on Hopkins's first novel. Madera, *Black Atlas*.

Hopkins's portrayal of mental health to her vision of an African utopia to the resonances between William James's psychological writings and her characterization of racial identity.[58]

Set in the period leading to the Civil War, *Winona* narrates the trials and triumph of two African American children raised by a disaffected Englishman, Captain Henry. After being wrongly accused of killing his older brother, the Captain abdicates his position as rightful heir and flees England. The Seneca people offer him refuge near Buffalo, NY and the Captain assimilates into the community, renaming himself White Eagle. While serving as a steward of the Underground Railroad, White Eagle becomes enamored with a "well-educated mulattress" and marries her, taking in an African orphan child—named Judah—and having a child of their own, Winona. Because his wife dies in childbirth, White Eagle raises the two children in the culture of the Seneca on an island located between Canada and the United States. Just as an English lawyer, Warren Maxwell, arrives in New York to track down Captain Henry and ensure that his descendants receive their rightful inheritance, White Eagle is murdered by white men and his two children are enslaved and deported to a plantation in Missouri.

Under the dominion of Colonel Titus and his cruel overseer, Bill Thomson, Judah and Winona endure harsh treatment. Warren Maxwell re-emerges in the story when he arrives at Magnolia plantation to handle Colonel Titus's legal dealings. Recognizing Winona and Judah, Maxwell gathers a company to aid in their escape from the United States. While Judah and Winona safely find refuge in the abolitionist camp of Captain John Brown, Maxwell is caught, imprisoned, and sentenced to execution. Judah, Winona, and the abolitionists eventually free their friend, enraging the pro-slavery Missourians who make war and destroy the abolitionist community in Kansas. During the battle, Colonel Titus dies and Judah kills Thomson. Reunited,

[58] Otten, "Pauline Hopkins and the Hidden Self of Race"; Horvitz, "Hysteria and Trauma in Pauline Hopkins' Of One Blood; or, the Hidden Self"; Reid, "Utopia Is in the Blood."

Maxwell declares his love for Winona who overcomes her self-doubts about a presumed racial inferiority and returns his affections. The three characters depart for England where they eagerly await the "honors and wealth" of heroes.[59]

Scholars have seized upon the charged political content of *Winona* to sketch the different dimensions of Pauline Hopkins's racial and gender politics. Scholars working in feminist and queer theory have highlighted how Hopkins's employment of drag emphasizes the performative character of identity, which Hopkins applies in equal measure to gender, sexual, and racial categories that order the worlds of her texts.[60] By dressing as a man to gain entry to the prison and nurse Maxwell, Winona exemplifies Hopkins's efforts to portray the "moral authority" of black women as well as enable the character to take action in ways that would be difficult for a woman to perform.[61] Winona's willingness to express love for a white man represents an early instance of "autonomous female sexual desire" that crosses racial lines in the tradition of American novel writing.[62] These readings highlight the instability of identity categories in Hopkins's novels and suggest that projects of racial and gender hierarchy are always vulnerable to subversion by actors willing to contest social norms and practice their self-making anew.[63]

More recently, scholars have turned to Winona to think explicitly about the settler colonial dimensions of the novel and theorize Hopkins's approach to race and racial justice with

[59] Hopkins, *Winona*, 435.
[60] Beam, "The Flower of Black Female Sexuality in Pauline Hopkins's Winona"; Somerville, "'The Prettiest Specimen of Boyhood': Cross-Gender and Racial Disguise in Pauline Hopkins's Winona."
[61] Patterson, "Kin' o' Rough Jestice Fer a Parson," 447; Somerville, "'The Prettiest Specimen of Boyhood': Cross-Gender and Racial Disguise in Pauline Hopkins's Winona," 205.
[62] Beam, "The Flower of Black Female Sexuality in Pauline Hopkins's Winona," 72.
[63] Moon and Ogle, "The 'Hybrid Hero' in Western Dime Novels" Moon and Ogle demonstrate that this literary practice of contesting gender norms was common in earlier western dime novels, probably influencing Hopkins's style.

respect to her representation of indigenous culture.[64] These sources place questions of belonging, territory, and violence at the heart of what is often referred to as Hopkins's "least studied novel."[65] My reading of *Winona* follows this turn in the scholarship. By placing *Winona* in context, the text appears to be not only a powerful response to the anti-black racism of the Jim Crow period but also a literary experiment to think settler colonial violence in relation to the structure of anti-black oppression. Hopkins resists what I call a "settler narrative arc" wherein the African American characters emerge from the struggles of the plot to accept an invitation to assimilate into American society and practice a form of settler citizenship. Though ambivalent about the status of indigenous culture in American life and uninterested in portraying the African American characters as allies to a project of indigenous resistance, Hopkins has her characters remove themselves from the settler society. Her dramatization of abolitionist resistance as fugitive and fleeting also separates the post-reconstruction freedom project from visions of freedom rooted in lustful property-acquisition. Hopkins's concluding scene defends the centrality of reclamation in her African American characters' final freedom. Both Judah and Winona set off for England where they plan to reclaim their inheritance, White Eagle's family's estate. I consider the power of reclamation as a practice and a relation between white and non-white peoples to think about *Winona*'s version of grounded freedom.

The timing of Pauline Hopkins's entrance into the African American literary public coincided with the intensification of Indian removal policies and state-sanctioned control of indigenous peoples. The 1864 and 1890 Sand Creek and Wounded Knee Massacres respectively bookended a federally sanctioned campaign of annihilation in the western United States. During

[64] Ammons, "Afterword: Winona, Bakhtin, and Hopkins in the Twenty-First Century"; O'Brien, "All the Land Had Changed"; Carico, "Cowboys & Slaves"; Schock, "Convergent Grounds."
[65] Schock, "Convergent Grounds," 22.

the Grant administration, the federal government also began experimenting with boarding school programs to enforce indigenous assimilation into white society. These schools were modeled on prisons and required the often forceful extraction of children from families.[66] With the western wars violently interfering with indigenous resistance, assimilation programs became the most effective way to provide a central plan to solve the 'Indian Question.'

Senator Henry Dawes crafted and passed the Dawes Act in 1887. During a speech in support of the plan, Dawes blamed the failures of the reservation system on the socialist agrarian character of their way of life. Dawes sought to instill "selfishness" in the indigenous peoples of the West by subdividing reservations into individual land holdings and shrinking the overall land held by tribes, completing the transition to a "modern" Western property regime.[67] Alongside these property changes, the Dawes Act increased support for assimilationist boarding schools. The so-called Five Civilized Tribes, restricted to what is now known as the state of Oklahoma, avoided the impact of the legislation because they were recognized as sovereign peoples under American law. On the eve of Pauline Hopkins's ascendance to fame, Congress passed the Curtis Act, which negated all precedent and unilaterally revoked the sovereignty of the tribes of Indian Territory. By the turn of the century the United States government in search of land and resources had killed thousands of indigenous persons and further reduced indigenous landholdings to a third of their pre-Civil War size.[68]

In this context, the choice to represent indigenous characters and center the settler history of the American nation-state intervened in popular conversations about the place of indigenous

[66] Child, *Boarding School Seasons*; Reyhner, *American Indian Education, 2nd Edition*.
[67] Cited in *An American Indian Development Finance Institution*, 159.
[68] Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*, 228.

peoples in the culture of the United States.[69] By writing indigenous culture into the plot of a popular novel, Hopkins refuted circulating ideas about the closure of the frontier and the 'vanishing Indian.' Hopkins's portrayal of indigenous history amounted to "an early example of an African American activist and writer attempting to represent Native American people and the issues of injustice they faced."[70] While her representations of "Indianness" at times seem "stereotyped and phony," Hopkins's story engaged the problems raised by the presence of indigenous people in ways that move the reader beyond concerns of resuscitation of indigenous voices or representation of indigenous claims.[71] These problems included the devastating moral impact of a culture of white greed and the destruction of land and nature through relations of extraction. To contest and soothe these corruptions, Hopkins valorized an understanding of rightful inheritance as reclamation and cross-cultural belonging, two values that served as a critique of U.S. policy toward indigenous peoples.

Hopkins opens the novel with a description of a multi-racial community near Buffalo, NY that defied the boundaries of nation-state politics and racial categorization. She asserts that the story she is "about to relate" is only one of "[m]any strange tales of romantic happenings" among the "Anglo-Saxon, Indians, and Negroes."[72] The existence of such diverse communities evidence the "sure" advent of "social intercourse" and the future impossibility to "find the dividing line… between whites and the dark-skinned race."[73] Yet Hopkins selects one particular racial group to discuss in detail, the "aborigines" who already began "to scatter" in 1842 under the pressure of government policy. In setting the stage for the novel, Hopkins emphasizes a

[69] Only Ammons, "Afterword: Winona, Bakhtin, and Hopkins in the Twenty-First Century" attends to the importance of this political context in a reading of Winona and even in Ammons, the context is a passing reference.
[70] O'Brien, "All the Land Had Changed," 28–29.
[71] Ammons, "Afterword: Winona, Bakhtin, and Hopkins in the Twenty-First Century," 216.
[72] Hopkins, *Winona*, 287.
[73] Hopkins, 287.

fundamental condition that makes her multi-racial community possible, the decision by some indigenes to remain in place and accept the burdens of partial assimilation. These remaining envoys of indigenous culture have "embraced Christianity," public schooling, and "agricultural pursuits," but retain "their tribal dress" and various customs that enhance the aesthetics of the "lively American city."[74] Hopkins was quick to point out that assimilation is not a lopsided process in this community: "[m]any white men had been adopted into the various tribes" as well.[75] While the remaining indigenes accepted changes in their practices, white men adopted by the tribe—like White Eagle—"conceal[ed] their [original] identities" so as to disappear from white society.[76]

Like Martin Delaney's search for shared experience among the tribes of the Americas and African Americans, Hopkins presents the non-white members of the multiracial community as victims of white practices of governance. As "white settlers" "took up [indigenous] reservations," Indians were displaced.[77] Hopkins attributes this process to white "thirst for power," which stopped short of, but was always in danger of expanding to propel "the curtailment of human liberty."[78] For Hopkins, the removal of indigenous peoples is a necessary condition for the establishment of chattel slavery. Resistance to slavery need not generate resistance to dispossession, however. Though she labels Buffalo "an anti-slavery stronghold," there is no protest to the foundational dispossessions that literally make space for the urban, "cosmopolitan character" of the region.[79]

[74] Hopkins, 287–88.
[75] Hopkins, 288.
[76] Hopkins, 288.
[77] Hopkins, 288.
[78] Hopkins, 288.
[79] Hopkins, 288.

And yet, even without explicit condemnation of the settler processes that set the stage for the novel to commence, Hopkins addresses the value and history of indigenous culture through her racially hybrid characters. Hopkins commits Winona and Judah to a strange in-between racial existence wherein they sometimes appeared as black and sometimes as indigenes. Though they are ultimately enslaved as Africans, Hopkins stages their encounter with the yet-unnamed Colonel Titus and Thomson to mirror the tragedy of the American thanksgiving scene.[80] The two Afro-indigenes feed the hungry white travelers who return the favor by killing their father and simultaneously removing them from their homeland and forcing them into bondage. Hopkins likewise affirms their double-appearance by emphasizing that they "might have been mistaken for an Indian."[81] The hybrid identities of Judah, Winona, and White Eagle enabled Hopkins to question biological understandings of racial difference and address the injustices facing indigenes even in contexts where they have already been rendered invisible or removed from public life.[82]

One way that Hopkins inserts herself into the national discussions of Indian removal in the United States is by defending the power and utility of indigenous forms of knowledge. The hybridization of African and indigenous culture provides Judah with a firm constitution that enables him to survive slavery's abuses. Warren Maxwell, on seeing Judah as a slave for the first time, observes that slavery could not "[contaminate]" Judah because his upbringing among the

[80] Hopkins, 296.
[81] Hopkins, 289. See also when Captain John Brown refers to Winona as "a pretty squaw" upon meeting her, 375.
[82] The performative staging of racial identity mirrors Hopkins's interest in destabilizing gender boundaries. In the case of gender, Hopkins both reveals the surface level passings that are possible and criticizes the domination perpetuated by members of certain groups. For example, Winona reminds herself (and Maxwell) that men "are all the same" in craving the beauty of women and ignoring those who do not assimilate to socially produced expectations of femininity. At the same time, Winona successfully passes as a man to enter the prison and Hopkins portrays the abolitionist women as armed even as they are told to avoid the battle. Hopkins, 407, 412.

Seneca with White Eagle "had planted refinement inbred."[83] The representation of indigenous peoples and ways of life, however, is complicated in *Winona*. At times, Hopkins seems to short-circuit her more valiant portrayals of indigenous life with negative stereotypes that would have been familiar to her readership. Characters refer to morally questionable and violent behavior as "savage."

While some commentators have pointed to these moments in the text as evidence that Hopkins trafficked in the racial prejudices of her day, few have noted the ways that Hopkins treats incidents of anti-indigenous prejudice. Hopkins underscores the pervasiveness of stereotypes and the potential for the internalization of racist norms in her development of Judah. His intimate knowledge of indigenous culture ought to have provided access to a more sympathetic understanding, but he tells a distressed Winona that the white school system will expose "all the silly stories that are told by the Indians."[84] Hopkins presents Judah's animosity in a critical light to expose the ways that non-white subjects can participate in the perpetuation of racial hierarchy. Judah's early dismissal of Indian knowledge appears ironic when read in light of later passages because his access to indigenous knowledge is the very source of expertise that enables him to brave the treacherous escape from slavery and defeat Thomson.[85] As Schock has argued, "Hopkins suggests that performing a culturally learned Indianness can move Blackness outside the definitional and legal structures of White cognizance, and serve as a catalyst for organized civic resistance."[86]

[83] Hopkins, 335.
[84] Hopkins, 292.
[85] Hopkins, 344, 417.
[86] Schock, "Convergent Grounds," 24.

The deployment of the term "savage" has a similar complicated portrayal in the story. When Judah compares his captors to Indians, he notes that the slavers rival "the ferocity of the savage tribes among whom he passed his boyhood."[87] The comparison, far from confirming symmetry between agents of the slavocracy and indigenous warriors, renders a judgment that the violence of the slavers is less justifiable and more disturbing. Judah recognizes that the "personal abuse" of the overseers and slave-breakers drove "smiles from his face," a condition that was unknown in his boyhood living among the Seneca.[88] In effect, Hopkins's story includes the negative stereotypes of the day in part to parody and criticize the defense and circulation of those prejudices. 'Savage' becomes a ground of re-signification in the text wherein the condemnation is almost always directed toward pro-slavery men.[89] Hopkins never offers an example of an indigenous person acting 'savagely.' While scholars have rightfully criticized her for relying on thin conceptions of indigenous culture, the portrayals of indigeneity are nearly always in the service of destabilizing popular fictions of indigenous savagery and backwardness.

The true genius of Hopkins's *Winona* emerges from her use of a western setting and interracial cast of characters to comment on ideas and cultures that drove the final major phase of 'Indian Removal' in the United States. One way to read the novel from the perspective of the land question is to interpret Winona and Judah's transition from an indigenous form of life without property rights in any land toward a condition of propertied nobility as a success of the civilizing creed. In this light, the novel appears to "reiterate empire's script" with the heroes claiming the "spoils of empire" at the conclusion of the story.[90] The ever-growing investment in

[87] Hopkins, *Winona*, 320.
[88] Hopkins, 320.
[89] Such as when the Parson labels the shouts of the Missouri militiamen as "savage cries." Hopkins, 350.
[90] Ammons, "Afterword: Winona, Bakhtin, and Hopkins in the Twenty-First Century," 215.

surveying and controlling land as the characters move from their nationless, stateless island to the plantation of Missouri and the fields of Kansas could read as either a worthwhile or worrying progression from an indigenous way of life into a settler, 'civilized' condition.

I find this imperial reading of *Winona* flawed for three main reasons. First, the imperial reading overlooks the abolitionists' complicated relationship to the land in Kansas. Though Hopkins mentions that some abolitionists have settled in the west to establish permanent land holdings, she valorizes John Brown's abolitionist camp, a group of freedom fighters who roam the western United States confronting enslavers and moving freed slaves across the United States' border with Canada. Second, *Winona* encourages a pessimism about using state authority to uproot slavery and establish African American freedom that casts doubt on the institutions of local or federal governments to legislate and execute just laws. Finally, I rethink *Winona*'s relationship to the genre of the Western adventure novel to highlight how Hopkins subverts the literary standards of the western to undermine tropes associated with western settlement. Taken together, Hopkins's literary foray into the themes and tropes of a western adventure novel acts as a rejection of the industrial selfishness that Dawes thought was central to taming and assimilating indigenous peoples.

Hopkins's presentation of the abolitionist westerners includes a complicated relationship to land that resists characterizing them solely as settlers in search of property. Mr. Maybee—friend of Judah and Winona—does admit to Warren that he "took up a claim" in Kansas shortly after the two African indigenes were captured.[91] That experiment in counter-settling the West was short lived as pro-slavery Missourians "burnt" his shack to the ground and commandeered

[91] Hopkins, *Winona*, 338.

his livestock.[92] Mr. Maybee's brief foray into land holding in the West, however, encapsulates the extent of Hopkins's portrayal of abolition as a political project that entails claiming property in land. In contrast to the pro-slavery attempt to take Kansas by force, Captain John Brown's forces are presented as nomadic, always on the move. Warren Maxwell's first encounter with the abolitionist collective underscores this important characteristic. He notes that the rank and file disliked their drawn-out encampment, stating "[t]he Brown men were restless because of enforced inactivity…"[93] This representation of abolition figures the political organization as a *de-territorialized* unit and refuses to transpose the struggles against slavery as a struggle for territory, an imagination that marked the historical Free Soil antebellum movement.

Instead of resuscitating the earlier, Free Soil, vision of freedom as a battle for territory and control of state institutions, Hopkins draws attention to the principles that the abolitionists seek to realize—mainly a form of liberty that does not depend upon human bondage. Enacting that vision is not conditional on holding territory and controlling land so much as it is conditional on the ability to traverse space and chase away agents and forces that aim to dominate both the land and their fellow human beings. Captain John Brown affirms the guerilla nature of his political strategy when he tells Warren that he will soon leave Kansas to organize a slave insurrection in the East.[94] Such an insurrection, in Brown's estimation, would "settle the question of slavery" once and for all through moral inspiration, not state policy.[95] Toward the end of the novel, when federal troops arrive at the former battle scene to arrest the abolitionist forces, Brown's band of abolitionists have all fled. Hopkins depicts their presence on the land as a

[92] Hopkins, 338.
[93] Hopkins, 399.
[94] Hopkins, 400.
[95] Hopkins, 400.

benign relationship that neither harms the land nor transforms it in an exploitative manner: "Where the Rangers [pro-slavery] had paid the penalty of their crimes against the farmers of Kansas, the grass covered the sod as if it had never been disfigured or stained."[96]

The de-territorialized representation of the abolitionists raises the question of the extent of their engagement with political institutions. If the abolitionists are merely a militia established to root out the institution of human bondage wherever it crops up, do they seek to eradicate slavery with the force of the United States government? Does abolition rely on the capture of state institutions to do the work of emancipating slaves and ensuring their condition as free persons? Such an entanglement would re-establish abolition as a project that aims to enact and execute rules and laws across a given space or territory—an aspiration that could rejoin abolition to settler practices or at least provide moral authority to institutions equally bent on eradicating indigenous peoples. Yet, here again, Hopkins—displaying a pessimism about the use of state power to enact and institute freedom for African Americans—gives the reader few positive representations of agents or institutions of the state.

Hopkins aligns state-based institutions with the pro-slavery men. The territorial militia, local court, and prison keeper are the major representations of state authority and all participate in the capture and confinement of Maxwell. Similarly, the federal government is invoked by characters as an impotent or unjust seat of authority.[97] Lying on his deathbed, Thomson experiences a change of heart and tells the abolitionists to continue their flight from United States territory, warning them that a "big Government force" will be "after you inside a week."[98] Moreover, Hopkins portrays the abolitionist style of fighting as unlike the regimented rule-bound

[96] Hopkins, 430.
[97] Hopkins, 351.
[98] Hopkins, 429.

practices of state violence. The abolitionists' final stand against the forces of enslavement on the battlefield appears not as the orderly vanquishing of a foe and the clean conclusion of victory with state-sanctioned imprisonment for criminals, but rather "pandemonium on earth" and segmented chases to capture leaders and bring them to justice as the pursuer sees fit.[99] These pursuers of justice act not in the name of country or state, but out of a loyalty to the principle of liberty. After Maxwell kills the first man in battle, he thinks not of America, the Union, or his native Britain. Instead, his killing of a pro-slavery man embodies a broader struggle for freedom from confinement as he remembers "only the sufferings he had endured in the dreadful time of imprisonment."[100]

Beyond de-coupling abolition from political projects invested in territorial expansion and acquisition, Hopkins proposes abolition as having a sensitivity to the natural world. *Winona* is not a typical narration of man versus nature, but rather a people in harmony with nature against a group of men that promote greed, violence, and extraction. In one of the most moving passages of the novel, Winona, recently freed, reflects on how emancipation has transformed her eyes, attesting to the fact that "all the land had changed."[101] The passage insinuates that slaves are taught to relate to the land in a narrow, extractive way. As a free person, Winona could now choose to relate to land differently, most prominently to enjoy the beauty of the natural world as she had done growing up among the Seneca. With this reorientation, Winona finds a cave that becomes integral to the military success of the abolitionists. Judah's skill in engaging and traversing the land (characterizations that are associated with his upbringing) also point to relations outside of those entailed by productive extraction. He overcomes Thomson on the cliffs

[99] Hopkins, 411.
[100] Hopkins, 412.
[101] Hopkins, 375.

because of his swift footwork. Once cornered, Judah shares the act of killing Thomson with nature, commanding Thomson to jump to his death and die on rocks below or receive a bullet from Judah's gun.[102] This feature of the abolitionist attunement to and care for the natural world arises from the hybrid cultural commitments of the main characters and reaffirms that Hopkins sought to impress upon the reader the value of recapturing indigenous knowledge to contest exhaustive profiteering.

Finally, Hopkins challenges a settler or imperial narrative through her refurbishment of the genre of the Western adventure novel. As Hazel Carby has argued, Hopkins's magazine novels are indebted to previous literary cultures that span genres.[103] One major point of reference for Hopkins's *Winona* was the American Western.[104] Though Hopkins clearly appropriates the commonplace setting of the western, she reformulates some of the major conventions of that genre. Aaron Carico characterizes the Western as a story that "projects a fantasy of law and order across space (sovereignty, settlement) and time (historical progress, patrilineal inheritance)" and "battles chaos and anomie at every turn."[105] Hopkins reworks these defining features in several ways. First, the hero of the story is not a "literal embodiment of sovereignty, a lawman."[106] On one account Maxwell could be selected as a hero with similar qualifications. He is a lawyer but lacks status or authority in his firm. Additionally, his English heritage prevents him from identifying with the state and he is often more the subject of American legal orders than the executer. Judah and Winona properly share the title of hero, but neither claims sovereign power

[102] Hopkins, 416.
[103] Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 145.
[104] The now renown "father" of the modern American Western, Owen Wister, released his first novel in 1902, the same year that Hopkins published Winona. In his bestseller *The Virginian*, Wister "articulated a new and urgent literary vision of masculine potency and conquest in the face of perceived cultural 'effeminacy.'" Will, "The Nervous Origins of the American Western," 294.
[105] Carico, "Cowboys & Slaves," 53.
[106] Carico, 53.

to enact their will and emerge victorious. Furthermore, by choosing African Americans with indigenous cultural commitments, Hopkins turns the trope of the law and order (white) cowboy on its head. Neither character remains in the west to assume control of new lands and enjoy newfound material wealth. And even hard-headed Judah recognizes the limits of his own authority, turning to Winona for ethical guidance on the killing of Thomson and ultimately choosing to follow Winona and Maxwell to England to "share prosperity as [they had] shared adversity."[107]

The sharing of prosperity emphasizes Hopkins's aim to refute the greedy, unsustainable, and expansionist impulses of Colonel Titus in the triumph of Winona and Judah. Their enjoyment of "honors and wealth" at the conclusion of the story is not meant to sanction the reckless pursuit of material possessions and confirm an inherent morality of land holding, but rather to valorize rightful inheritance and the return to one's homeland.[108] These 'spoils' of adventure do not represent the outcomes of the unjust conquest of lands and expropriation of labor that have been won through force and domination. Instead, they represent the justness of reclamation and celebrate the power of cross-cultural solidarity. Hopkins invites readers to identify with indigenous persons via White Eagle, to understand that dispossession is an experience under industrial, global capitalism that threatens to undo the bounties of labor and work that testify to our freedom. A foundational dispossession stands both at the heart of the novel and the heart of American fictions about our own national identity. That resonance cannot go overlooked. Perhaps in Winona and Judah's rightful reclamation of inheritance Hopkins was imagining another rightful inheritance returned, one on a much grander scale. If this was one of

[107] Hopkins, *Winona*, 434.
[108] Hopkins, 435.

Hopkins's "didactic [intentions]," she never explicitly made the case for indigenous reclamation.[109] Even without an explicit defense, her novel's critiques of greed, acquisition, and domination challenge the desires at the center of settler colonial culture in the United States.

**Conclusion: An Anti-Settler Romance and a Tragic Other**

Reading Pauline Hopkins's 1902 novel as an intervention in discourses about freedom, abolition, and settler colonialism draws attention to the transformations in the problem-space of the nineteenth century African American public sphere. Earlier antebellum discussions of violent insurrection against the American state fell out of favor as Reconstruction Era reforms appeared to make space for African American participation in the social and political life of the nation. While the alternative of building a black state persisted into the twentieth century, Douglass's vision of African American citizenship in a multi-racial republic came to dominate late nineteenth century aspirations of African American freedom.[110] Hopkins transposed the terms of this debate. The characters in *Winona* refuse both Delaney's and Douglass's ideas of freedom. Neither conscripted as citizens of the American nation nor radicalized as rebels against the American state, Judah and Winona return to the United Kingdom as black heirs of a historically white family's estate. In this return to the metropole, Hopkins flirts with a radical reworking of the colonial literary imagination. However, her innovative engagement with elements of the colonial adventure story remains wedded to a romantic narrative emplotment that obscures as much as it confronts the political dilemmas of practicing freedom in a settler nation. I briefly consider the limitations of Hopkins's vision of freedom.

[109] Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 145.

[110] The rising alternative to Douglass's vision was not an African American rebellion against the American state but rather the acceptance of a second-class form of attenuated citizenship and segregated economic development as endorsed by Booker T. Washington.

Pauline Hopkins's *Winona* challenges the classic colonial narrative forms by concluding with the characters' removal from the settler society. As Lorenzo Veracini has argued, readers can distinguish between colonial and settler colonial storytelling by the narrative form that shapes the action of the novel. Whereas colonial narratives have a "circular form" where characters move outwards to interact with exotic and colonized others in foreign surroundings and subsequently return to the original locale, settler colonial narratives resemble the Aeneid where adventurers move forward "along a story line that can't be turned back."[111] *Winona* confounds expectations about the colonial adventure novel because the characters neither return to their original home nor do they advance toward a grounded freedom in the western United States after defeating the pro-slavery forces. Their self-removal to England, far from representing a return—which implies 'having been already,' impresses on the reader a moment of reclamation where the characters emerge in the imperializing nation as strangers demanding recompense for something stolen. Their enjoyment of those privileges—like Judah's slaying of Thomson—is presented as just, considering their own histories of enslavement and dispossession.

And yet, even as Hopkins innovatively disrupts expectations about the interests and movement of the characters, her investment in narrating the story as a romance narrows the field of possibilities available for imagining practices of justice given the history of settler colonial violence and theft. Hopkins declares at the outset that she is telling a story of "romantic happenings" and the narrative mirrors the emplotment strategy of a romance. Hayden White defines the genre of romance as:

> "…fundamentally a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it—the sort of drama associated with the Grail legend or the story of the resurrection of Christ in Christian mythology. It is a triumph of good over evil, virtue over vice, of light over darkness, and of the ultimate transcendence of man over the world in which he was imprisoned by the Fall."[112]

[111] Veracini, "Telling the End of the Settler Colonial Story," 205.
[112] White, *Metahistory*, 8–9.

Pauline Hopkins's political orientation, particularly her interest in abolitionist politics, produced a hopeful assessment of what was possible in a world defined by chaos, injustice, and domination. In *Winona* as in her other stories, Hopkins presents characters as agents who learn to overcome personal obstacles and defy structural systems of oppression to find a robust form of political and social freedom. Her characters achieve mastery of the world, enabling conclusions that gesture toward unrealized possibilities made imaginable by the triumph of the individual characters. Readers are left hopeful that, though the war is not won, the 'battlefield successes' of the novel portend an ultimate, just victory.

In the concrete realities of the early twentieth century, however, Hopkins's optimism appears somewhat delusional, if not dangerously out-of-sync with the policies of elimination and removal that pressed down upon indigenous peoples. Hopkins responded to the tense interracial conflicts generated by the land question with an imagination of African American removal that was impractical and controversial. Judah and Winona need not implicate themselves in settler practices because they have an escape route, a way of securing a home outside of the nation. In effect, they avoid engaging in the settling acts that conclude most settler colonial adventure novels by assimilating into another European culture. To avoid aspiring to a kind of citizenship that required the territorial expansion of the American nation, Judah and Winona fashion ties of belonging in another (European) nation. Moreover, as a wide-scale effort to enable African Americans to establish communities in the post-emancipation period, collective self-removal constituted a cession to white rule in the United States that threatened global communities of black people, not to mention silence on the problem of white American expansion on the continent.

Following the elements of a romance, the novel establishes a linear mode of plotting from the past to the future that disappears the anti-indigenous violence and domination with which Hopkins begins. While the characters eschew a citizenship forged in the dispossession of indigenous peoples, the story culminates in the celebration of their individual successes. Though Judah and Winona are representative of multiple layers of racialized experiences, their movement from nationless island to plantation marks them as Africans. By the end of the story, their indigenous characteristics and commitments have all but faded. Instead of rejoining the Seneca people, Judah and Winona leave the continent forever. From this perspective, Hopkins offers the reader guidance on avoiding settler entanglements more than she provides strategies for fashioning solidarity with indigenous peoples. Given the sidelining of indigenous claims, we might say that the romance divides the world into more than romance's two usual sides, good and evil. Indigenous peoples occupy a third space, one in which triumph and transcendence are never a possibility even as those characters aid and abet the agents of virtue.

Hopkins composed an anti-settler romance that creatively reworked the colonial tropes and elements of narration that captured many of her contemporaries, but her commitment to a progressive, linear narrative structure ultimately stifled its critical potential. Unsatisfied with the "provisional release" from the conditions of the world and subsequent "gain in consciousness… of the laws governing human existence" that tragedy offers, Hopkins firmly concluded with a celebration of her black characters' triumphs and the optimistic view that one can find freedom after oppression.[113] Her literary disposition was much needed in the Jim Crow era of intensifying anti-black oppression. There were, however, costs involved in this choice of emplotment. Rather than acknowledge the deteriorating situation of indigenous peoples who could not rely on the

[113] White, *Metahistory*, 9.

historical anticipation of a future political freedom within a European nation, Hopkins remained silent about their prospects. To kindle the fires of African American political hope, Hopkins hid the unfolding tragedy of American settler colonialism under the romance of African American freedom. Such a gamble emphasized that African American freedom was not a predetermined outcome of the status quo, but it also foreclosed the possibility of making African American freedom responsive to the demands of indigenous peoples.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### W.E.B. Du Bois's Vision of the Black Cooperative Nation

"Here then [cooperation] is the economic ladder by which the American Negro, achieving new social institutions, can move pari passu with the modern world into a new heaven and a new earth."[1]

In 1946, the scholar and activist W.E.B. Du Bois ruminated on what achievements were necessary to secure black freedom at the closing session of the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC). Known as "Behold the Land," the speech functioned as a rallying cry for a new generation of black and white youth leaders, imploring the audience to understand the fight for racial justice as a battle for control of Southern soil. Speaking against calls for resistance by moving North, Du Bois argued that black people must remain in the South and win their emancipation through protracted political struggle. Du Bois spoke of the shame of "[surrendering] this glorious land" and entreated his audience to rescue and restore it.[2] The land was important for its productive potential and the resources that it could muster, but it was also worthy of saving for the psychic and historical meaning that it held. Harkening back to his depiction of the degradation of Southern land in *Souls*, Du Bois argued that economic monopoly, profiteering, and lynching enslaved the Southern people as well as desecrated the sacred potential of the land. Paraphrasing Deuteronomy 1:21, Du Bois cast the audience as the people of Israel and himself as Moses: "Behold the beautiful land which the Lord thy God hath given thee."[3] To claim the land, Du Bois argued, was to confront and oppose the forces of racial prejudice and economic domination that pervaded Southern life.

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[1] Du Bois, "W. E. B. Du Bois," 715.
[2] Du Bois, "Behold the Land," 13.
[3] Du Bois, 13 The comparison to Deuteronomy is worth considering for its rhetorical power. Like the Exodus generation of Isrealites, the ancestors of the audience members were unable to enter and claim the promise land. Deuteronomy consists of a series of speeches by Moses that call on the new generation to uphold the covenant with God.

These thoughts reflect the complicated but persisting importance of land in twentieth-century visions of African American freedom. Du Bois frequently figured the nineteenth-century abolitionist land reform movement as responding to a particular kind of economic domination that awaited freed people in their newfound condition. In *Black Reconstruction in America,* Du Bois considered the contest over land ownership in the early Reconstruction period to be representative of a broader struggle for economic power. Without a land guarantee to freed people, Du Bois argued that the racial domination of the former slave system could be rearticulated in the terms of a new racialized political economy. This portrait of Reconstruction history enabled Du Bois to generalize the failure to redistribute land as a failure to democratize capital. And yet, Du Bois's insistence on the psychic value of reclaiming Southern land in his 1946 speech preserved the idea that land could not be reduced to an antiquated and ineffective means to protect against modern capitalist domination. Du Bois provided one of the most sophisticated analyses of African American unfreedom in the first half of the twentieth-century and conserved land as a site of ongoing racial domination albeit in new registers. Du Bois extended the idea of grounded freedom by suggesting that cooperative ownership was the only way to break the structures of neo-dependency that marked the post-emancipation order.

In the first section of the paper, I offer a series of readings that flesh out Du Bois's understanding of black unfreedom and its connection to the land question. With a close reading of *Black Reconstruction in America*, I demonstrate that Du Bois understood the refusal to redistribute land during Reconstruction as the necessary condition for the construction of a new capitalist regime and new forms of domination. This reading proceeds in three parts and requires additional texts to draw out the features of Du Bois's analysis. First, Du Bois presented land ownership as part of a nineteenth-century agrarian vision of freedom that promised limited white

political mobility through processes of indigenous dispossession and white resettlement. Second, the labor practices of that economic order corresponded to an ideological constellation known in his writings as the "American Assumption," the "philosophy of industry and life," or the "Bourgeois Mind." Together these monikers designated an ideology that prioritized wealth accumulation over other activities of life, sought profit in all human affairs, and proliferated a psychology of atomized individualism. Finally, Du Bois suggested that freedom for black people in the United States would require a project of undermining the American Assumption and experimenting with new practices of consumption and production that could rejuvenate American political and economic culture.

In the second section of the paper, I reconstruct Du Bois's positive program of economic transformation to analyze how Du Bois understood the operation of *racialized* economic domination and what prescriptions might combat it. Du Bois—a seasoned historian of the Reconstruction Era—did not refurbish Stevens's plan for redistribution or T. Thomas Fortune's hope for the public ownership of all land. Instead, he turned to the cooperative movement for inspiration on how black Americans might establish democratic values in industry and politics. While there is a growing scholarship on Du Bois's economic thought, his relationship to Marxist debates, and his critique of racial capitalism, few scholars connect all of these elements to Du Bois's reflections on the shortcomings of the abolitionist movement or articulate exactly how Du Bois theorized economic domination as a political problem facing interracial democracies.[4] This chapter begins to sketch these aspects of Du Bois's thought as well as to introduce the politics of the black cooperative movement in the United States with often overlooked archival materials.

[4] Reed, Jr., *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought*; Singh, *Black Is a Country*; Douglas, *W. E. B. Du Bois and the Critique of the Competitive Society*.

I conclude by reading Du Bois's 1946 speech. "Behold the Land" underscores the enduring centrality of land ownership in the struggle against white domination in the twentieth century and explain why land persisted as a theme in black freedom dreams. While Du Bois recognized that land ownership practices could not resist the myriad forms of economic domination present in modern capitalist societies, he argued that collective control of Southern land made possible a kind of psychic freedom for Black Americans. Reclaiming a relationship to Southern land amounted to the reclamation of a Black homeland and the development of a place for peoples of all races.

## Part 1: Land Ownership and the New Capitalist Regime in *Black Reconstruction in America*

> This [power concentration by a trusteeship of capital] was not a petty bourgeois development, following the overthrow of agrarian feudalism in the South. It was, on the contrary, a new feudalism based on monopoly…"
>
> --*Black Reconstruction in America* (1935)[5]

Though much of the discipline disagreed with its conclusions at the time of its publication in 1935, *Black Reconstruction in America* has become a touchstone text in historical research on the nineteenth-century United States. By reinterpreting the sources of earlier, conservative historians of the Dunning School, Du Bois challenged prevailing narratives that merely affirmed the race pessimism of his day, making space for a new era of progressive Reconstruction scholars.[6] The countless references to Du Bois's account of the post-Civil War United States in the prefaces of Reconstruction scholarship over the past thirty years evidences Du Bois's success in shaping the form and substance of scholarly reflection on the period that he famously called "a splendid failure."

[5] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, 583–84.
[6] Eric Foner and Thomas Holt have worked to center Du Bois as the forbear of the post-Civil Rights school of progressive history. See, for example: Foner, *Reconstruction*, xix; Holt, "Political History."

While there is widespread acceptance of Du Bois's influence on the field of Reconstruction historiography and an interest in the politics of the writing, fewer scholars interrogate the theoretical claims of the text. Du Bois sought to intervene in the interpretive debates of his day, particularly in a way that could break the stranglehold achieved by historical narratives that took Reconstruction to represent the impossibility of interracial self-rule. Less clear from the current historiographical literature, however, is how Du Bois's alternative narrative prefigured his own political present in the events of the past. Part of the difficulty in assessing this second question results from the disproportionate attention granted to his works that explicitly intervened in the historiographical debate. Scholars today understand *Black Reconstruction* to be a culmination of the research begun in his 1901 article for *Atlantic Monthly*, "The Freedman's Bureau" or his later piece, "Reconstruction and its Benefits," which was first presented at the 1909 meeting of the American Historical Association. Both articles recover the radical political changes that marked the postwar period and argue for their limited successes—two aims that seem to support a reading of *Black Reconstruction* as a response to mainstream versions of Reconstruction in the early twentieth century.[7]

The events that precipitated Du Bois's decision to complete an extended history of the Reconstruction Era are not entirely clear. In his masterful biography of Du Bois, David Levering Lewis touts Du Bois's failure to publish his entry, "the Negro in the United States," for the

[7] I contend that Du Bois found more than historiographic disagreements when he turned to the past and *Black Reconstruction* reflects the breadth of those discoveries. Beyond his thorough dismay over the racial pessimism of the Dunning School, Du Bois returned to Reconstruction events again and again in order to analyze the limits of the emancipation moment, to understand why the legal abolition of bondage did not secure the necessary conditions of political freedom for black Americans. This question dates to at least 1911 when Du Bois presented a paper at a meeting of the Sociological Society in London that eventually found a wider audience as "The Economics of Negro Emancipation" in the October edition of *The Sociological Review*. "The Economics of Negro Emancipation" was a formative expression of Du Bois's evolving desire to understand the postwar moment. In that article, Du Bois posed the question of why the Freedman's Bureau could not resist the formation of a new racialized feudal order in the wake of the Civil War.

*Encyclopedia Britannica* and the release of Southern apologist Claude G. Bower's *The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln* as motivating factors in his decision to write *Black Reconstruction in America*[8]. Both events caused aggravation for Du Bois, but they did not represent sudden changes in the white dominated academic and publishing worlds. The Dunning School of historiography all but monopolized the publication of Civil War and Reconstruction histories well before the Depression Era. And the suspicion on the part of white scholars and publishers toward racially progressive interpretations of Reconstruction history echoed Du Bois's unfavorable reception at the American Historical Association meeting in 1909. Since the publication of *Souls*, Du Bois remained interested in the interpretation of the events of Reconstruction and denounced how the white academy portrayed the agency and struggle of slaves and freedpeople.

I argue that a less commonly discussed motivation for writing *Black Reconstruction*, the disastrous economic downturn that became the Great Depression, ought to be considered. The suffering and destitution brought on by the economic implosion reminded Du Bois of the misery instituted in the South after the Compromise of 1876. In several articles in the 1930s, Du Bois criticized the New Deal program with reference to the events of Reconstruction.[9] Du Bois believed that to understand Reconstruction's failure was to understand the construction of the political and economic *regime* that ushered in the Great Depression. *Black Reconstruction* constituted more than a revision to the Dunning School of historiography. It also embodied Du Bois's quest to understand the political economic formation that limited black freedom in his own present.

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[8] Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois, 1919-1963*, 951–55.

[9] These include "A Negro Nation within The Nation" (1935), "Social Planning for the Negro, Past and Present" (1936), and "Federal Action Programs and Community Action in the South" (1941).

*Black Reconstruction* (hereafter BR) provided an origin story much like the origin story alluded to in the opening pages of Du Bois's later work, *Dusk of Dawn*. The Reconstruction period witnessed the initial movement of black Americans into the political life of the nation and the establishment of an interracial democracy, rule by black and white, yet unseen in the modern world. That initial attempt to build interracial participation in self-rule threatened white control of politics and spooked Americans North and South who were disdainful of political equality between the races. While the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments guaranteed a nominal political enfranchisement to black male citizens, Southerners could turn to modes of economic domination to quell the enthusiastic rush of freedpeople into the voting booth and beyond. In a bid to dismantle the political and social changes made during the period, white Americans had to concoct a way to press the formerly enslaved "back toward slavery." It was in this effort that older ideas about political fitness had to be refashioned so that new forms of economic domination might produce the conditions necessary for not just exploitation and private suffering, but *political* and *civil death*.

I argue that *Black Reconstruction in America* demonstrates how the freedpeople's demand for land forced the collapse of the critical political alignment between Northern capital and the proponents of abolition democracy. I focus on Du Bois's deployment of "the American Assumption" as an ideological condition that stymied efforts to achieve economic emancipation for the freedpeople. BR positioned black land ownership as a particular instantiation of a broader struggle for economic freedom of the worker in the United States. The American Assumption, according to Du Bois, represented an ideology that displaced political concerns by asserting the primacy of wealth acquisition for all classes of Americans and obfuscated the realities of economic exploitation. Thus, Reconstruction Era Americans not only witnessed the failure to

institute material freedom for the laborer of the South, but also the emergence of an ideological constellation that forestalled the possibility of instituting an industrial democracy well into the Depression Era. Democracy died during Reconstruction in Du Bois's account because Northern capital refused to provide the freedpeople with material power and access to capital, and instead initiated a counter-revolution that not only disenfranchised the black worker but also inaugurated economic practices impervious to democratic control.

*A. Free Labor Ideology and the Land Question in Black Reconstruction*

Du Bois narrated the events of the period with land ownership as the final frontier of the abolitionist coalitions' attempt to inoculate the nation against the last diseases of slavery and avert its reemergence. Given his analysis of how the promise of land ownership maintained political cohesion among white citizens through economic mobility and solidified a collective white identity as owners of the Earth, the effort to expand access to land destabilized the image of the American citizen as a white propertied man. More importantly, economic security for the new citizens would have denied the planter class a myriad of ways in which they could effectively constrain and control the political power of the new laboring class through onerous employment contracts, the threat of depressed wages, or ownership of their conditions of existence. The demand for land and its proponents attention to how economic domination could fuel political disenfranchisement *endangered* the power of the old ruling class and its dream of a new racialized feudalism. Du Bois highlighted how land ownership was the feature of white citizenship that the nation could not endure to universalize.

In the opening pages of BR, Du Bois presented land ownership as the ultimate desire of white laborers during the first half of the nineteenth century. According to Du Bois, white workers "wanted a chance to become capitalists," a desire that arose from the "early American

doctrine of wealth and property."[10] The existence of black slave labor and the competition of unskilled black workers threatened the ability of the white laborer to accumulate wealth. Violent collisions erupted between the white and black working classes in the antebellum North as white workers unleashed their fury, resulting from the failure to realize the promises of American ideas about wealth acquisition, on black workers. Government-sanctioned removal of indigenous peoples on the western frontier briefly defused the tension between workers white and black: "plenty of land, rich land, land coming daily nearer its own markets, to which the worker could retreat and restore the industrial balance ruined in Europe by the expropriation of the worker from the soil."[11] The free black worker remained in the industrial shops of the city, while white immigrants from Europe augmented the labor supply. The latter group was offered an escape route from waged employment by way of land access in the West. Land ownership represented freedom for the white worker as it released the worker from the employer-employee relation and enabled him to self-regulate the conditions of his employment.

Although Du Bois argued that the "crisis" of the Civil War arrived in 1860 "not so much because Abraham Lincoln was elected President on a platform which refused further land for the expansion of slavery," his narration of the events leading up to the war suggested otherwise. Clearly, the white worker accepted the slave system of the South so long as it did not disrupt his access to land in the West. The planter, on the other hand, experienced the rise of industrial power in the North through fear and anger. In order to combat the growing power of Northern industry, the planter class in the South also had to secure ever-growing profits, a gambit with two paths forward: "One method called for more land and the other for more slaves."[12] The latter

[10] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, 18.
[11] Du Bois, 19; For a critique of Du Bois's silence on "the story of land" and indigenous dispossession see: Bruyneel, *Settler Memory*, 45–75.
[12] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, 41.

method ultimately failed because "the price of slaves… was gradually rising."[13] Therefore, the planters of the South searched for "new, rich land upon which ordinary slave labor would bring adequate return."[14] It was the pursuit of land access in the territories and beyond that inspired the dreams of empire in the South and convinced the planter class to wield their political power against the industrial interests of the North.[15] While the free soil ethos of the Lincoln platform was not the main cause of war according to Du Bois, his account maintained that it was a necessary condition. Even the evidence that Du Bois cited to support his cotton production thesis for precipitating the war pointed in the direction of land interests. Ficklen unpacked Southern "orthodoxy" to find a "suspicion of heresy" that targeted "the doctrine of 'Squatter Sovereignty'" and insisted upon "Federal protection of slavery in the territories."[16] The political success of Northern industry in the election of 1860 spelled disaster for the slave power. "And so war came."[17]

For Du Bois, it was unsurprising that freed slaves, after their self-emancipation and migration to Union military camps, demanded their own land. White laborers of the North had long touted free-soil ideas as the alternative to industrial arrangements of waged work in cities. Not to mention, the towns and cities of the South were vastly underdeveloped to accommodate such a massive expansion of the working classes. Any waged work would be primarily agricultural. As far as agricultural production went, freedpeople associated work on a plantation—regardless of the payment structure—with their existence under the slave regime. Freed slaves "wanted to see and own the results of their toil"—a privilege that was largely

[13] Du Bois, 41.
[14] Du Bois, 41.
[15] The Compromise of 1850 and subsequent "Bleeding Kansas" incident demonstrated the imperfect political power of the Southern Congressmen. Du Bois, 47.
[16] Du Bois, 48.
[17] Du Bois, 55.

denied them during slavery.[18] Beyond this straightforward reaction to the economic realities of the nineteenth-century Southern United States, the demand for land represented a more general claim about the broader conditions of production into which the slave was thrust. Du Bois, in delineating the meaning of the "general strike," contended that freed slaves desired land in relation to their "strike on a wide basis against the conditions of work."[19] Later in the history the broader meaning of the claim for land surfaced to the detriment of the abolitionist platform.

In the first few chapters of BR, Du Bois established land as the motivating factor in the nation's descent into civil war. White laborers came to expect access to land ownership during a single lifetime in order to accept the short-term conditions of waged employment in the increasingly industrial economy. The push to exclude slavery from the western territories resulted from white fears that the safety valve on industrial employment—access to land—would close under pressure from the ever-expanding Empire of Cotton. What white labor and white capital did not expect North or South was the emergence of the black laborer as an active participant in the struggle. The general strike deprived the planter class of their economic might and augmented Union forces, enabling victory. Already in these early chapters Du Bois suggested that there were ideas at play, ideas about wealth acquisition and its priority among the activities of humankind, which animated the white laborer's quest to join the capitalist class. These ideas appeared democratic when they compelled the white laborer to abhor economic arrangements in which he had no control over production or its outcome, but his disapprobation misapprehended the growing problem in industry. The white laborer dreamed that one day he would himself own capital and assume control over the labor of others. This protest against the

[18] Du Bois, 67.

[19] This interpretive move—from understanding the flight and refusals of freed slaves as a strike against work generally to a protest the conditions or arrangement of the work—is further evidenced in the freed people's rejection of General Banks' plan of forced work on the plantations under military control according to Du Bois, 67–68.

system of waged work was unlike the protest of the freed slave against the planation system. The differences between the protests of labor North and South, black and white, would become starker as the political questions of Reconstruction unfolded and each group's varying degree of attachment to the American Assumption, what Du Bois took to be defining ideological tenet of the era, became visible.

*B. The Apotheosis of the "American Assumption"*

Like his invocation of the "philosophy of industry and life" that naturalized an aristocracy founded on exploitation in the Jim Crow Era South, the American Assumption structured, conditioned, and regulated the political efforts to contest or control economic development in the postwar period.[20] Du Bois first articulated the problem of the American Assumption in his chapter "Looking Forward," which narrated the reaction of Northern interest groups to the Southern attempt to restore the prewar political order. It was this set of ideas that narrowed the imaginaries of the period and enabled the victory of Northern capital in the political arena. In brief, the American Assumption was the constellation of ideas that jointly stated, "wealth is mainly the result of its owner's effort and that any average worker can by thrift become a capitalist."[21] Though it was an assumption, and therefore did not rely on empirical evidence to sustain its truth, this idea "was more nearly true in America from 1820 to 1860" than in any other time or place.[22] With the "opening of the West," the white laborer could "by thrift and saving" accumulate enough wealth to buy land and become "a small capitalist" or even "a

[20] Du Bois used the phrase, "the philosophy of industry and life," in his 1911 lecture turned article, "The Economics of Negro Emancipation." I provide a reading of that piece in Part 1, Section C .
[21] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, 183.
[22] Du Bois, 183.

rich man."[23] Confident in his newfound economic mobility, the white laborer understood his success as an effect of his own striving.

Meanwhile, industrial leaders endorsed the Assumption for its potential to justify their "wealth" and "power."[24] The wartime demand for new goods began "a vast economic development" and "[b]ehind this extraordinary development" lay the American Assumption. Du Bois showed how the material transformations of Northern industry—"a vast organization for production, new supplies of raw material, a growing transportation system on land and water, and a new technical knowledge of processes"—resulted in the apotheosis of the idea that wealth accumulation was prior to any other human project: "The whole moral fabric of the country was changed, not simply by the blood and cruelty, hate and destruction, of war, but by the prospects of a golden future."[25] The American Assumption, then, acted as both an instigator of the wealth-seeking, power-concentrating impulses in American economic life and an eventual justification for the disparagement of the democratic ideals that obstructed the pursuit of those goals.

Across the dense history of the Reconstruction Era, Du Bois exposed how each political-economic coalition permitted, cajoled, or contested the rise of the American Assumption. For Du Bois, the most significant engagement with the Assumption occurred within the coalition that was pressing for abolition democracy. Led by Charles Sumner, Wendell Philips, and Thaddeus Stevens, the abolition democrats pushed the nation toward an "extension of the realization of democracy."[26] Their fight to achieve real emancipation for the slaves of the South culminated in three positions: universal manhood suffrage, universal public education, and a capital guarantee

[23] Du Bois, 183.
[24] Du Bois, 182.
[25] Du Bois, 581; 210–11.
[26] Though these men belonged to the alliance known as abolition democracy in Du Bois's account, they were members of the radical wing of the Republican Party. Du Bois, 189.

to the freedpeople.[27] A strategic alliance with Northern capital, whose economic interests were under threat from the possibility of the South's reentrance into national politics after the war, coalesced behind suffrage for black men.[28] Education for the working class, though never supported by federal legislation, was the greatest success of the period according to Du Bois because philanthropic efforts and short term support by state governments produced an educational infrastructure that survived the curtailing of the franchise and the collapse of Reconstruction policy.[29] The issue of capital for the freed slaves took the form of claims for the redistribution of land. A fissure in the abolition democracy coalition appeared.

Du Bois singled out the capital guarantee to freedpeople as the most glaring path-not-taken of the period. This interpretation rested on a claim about the character of industrial democracy. Suffrage and education alone would not arm the worker with the necessary power to contest the authority of the rising industrial class in the North. Deploying the American Assumption, industry and finance could insulate their practices from the power of the labor vote. Furthermore, the new organization of capitalist power—its concentration at the expense of workers—meant that industrial leaders could threaten laborers with layoffs, higher prices, or decreasing wages if they voted against their interests. Similarly, limited access to education meant laborers were ill-prepared for a fight with employers; contractual arrangements obstructed

[27] In chapter eight, "The Transubstantiation of the Poor White," Du Bois argued that abolition democracy moved beyond the legalistic emancipation of Lincoln. "…and it looked forward to civil and political rights, education and land, as the only complete guarantee of freedom…" 239.

[28] The consolidation of this alliance during the battle for a 14th amendment demonstrated how the franchise could be used as a weapon first to dilute Southern electoral power and then to weaken white planter domination of political office with black votes. Du Bois believed that suffrage was necessary to found an industrial democracy, but ultimately insufficient: "…for only with universal suffrage could the mass of workers begin that economic revolution which would eventually emancipate them." This fight over political power would "clear the way for the final fight which would make democracy real among the workers" 284. That final fight at least in part consisted of the struggle to obtain a capital guarantee.

[29] Du Bois said of education policy during Reconstruction: "This latter accomplishment crowns the work of Reconstruction. The advance of the Negro in education, helped by the Abolitionists, was phenomenal; but the greatest step was preparing his own teachers—the gift of New England to the black South" 637.

regular attendance in school and funding, particularly in the South, depended on the generosity of Northern financiers. By guaranteeing freedpeople a minimum amount of capital, Du Bois argued, the laboring classes could fight fire with fire, capital against capital. Black laborers in the South understood the need to politicize the concentration of capital.[30] Du Bois represented this growing idea among black laborers as a radical challenge to Northern capital's "prevailing manner of holding and distributing wealth," a product of the American Assumption.[31]

While Stevens—and gradually Sumner—came to support redistributing land to the freedpeople for its democratizing effects, the policy of redistribution and its prerequisite, confiscation, alarmed sections of the Republican political coalition who withdrew their support given its violations of the American Assumption. It was "perfectly clear to Sumner and Stevens that freedom in order to be free required a minimum of capital in addition to political rights."[32] Du Bois connected the demand for redistribution to the struggle for "pure democracy" because at base it amounted to an endorsement of the idea that all persons were self-determining agents who ought to be involved not only in the collective decisions of who should obtain formal political office, but also the collective decisions of industrial production and management.[33] Stevens' recognition of this principle made him "a stern believer in democracy, both in politics and industry."[34] The struggle to inaugurate the "economic freedom of the slave," however, spooked members of the abolition-democracy as well as the Northern capitalists. Stevens and Sumner's counterparts in the abolition movement "believed in capital and formed in effect a powerful petty

[30] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, 590.
[31] Du Bois, 590.
[32] Du Bois, 185.
[33] Du Bois, 265.
[34] Du Bois, 265.

bourgeoisie."[35] The confiscation and redistribution of land "smacked of paternalism" and opposed the "American Assumption that any American could be rich if he wanted to, or at least well-to-do."[36] Land confiscation and redistribution split the abolition-democrats as it forced members to either commit to or distance themselves from the American Assumption.

The radical Republican choice to champion the land interests of the black laboring class raised the ire of Northern capital and industry. According to Du Bois, Northern titans of industry understood that land was the central form of capital in the South during the postwar years and its confiscation would be the political basis for future anti-capitalist schemes. "Industry," Du Bois asserted, "was uneasy at the Stevens plan" and became increasingly nervous as Stevens' success with passing the fourteenth amendment demonstrated that he "was gaining political capital."[37] The move to guarantee capital to laborers, particularly to give laborers the capital of their former masters, threatened to "embarrass" the efforts of financiers and industrialists in exploiting laborers and accessing resources.[38] Du Bois argued that Northern capital interests rebuked the Southern planter attempt to return to the prewar economic order because they disagreed with its vision of production. It was important to Northern capitalists that Southern planters develop means of "intelligent exploitation" through which "modern industry could secure the advantages of slave labor without its responsibilities."[39] In order to spread their vision of a postwar economy, the industrial and financial wing of the abolition-democrats refused to take that final step in securing freedom for the ex-slaves. Thus, "the wild idea that industry and progress for the people of the United States were compatible with the selfish sequestration of profit for

[35] Du Bois, 186.
[36] Du Bois, 601–2.
[37] Du Bois, 262.
[38] Du Bois, 328.
[39] Du Bois, 185.

individuals and powerful corporations" took hold, founding a new economic order on the premises of the American Assumption.[40]

The American Assumption was not simply a relic of a bygone era. Throughout the 1930s, Du Bois criticized American culture for glorifying wealth accumulation and individual prosperity, appropriating his critique of the substance of the American Assumption without deploying the same term. In the final pages of BR, Du Bois articulated the problem: there existed no "moral strength" or a counter-conception of "industrial unselfishness" from which to challenge the structures of the rising economic and political regime.[41] To resist the new economic order, Americans would need to overthrow the supremacy of the American Assumption and develop a new perspective from which to survey their historical moment. The vanquishing of this condition of political blindness required Americans—and, Du Bois claimed, "all men"—to develop "a clear vision of the world without inordinate individual wealth, of capital without profit and of income based on work alone."[42]

Du Bois offered fragmented commentary on the problem of industrial selfishness in BR, but these remarks were the culmination of previous reflection on the problem. Two years before publishing BR in 1933, Du Bois accepted the invitation of George R. Arthur, associate for Negro Welfare at the Julius Rosenwald Fund, to address the organization's conference in D.C., "The Economic Status of the Negro." Arthur assured a worried Du Bois that the white invitees were capable of providing well-researched commentary on the theme of the conference and requested that Du Bois prepare a speech "on what the Negro and friends of the Negro can do in the future

[40] Du Bois, 240.
[41] Du Bois, 620.
[42] Du Bois, 706–7.

based upon the light of the findings of the conference."[43] The resulting address, entitled "Where Do We Go From Here?," took white economic domination of black workers as its point of departure. Du Bois believed that in order to contest the domination of the black worker and achieve a form of economic freedom that would enable robust democratic participation, Americans would need to challenge the philosophy of industry and wealth—what he would label the American Assumption in BR—that prioritized individual well-being over collective uplift and monopoly of capital over the right to self-determined employment.

Pushing aside the lack of real access to the franchise and the school yard, Du Bois contended that "our greatest failure [to accomplish Negro advancement]" resulted from the inability of the black worker to "earn a decent living."[44] Du Bois compared the black worker to "wave after wave of the poor and ignorant and unskilled" immigrants who leapfrogged over the black worker to achieve "success, honor and wealth." The unequal opportunity of economic advancement for white immigrants and the disproportionate sacrifices of black Americans forced Du Bois to question how his own generation might instill in "the present generation of young black people" the democratic desire to seek the "recognition" of their fellow white citizens. Du Bois ventriloquized the dissatisfaction of black youth by demanding "whence came [the white citizen's] right and assumption of world ownership?"[45]

Black Americans—unable to accrue wealth, proper schooling, or full citizenship rights generation to generation—occupied for Du Bois a privileged position of revolutionary

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[43] Arthur, "Letter from Julius Rosenwald Fund to W. E. B. Du Bois," 1 Arthur admitted that he settled on that topic while in discussion with Professor Charles E. Merriam of the University of Chicago who argued that the study of black life in America ought to take a similar form to that of President Hoover's Research Committee on Social Trends.

[44] You can find the speech in Andrew Paschal's collection, "W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader." Du Bois, "Where Do We Go From Here?"

[45] White ownership of the world, a broader theme in Du Bois's writings, would become a defining feature of American citizenship during the Reconstruction period according to his account in BR.

transformation. Du Bois highlighted that black Americans stood at a crossroads "at the beginning of a vast change in the organization of industry and in the world." They must determine what "part" they would play in the coming transformation and prepare for a place in the "world that comes after." Under the conditions of a "stable word," black Americans could count on "a uniform rate of progress toward well-defined goals." Race prejudice and economic domination denied black people these necessary conditions of collective realization and so they constituted a class who could criticize the reigning philosophies of life.[46] Rather than establish a new order through "blood and guns," black Americans were in the midst of enacting "a real revolution" which Du Bois defined as taking place "within." "The inner spirit of man" must change for the world to develop toward industrial democracy and increased political freedom. Du Bois called this transformation "tremendous" and outlined the premise of the new world: "The average man must give up the idea that the chief end of an American is to be a millionaire."

This "readjustment of ideals" away from a conception of freedom as the opportunity to accumulate inordinate wealth and enter into the "world's upper and ruling classes" demanded pragmatic transformation in the material conditions of the world. Du Bois insisted that his was a realistic imagination of a future world. "The past must be foundation of any future" and the "huge and intricate and marvelously ingenious industrial organization must be saved for any future reorganized state." To demonstrate the possibility of defeating the primacy of the American Assumption, Du Bois provided four points or principles to guide future black efforts at economic success and avoid falling prey to the cruel optimist that was perpetuated by white capitalistic success. First, new businesses must follow a "no-profit idea" where the revenue

[46] Du Bois interpreted the economic subordination of black people as a gift to be coveted, stating that a "future day" would come when black people's "greatest reason for pride" would be "that we have not developed more millionaires and more big businesses."

made from services, the use of capital, or extraction of resources contributed first and foremost to the edification of the workers. Du Bois suggested that this change would be the most difficult and would rely on a spiritual change among men of power and education who accepted the American Assumption's valorization of high salaries as the highest ends of life.

The second and third points that Du Bois outlined demanded new orientations within and toward already existing institutions in black communities. There was a need, Du Bois contended, to make work "primarily service." He explained what he meant by way of the example of the black church. By the 1930s, there were twenty-five thousand black churches in the United States—a number that could easily accommodate the spiritual needs of black Americans, but there were only one-thousand two hundred and thirty black lawyers, not enough to cover the legal needs of the black population. Du Bois argued that black churches ought to focus on directing their pooled resources to fund the hiring of black lawyers, doctors, and nurses so that every community had access to necessary social services. The third principle exposed Du Bois's attachment to the institution of marriage as a necessary and appropriate relation between the sexes to fulfill the objects of "civilized life." He advanced the idea that black men and women ought to marry younger even if they have not secured the wealth and income that "public opinion" demands. Du Bois did not challenge the deeper economic impetus for marrying or comment on how gendered relations within the household made possible the pursuit of wealth and success by black men.

Finally, Du Bois asserted that the audience could not rely on industrial leaders or politicians to enact these plans and push forward the spiritual revolution that would overthrow the American Assumption. Rebuking his audience for arriving at the conclusion that they had "to make obeisance to Big Business and ask it to please to allow us to be exploited on the same

terms that good white people are," Du Bois claimed that the trusts of the world could only use black workers as tools to proselytize the masses. He also casted doubt on the idea that the government could be the appropriate vehicle to revolutionize society, stating with a Tocquevillean sensibility that democratic peoples were turning to dictators because of their ignorance and passivity: "If we give Mr. Roosevelt the right to meddle with the dollar, if we give Herr Hitler the right to expel the Jew, if we give to Mussolini the right to think for Italians, we do this because we know nothing ourselves." Instead of enforced revolution by means of the state or industry, Du Bois celebrated the "intelligent consumer" who could use his or her buying power to cut out middlemen and his or her votes to combat "monopolistic privileges."

Alongside the gifts of song and laughter already bequeathed to America, Du Bois recommended that black Americans gift the nation the "example of intelligent cooperation." Du Bois compared the situation of the black worker to that of the "Jew" in Russia who spurred on the Soviet revolution and became the "first citizen of the international," unsettling the stereotypes that perpetuated antisemitism. Black workers might similarly anticipate the "industrial commonwealth" by ridding themselves of the price system and thus "enter the new city as men and not as mules." Through the formation of consumers' cooperatives, black Americans would prepare themselves for the new economic order and free themselves from the forms of economic domination that limited their political freedoms in the present. I return to the cooperative model of ownership in part two of this chapter.

*C. The Failure to Redistribute Land and the New Capitalist Regime*

As I mentioned in the opening remarks of this section, Du Bois had already criticized the political-economic formation that rose to power in the wake of Reconstruction's collapse in his 1911 article, "The Economics of Negro Emancipation." In that piece, Du Bois referred to the

tenant mode of production in the South as a "new regime" that systematized forms of political and economic control of black citizens in unprecedented ways. By the 1930s, Du Bois's specific analysis of the new regime in the South expanded to include the operation of financial and industrial varieties of production and investment in the North, likening this "tremendous, new, and rising power of organized wealth and capitalist industry" to a "dictatorship of capital" and "a new economic monarchy."[47] *Black Reconstruction's* narrative wedded the failure to enact land reform in the South with the construction of a novel political-economic formation that resisted democratic efforts to control its development. I read "The Economics of Negro Emancipation" alongside BR in order to illuminate the features of this new economic and political order.

In his 1911 article, Du Bois held that the failure to extend the life of the Freedmen's Bureau, particularly the failure to redistribute land, resulted in a new economic "regime".[48] Under the new system, the landlord controlled all land and capital, while the freedman held only his own labor. The freedman, therefore, had to contract with the landholder of the South to receive wages, food, clothing, and medical care in advance of the harvesting season. In order to facilitate this arrangement, planters and landholders invented the "crop lien" so that impoverished laborers could mortgage "nonexistent property."[49] The new economic order harkened "straight back to slavery" in that the landlord achieved legalized control over the activities of the freedpeople—whether or not they could attend school, which crops they could harvest, whether or not they fulfilled the obligations of the contract. Du Bois admitted that some black laborers succeeded despite the exploitative conditions but added that "no sooner are they

[47] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, 327; 239; 240.
[48] In BR, Du Bois disaggregated the attempt to redistribute land to freed people and the Freedmen's Bureau. Most likely his foray into the archival material lead him to conclude that the land question was not exhausted by debate about the postwar administration. Du Bois, "The Economics of Negro Emancipation in the United States," 56.
[49] Du Bois, 57.

reaching it [status as small proprietors], however, than new hindrances are being invented in the shape of concentration of land ownership and capital and new labour laws."[50]

Buttressing the contractual power of the landholder was the practice of "crime peonage." The end of military control of the Southern legal system spelled disaster for the ex-slaves regardless of their wealth. Once the planter class regained control over judicial and political offices, they instituted new codes that criminalized a range of mundane activities and enabled private individuals to lease convicts. While the ownership of land would not have prevented this practice, the poverty of the tenants made their criminalization easier with fines and legal fees that they could not pay.[51]

Du Bois presented the emergence of retail merchants as the third development preventing the economic emancipation of the black laborer of the South. Owners of "small provision [shops]" in Southern towns inherited the role of furnishing the laborer with supplies from the landlord.[52] This merchant class perpetuated the oppression of black laborers in two ways. First, as an independent class whose sole function in the economy was to provide cash advances to the laborer, the merchant began to innovate and sell "more attractive goods" to tempt the laborer into deeper debt.[53] Not all black laborers fell for the schemes of the merchant, however, and land accumulation steadily increased among black workers in the South. To stifle this development, the merchant class turned to local politics—a strategy that the planter class scorned—passing labor laws to restrict the mobility of black laborers, defunding public schools, and revoking the voting rights of black citizens.

[50] Du Bois, 57.
[51] Du Bois, 58.
[52] Du Bois, 58.
[53] Du Bois, 58.

Du Bois claimed that these measures hid under the guise of race prejudice. Such "outward noise" obfuscated the "more subtle and dangerous work" of class antagonisms.[54] The emancipation of the black laborer constituted "a local phase of the vastest and most insistent problem which the world faces to-day."[55] Du Bois extracted a general problem from the particular struggles of black laborers in the South and framed that problem in terms of political economy: "How far is the world composed of an aristocracy of races, unalterable and unmovable, by which certain peoples have a right to rule and exploit all others, with no hope of equal rights and privileges among men within any reasonable time?"[56]

"The Economics of Negro Emancipation" offered a simplified schema for interpreting the collapse of the Freedmen's Bureau. Du Bois concluded the article by provincializing race hate as a motivating factor for the failure to economically emancipate the slave, but he had not worked out the relationship between racial and class interests. On this account, the planters feared the black laborer—at least partially—out of defense of their social status and race hate on the part of the white laborer motivated his refusal to organize alongside black workers. Du Bois, as we will see, never entirely overcame the difficulty of ordering class interests and racial animosity as motivating historical factors. His more expansive account of Reconstruction in the 1930s did make one important revision. By the time he began writing *Black Reconstruction in America* in the late 1920s, Du Bois was convinced that the struggle for landownership in the South encapsulated the defining political and economic interests of the period. It was the demand for land ownership by the freed slaves which ultimately forced a realignment in national politics and

[54] Du Bois, 59.
[55] Du Bois, 60.
[56] Du Bois, 60.

inspired the crystallization of a new economic order, instituting these local practices of domination.

BR connected the local Southern economic transition to a national political transformation. Once property holders in the South convinced property holders in the North that policies of confiscation and redistribution would spell disaster for the construction of a new economic order, Northern capitalists not only refused to support the abolition democrats, but also initiated a "counter-revolution" to reclaim control of national politics.[57] Stevens' bid at confiscation represented for Du Bois the possibility of "a dictatorship of the proletariat."[58] His failure amounted to the "murder" of democracy.[59] Instead of pure democracy, the rule of the principle of self-determination in politics and industry, Northern capitalists built "a new feudalism based on monopoly."[60] However, the new ruling class was unlike "the petty bourgeoisie" which rose to power in the wake of feudalism's collapse. "It was a new rule of associated and federated monarchs of industry and finance wielding a vaster and more despotic power than European kings and nobles ever held."[61] Du Bois suggested that the emergence of the new economic order and the capture of federal politics resulted from the "buying-in" of various coalitions to the vision presented by Northern capitalists, mediated by the American Assumption. Businessmen received assurances that corruption in government would not hurt their pursuit of

[57] Du Bois's description of Reconstruction's collapse as a "counter-revolution" marked a turning point in his thinking. In "Reconstruction and its Benefits," Du Bois concluded his history of Reconstruction by observing that the collapse of Reconstruction represented less a reformulation of democratic principles than the expulsion of black politicians from office driven by a need to purge any sign that black people had partaken in the experiment of self-government. By the 1930s, BR proved that there were deeper ideological stakes to the end of federal Reconstruction policy.
[58] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, 345.
[59] Du Bois, 187.
[60] The new feudalism grounded itself not so much on the ownership of the land as on "its wealth in raw material, in copper, iron, oil, and coal, particularly monopoly of the transportation of these commodities on new public iron roads privately sequestered, and finally, of the manufacture of goods…" Du Bois, 583–84.
[61] Du Bois, 345.

profit; the Western small proprietor received "lower railway rates" and "wider and better markets;" the Southern planter received the withdrawal of the military from the South.[62]

But it was less the material gains from Northern capital's governance of the nation than the rise of the American Assumption that enabled the spectacular speed with which a new order crystallized. The idea of a unified labor vote—already emergent in the industrial centers of the North before the war—posed a challenge to the consolidation of interests between Southern planters, the Western middle class, and Northern businessmen. Citing the American Assumption, the leaders of the new economy affirmed that "profit, income, uncontrolled power in My Business for My Property and for Me" was the mantra of the dawning postwar era.[63] These ideas—which Du Bois claimed "impregnated" the electorate—compelled the white laborer to assent to the new order.[64]

*Black Reconstruction in America* revealed how the ideas of one economic order could become the material force of a succeeding order. Forged initially in the agrarian capitalist moment of westward expansion, the idea that wealth was a function of individual striving became the defining ideological condition of the Reconstruction period. More importantly, the substance of the American Assumption signaled a fundamental shift in American conceptions of the political. The assumption that thrift and determination resulted universally in wealth accumulation not only relegated the misfortunate who failed to achieve success to the position of "deserving poor;" it also desensitized the citizenry to the structures, formations, and practices of exploitation that produced the differentiation of capitalist, small proprietor, and laborer in the first place. Under these ideological conditions, politics became a means of wealth accumulation,

[62] Du Bois, 584.
[63] Du Bois, 586.
[64] Du Bois, 585.

not a realm of acting together to create new possibilities, and political concerns were displaced by the motivations of imperial capitalism.[65] According to Du Bois this new ideological constellation forestalled the possibility of instituting an industrial democracy up through the New Deal Era.[66]

It is not my intention to reject the standing interpretation of Du Bois's 1935 publication. *Black Reconstruction* affirmed the agency of slaves and freed people in their struggle against inherited processes, structures, and ideas, refuting the projects of Dunning School historians. My argument is that BR also represented Du Bois's attempt to make sense of the economic dimensions of black unfreedom during a time of depression and pessimism about the possibilities of freedom under twentieth century capitalism. Turning back to the 1860s and 70s, Du Bois came to understand the post-Civil War moment as the birth of "a new capitalism" and its corresponding "new political framework."[67] At the heart of this political framework was the American Assumption and its narrow view of the purposes of political action as well as its emphasis on the accumulation of private wealth. Any effort that seriously aimed to remake the world for black freedom would need to subvert the Assumption and replace the political-economic formation that arose during the fall of Reconstruction. The next section outlines Du Bois's alternative vision and the role of the cooperative in remaking American political and economic life.

**Part II: W.E.B. Du Bois's Vision for a Black Cooperative Nation**

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[65] By imperial capitalism, I am referring to Du Bois's insistence that the failure to achieve industrial democracy in the United States during Reconstruction enabled the founding of an economic and political order bent on the global pursuit of ever-growing profits through access to cheap labor and new resources.

[66] And, perhaps, further. Du Bois claimed that the ideological elements of the Assumption were true in the first two decades of the 20th century: "The validity of the American Assumption ceased with the Civil War, but its tradition lasted down to the day of the Great Depression, when it died with a great wail of despair, not so much from bread lines and soup kitchens, as from poor and thrifty bank depositors and small investors" 183.

[67] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, 347.

"You must realize however that we Negroes have been trained in American individualism in our industrial life and we are rather slow to realize that cooperation is the next step."(1944)[68]

Workers' cooperatives existed in North America since before the War for Independence. Opposition to the "imposition of the wage system"—understood as wage slavery—took the form of mutual-aid organizations that gradually developed into unions, cooperatives, and parties.[69] The early complaints of journeymen about the conditions of domination that pervaded the shop fueled the growth of unions, which many workers regarded as the most effective method to secure greater self-determination in the workplace. Over the course of the nineteenth century, production across economic sectors increasingly consisted of a small class of individuals that had access to capital and a larger class that could only work as employees of the former. Cooperatives became a major organizational alternative in the struggle to arrest the growing corporatization and centralization of industry and agriculture. Alongside the movement to empower workers to cooperatively control industry ran a movement to democratize distribution by way of collective purchasing in consumers' cooperatives. Both movements aimed at establishing the economic independence of individuals within contexts of centralized, hierarchical management and control of labor.

Du Bois's support for cooperative movements during his life has noted admirers.[70] From his early study of black cooperatives in 1907 to his formal correspondence with white-led cooperative leagues and unions during WWI, Du Bois showed a careful interest in the cooperative as a possible strategy for overcoming black economic domination without relying on

[68] Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Edward Gaulkin."
[69] Curl, *For All the People*, 3.
[70] Nembhard, *Collective Courage*; Nembhard, "Cooperative Ownership in the Struggle for African American Economic Empowerment"; Holt, "The Political Uses of Alienation"; Phulwani, "A Splendid Failure? Black Reconstruction and Du Bois's Tragic Vision of Politics"; DeMarco, "The Rationale and Foundation of DuBois's Theory of Economic Cooperation."

coercive state policies or subscribing to the rugged individualism of capitalist culture. In his 1911 novel, *Quest of the Silver Fleece*, Du Bois's characters turn to cooperative organization to resist the economic practices of the Jim Crow South, seizing their own emancipation within the oppressive tenancy system. By the 1930s, black activists and organizers formed the first national cooperative unions for black consumers and Du Bois became an active spokesperson for the movement, authoring several articles in black newspapers and addressing conferences extolling the promises of cooperative life. Du Bois shared a belief with many cooperative activists of his day that cooperative consumption and production could fundamentally transform the American economy without the anti-capitalist violence advocated by communists or the enforced hierarchies of European corporatist fascism. For his commitment to cooperative ventures as an active modeling of the world that must be brought into being, I argue that Du Bois's approach shares important resonances with pragmatist political thought, particularly his emphasis on the need to create political change through new modes of action rather than confining his vision to the making of demands on the state.

*A. Recovering the History of Black Cooperation*

In 1907, Du Bois organized a conference at Atlanta University with funds from the Carnegie Institution to study "Economic Co-operation Among Negro Americans." The conference report—compiled by Du Bois and two other academics—suggested that a wider acceptance of cooperative organization among black Americans could help the race progress, employing a nineteenth century language of civilizational development. Prefiguring Du Bois's later claims about the particularly advantageous situation of the darker races for imagining a new economic system, they also wrote that black Americans stood at a crossroads in that development. The bulk of the document, however, was not a theoretical analysis of economic

advancement and its relation to political freedom, but a history that traced efforts at cooperation among black folks in the United States. "Economic Co-operation Among Negro Americans" claimed that cooperative organizing was an indigenous form of life that developed within black communities in response to systems of enslavement and segregation.

Articulating a theme that Du Bois would continue to reiterate throughout his life, the conference report asserted that black Americans stood at a crossroads in the development of the American economy. Because black families held "little wealth," they could choose how they wanted to begin the slow process of accumulating capital.[71] Black Americans could acclimate to "fierce individualistic competition" that required them to "prey upon the ignorance and simplicity of the mass of the race" or they could choose "the other way," "co-operation in capital and labor, the massing of small savings, the wide distribution of capital and a more general equality of wealth and comfort."[72] Du Bois and his co-organizers warned that the first option was quickly becoming the default path for many black folks: "The race does not recognize the parting of the ways, they tend to think and are being taught to think that any method which leads to individual riches is the way of salvation." [73] The opening resolution concluded with a call to "foster and emphasize" the co-operative spirit and ideal of "wide ownership of capital" among black people in the United States.

The conference report framed the study of economic cooperation with a discussion of hierarchical civilizational development. Beginning with the question of how far "has there been among Negro Americans a conscious effort at mutual aid in earning," Du Bois and his coauthors suggested that the characteristics of earning a living related to the development of a given

[71] Du Bois, Nelson, and Sims, *Economic Co-Operation among Negro Americans*, 8.
[72] Du Bois, Nelson, and Sims, 3.
[73] Du Bois, Nelson, and Sims, 3.

society. Societies wherein earning a living consumed the activities of a large majority of the people—such as the United States and other countries "under the lead of European civilization"—were labeled "highly developed."[74] This condition was unlike the conditions of "undeveloped races" or a "fully developed Race."[75] The former understood "getting the material thing necessary for life" as "incidental" to their customs of hunting, resting, eating, and carousing, while the most developed societies would spend relatively little time supplying themselves with necessities.[76]

Black Americans constituted a peculiar social class within a highly developed civilization according to the report because their efforts at advancement were always bound up with economic progress. The United States qualified as a moderately developed civilization in the first scheme, but black Americans "never will surrender [themselves] entirely to the ideals of the surrounding group."[77] The authors deployed the concept of social classes to categorize the existence of black folks in America and analogized it to the development of nations: "that whereas in the world we have separate large groups in varying degrees of civilization and development, and they gradually rise and fall and sometimes even change their relative position, so, too, in any separate group or nation, we have smaller groups with differing developments…"[78] The conference aimed to shed light on how black collective action in religious, political, and cultural life always had "an economic tinge" to impress upon the world the marks of economic progress and, to that end, the development of the race.[79]

[74] Du Bois, Nelson, and Sims, 10.
[75] Du Bois, Nelson, and Sims, 10.
[76] Du Bois, Nelson, and Sims, 10.
[77] Du Bois, Nelson, and Sims, 9.
[78] Du Bois, Nelson, and Sims, 12.
[79] Du Bois, Nelson, and Sims, 11.

The report characterized European nations at the highest point of civilizational development, which other nations had not yet reached. On the other hand, Du Bois and his co-authors admitted that the development of a race, nation, or class was not a linear progression from under-developed to highly developed: groups could regress or advance relative to one another. The report also examined the history of Africa to refute the contention that Africa was a backward civilization that had little history to attest to its progress. Furthermore, the development of the white race understood as the advance of European civilization represented something lacking. Destructive competition, insatiable greed, and massive inequalities in wealth all stemmed from the development of the white, European peoples. In providing a history of black economic development, the conference report authors sought to rescue modes of economic development that might avoid the destructive economic culture of the highly developed, white world.

Two important features of the report demand commentary. First, the authors of the report presented the practice of slaves buying their freedom as an antecedent to cooperative business models in black communities. By saving gifts, cultivating land on Sunday, or hiring out their labor, slaves could generate small savings that over time became the means to purchase freedom.[80] The choice to center this practice at the outset of the section detailing cooperative business ventures suggested that Du Bois and his fellow academics wanted to highlight that the surplus proceeds of black labor were traditionally not associated with private gratification or the amassing of wealth. Instead, these funds became a source of community uplift both in the way that black communities would collectively raise money to buy the freedom of black slaves and in

[80] Du Bois, Nelson, and Sims, 149–50.

the fact that an individual purchasing freedom provided a model to others and could not be collapsed into individual accomplishment.

The second important feature of the report was the concluding section on a "group economy," which demonstrated Du Bois's early thoughts on black national cooperation. From disparate attempts at organizing cooperatives in transportation, banking, manufacture, and agriculture, the report envisioned "a co-operative arrangement of industries and services within the Negro group" such that "the group tends to become a closed economic circle largely independent of the surrounding white world."[81] This group economy was well within reach according to the report because "new Negro business men are not successors of the old," referring to their interest in doing business with and for black people.[82] The diversification of black business ownership meant that within a given city there were the makings of a black economy capable of providing the necessary services and products to sustain black economic independence.

The 1907 conference report contained Du Bois's early thoughts about the advantages of cooperative organization to secure economic independence for black workers. The report first and foremost consisted of Du Bois's interest in tracing a history of grassroots efforts at cooperative economics within the black community. Unlike dominant narratives of cooperatives that continue into our own present, Du Bois supplied a history that centered the experience of slavery and its particular conditions of possibility in forming the practice of black cooperative ownership and uplift.

*B. <u>From Fictional Scheme to the Negro Cooperative Guild</u>*

[81] Du Bois, Nelson, and Sims, 179.
[82] Du Bois, Nelson, and Sims, 179.

During the 1910s, Du Bois's interest in cooperative organization grew. His correspondence with prominent members of the cooperative movement as well as his collection of circulars and newspapers distributed by cooperative leagues and unions attested to this growing interest. In his 1911 novel, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, Du Bois's characters realize emancipation from the system of tenancy by forming a new community built upon the principles of cooperation. Together, the novel and Du Bois's contemporaneous letters illustrate how a cooperative community could manage its profit. Du Bois's vision of cooperative economics resisted the utopian tendencies of cooperative colonies in that it did not require the total abolition of private life. Profits would be channeled partially toward efforts to uplift the community and partially to the individuals involved in the venture.

*The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, a lesser known piece of Du Bois's body of fiction writing, centers the cooperative as the emancipatory organization of the post-Civil War South. Scholars in African American Studies and English have produced a small literature on the book, but few scholars have deployed a reading of the novel to advance conversations about Du Bois's wider political vision.[83] More recently, scholars have turned to thinking through the narrative in relation to Du Bois's growing socialist predilections in the early twentieth century, detailing the economic realities that Du Bois depicts in the book.[84] I read *Quest* for insights into how Du Bois understood the capitalist order that arose in the wake of Reconstruction's collapse. The novel details how an imaginary black community in the South wins freedom by establishing a cooperative community.

[83] Debates among literary scholars have mostly revolved around the question of genre. The romance/realism debate occludes the ways in which the love story between Bles and Zora motivates the intervention of realistic modes of writing (such as the economic analyses presented). For examples of this literary debate see: Lee, "Du Bois the Novelist"; Byerman, "Race and Romance."
[84] Van Wienen and Kraft, "How the Socialism of W. E. B. Du Bois Still Matters"; McInnis, "'Behold the Land.'"

Echoing the Reconstruction moment, the struggle to obtain land lies at the heart of Du Bois's 1911 novel. Miss Smith's school for black children teeters on the edge of financial ruin, unable to attract unqualified philanthropic support from a wealthy businessman and always threatened by the expanding land interests of the ex-planter Cresswell family. Initially the young and self-interested pair, Zora and Bles, attempt to secure conditions of financial independence in order to realize their goal of living together as a married couple. Zora convinces Bles to plant cotton in the undesirable swamp land to raise money for their post-slavery uplift. This first bid to use the land fails because neither Bles or Zora has legal claim to the land and Colonel Cresswell's control over not just the land, but the sale of farming equipment and the cotton product itself results in more debt. Meanwhile, Zora's past experiences of sexual violence at the hands of the Cresswells become clear to Bles who spurns Zora, upholding the prevailing morality that condemned female accusers more than male perpetrators for their licentious brutality. The two lovers part ways.

Near the end of the novel, both Bles and Zora return to their homeland. Bles has spent years chasing personal success in Washington, D.C. believing that holding public office will uplift his people. Zora, who cannot leave Toomsville of her own accord, becomes a maid for the wealthy Mrs. Vanderpool and uses her proximity to financial power to help Bles succeed from afar. She almost convinces Mrs. Vanderpool to mobilize her connections to ensure that Bles becomes the first black Secretary of the Treasury, but Mrs. Vanderpool hesitates after receiving word that such a move might jeopardize her husband's political future. In her shame for lying to Zora and failing to assist in securing Bles' office, Mrs. Vanderpool gifts Zora a large endowment and buys back the cotton that Zora and Bles raised together in the swamp. Du Bois juxtaposes Zora's return with that of Bles. While Bles wallows in his failure to personally succeed in

Washington, Zora arrives in Alabama "with new eyes" and the conviction that individual black successes cannot be won without collective achievement for her community.

Zora enlists Miss Smith and Bles to help her mobilize the "vast unorganized power in the mass."[85] In order to activate the political potential of the community, Zora recognizes the need for land ownership. "We must have land—our own farm with our own tenants—to be the beginning of a free community."[86] Zora sets her sights on the land of her upbringing, the swamp, a large tract of seemingly useless land with which the white planters might be willing to part ways. Colonel Cresswell, the patriarch of the Cresswell family, agrees to sell Zora the land convinced that he will reclaim its title once the black workers have cleared it.

The final movement of the novel consists of the black workers of Toomsville—led by Zora—securing the swampland as their own. With the ownership of land comes "independent economic strength," which will make the black workers of Toomsville desirable allies to the disaffected white workers of the town.[87] Unlike Zora's original bid to secure wealth with Bles, this new attempt to own land is partially collective.[88] Zora explains her plans for the land in detail. While she wants to sell off a few small tracts of land, she hopes to retain much of the swampland as "one central plantation of one hundred acres" for the school to run "a model farm."[89] The collective nature of the land meant that its use must be for the good of the community:

"We want to centre here agencies to make life better. We want all sorts of industries; we want a hospital with a resident physician and two or three nurses; we want a cooperative store for buying supplies; we want a cotton-gin and saw-

[85] Du Bois, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, 310.
[86] Du Bois, 315.
[87] Du Bois, 347.
[88] It is interesting to note that directly before defending her vision of a free community, Zora shows Bles a series of books in her room which she refers to as her "university." Included among the texts is Plato's *Republic*, which famously provides a story of collective ownership among the rulers of the Callipolis.
[89] Du Bois, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, 350.

mill, and in the future other things. This land here, as I have said, is the richest around. We want to keep this hundred acres for the public good, and not sell it."

The formation of a cooperative community in *Quest* was not simply a utopian scheme for a future world, but the musings of an author imagining a realistic solution to the problem of economic domination in the South. This imagined community would serve as a basis for Du Bois's foray into cooperative activism. In 1918, Du Bois noticed the expanding interest in cooperative ventures nationwide. He wrote John Brown Jefferson of California in April, requesting his participation in a small conference on black cooperation, arguing that the work of cooperation must begin "as a great movement and not piecemeal." Du Bois also responded to an earlier letter from Jefferson that considered how cooperatives ought to manage profits. Inspired by the Toomsville cooperative community, Du Bois allowed the need for individuals to acquire personal wealth through the venture. He suggested that cooperatives commit half of their profits "for social uplift" and divide the remaining half of the profits among the workers as individual dividends.[90] Jefferson responded that he could not make the conference, but suggested E. Burton Ceruti of the NAACP attend in his stead.

Du Bois's conference launched the Negro Co-operative Guild which aimed to coordinate the establishment of black cooperatives throughout the United States. Du Bois's involvement in the Guild in addition to his publication of cooperative propaganda attracted the attention of rising cooperative activists. Foremost among these admirers was Dr. James Peter Warbasse and his partner, Agnes Dyer Warbasse, who founded the Co-operative League of America in 1916. The League aimed to nurture the conditions for a cooperative commonwealth, supplanting the capitalist system of private ownership of capital while avoiding centralized control of

[90] Du Bois positioned his method "between" the Rochdale plan and the Belgian and Congo Plan.

production.[9192] E. Ralph Cheyney, the League's publicity director, invited Du Bois to write an article for the League's national circular, the *Cooperative Consumer*.[93] Throughout the 1920s, Warbasse maintained correspondence with Du Bois, congratulating him on his advocacy of consumers' cooperatives among "the colored people" and offering advice about the possibility of particular cooperative endeavors.[94]

Finally, Du Bois's foray into organizing for the cooperative movement precipitated a shift in his thinking about the use of cooperative ventures in achieving economic independence for black Americans. Responding to Elmer Cornbeck's proposition that Du Bois convene a committee to "act on the land question" and determine how cooperation could propel black ownership of land in the United States, Du Bois extinguished his hopes: "Cooperative farming has never succeeded."[95] Du Bois contended that all cooperation ought to commence by way of the cooperation of consumers. Though cooperative land buying was "possible" according to Du Bois, it could only be attempted "sometimes."[96] Only a few years after publishing *Quest*, Du Bois distanced himself from the idea of establishing cooperatives as collective ownership of production in their first instance. The consumers' cooperative model offered the most realistic way forward for black workers to pool their resources and achieve success at driving out the retail merchant. This transformation in position represented a commitment to the ideals of the

[91] Chambers, "The Cooperative League of the United States of America, 1916-1961."
[92] James Warbasse was a critic of communism and Soviet Russia. While he and Du Bois agreed that cooperatives would render the communistic strategy for control of state unnecessary, Du Bois remained sympathetic toward the new Soviet Union.
[93] Cheney, "Letter from Cooperative League of America to W.E.B. Du Bois."
[94] Warbasse, "Letter from James P. Warbasse to W. E. B. Du Bois,"; Warbasse, "Letter from The Cooperative League of the U.S.A. to W. E. B. Du Bois."
[95] Cornbeck, "Letter from Elmer Cornbeck to W. E. B. Du Bois"; Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Elmer Cornbeck."
[96] Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Elmer Cornbeck."

growing movement as well as Du Bois's pessimism about gathering the necessary capital to successfully manufacture or extract resources.

Rather than acquire land on which to build a cooperative community, the Negro Co-operative Guild would initiate cooperative educational efforts in one city and then replicate the procedures to spread the cooperative model. In a 1919 unpublished plan for his organization, Du Bois envisioned the Negro Cooperative Guild as a local committee that would raise money for "propaganda purposes" and send out representatives into communities. These representatives would gather persons "willing to begin a chain of cooperative stores" and study the history and principles of cooperative ventures. Every year a new city would be selected for launching more cooperative stores "until the centers of Negro population are organized." Du Bois imagined that any city with a black population greater than ten thousand would be able to initiate large-scale consumer cooperation.[97] The growth of the Guild would eventually require central reorganization such that committees for inspection, planning, and trade could be formed. All stores would adopt three reigning principles: first, low cost of administration; second, cash business as far as possible; and third, all profits belong to the consumer.[98]

This vision was predicated on both an extension of and alteration to the cooperative community that enabled the characters of *Quest* to avoid participation in the white planter controlled economy of Toomsville. Though Du Bois believed that he had finally obtained a plan of action that could resist the forms of economic dependence not just in the sharecropper South, but in the industrialized North as well, the nineteen-twenties proved to be a difficult time for cooperative conversion. An expanding economy tempted workers with the promise of individual

[97] Du Bois, "A Plan for the Southern Migrant," 215.
[98] Du Bois, "Proposed Scheme of Co-Operation among American Negroes."

fortunes and Americans black and white desired familiarity in their day-to-day lives after wartime.

C. *Toward a Black Cooperative Economy: Du Bois's Critique of The Economic Alternatives*

Cultural and ideological conditions favoring cooperatives arrived with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. As communities struggled to meet their basic needs through the typical practices of consumption, Americans turned to cooperative ventures in a way unimaginable during the previous decade. Du Bois promoted the cooperative movement intensely during the 1930s because he was reinvigorated by the founding of the Young Negroes' Cooperative League (YNCL). The YNCL fortified the cooperative concept with nationwide publicity efforts, hosting workshops and training sessions. Writing for the newspaper of the YNCL founder, George Schuyler, Du Bois reaffirmed his commitment to cooperative organization for its potential to undermine the ideals of the American Assumption. Cooperation was a worthy path forward for the emancipation of black Americans. Echoing the talking points of the wider movement, Du Bois asserted that cooperation provided an alternative to capitalism, communism, and corporatism, one that did not rely on state coercion or violent revolution.

Inaugurated by the journalist and self-styled philosophical anarchist, George Schuyler, and the young activist, Ella Baker, in 1930 the YNCL aimed to educate black people about the advantages of cooperation and coordinate the expansion of black cooperative ventures. At its first conference, Schuyler implored the audience to recognize their "potential economic power" and surrender their impractical dreams of "Communistic and Socialistic Utopia."[99] The YNCL designed an ambitious five-year plan, ironically appropriated from the Soviet industrialization plan of the same name, in order to guide organizational policy. Within three years, the YNCL

[99] "SCHUYLER HEADS UP LEAGUE."

intended to establish a wholesale outlet; within seven, an independent cooperative college. These goals were difficult to achieve. By 1932 the League included four hundred members, a healthy membership for a budding association, but well below the five thousand leaders for which Schuyler and Baker hoped.[100] Nonetheless, the impact that the YNCL made on black public discourse was enormous. Black newspapers across the nation carried opinion columns debating the merits of the cooperative movement throughout the 1930s. Schuyler's influence at the *Pittsburgh Courier* all but transformed the paper into a mouthpiece for the League. Black leaders encouraged their readership to join the movement, comparing the YNCL to the NAACP.[101]

Given the exciting discussion prompted by the iconoclastic Schuyler and the YNCL, Du Bois redoubled his efforts to proselytize black Americans. In a 1932 address, Du Bois provided a theoretical articulation of the cooperative movement, emphasizing the need to begin with the consumer in any attempt to transform the economic system.[102] In his speech, "The Organization of Our Buying Power," Du Bois offered an economic rationale for his turn to cooperation. He faulted economists for their focus on the producer. "The economic process does not begin with production. It begins with consumption."[103] Du Bois advised economists to reorient their theories around the "welfare and power of the buyer" if they wanted to keep up with the changing times.[104] The speech implored black Americans to organize their consumption such that black dollars supported black businesses who hired black workers. Through cooperation, Du Bois maintained, black Americans could "approach economic independence or a position of self-

[100] Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 83–84.
[101] Clarke, "BURROUGHS AND POWELL BOTH WRONG."
[102] Du Bois, "The Organization of Our Buying Power."
[103] Du Bois, 1.
[104] Du Bois, 2.

sustaining inter-dependence" without the strategies of the nation state—"law-making power, armies and police."[105]

He also wrote a series of articles for the *Courier* explaining how the cooperative movement could overcome the ideological confines of the current capitalist ethos. Having just finished *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois's concern with the problem of the "Bourgeois Mind" bore unmistakable resemblance to the American Assumption of his 1935 publication. Consumers' cooperatives, Du Bois contended, would demonstrate to black Americans the error of their ways by revealing the "universal selfishness" that underwrote the American "theory of economic morals."[106] The following week, Du Bois reiterated this problem in his diagnosis of the Bourgeois Mind, which could only imagine the production and distribution of services "through the lure of large, private profit."[107] Du Bois reserved hostility for organized socialists and communists as well. Calling them "sincere reformers," Du Bois criticized their "All or None" approach to social and political transformation, their hardline commitment to a "complete socialist state" or a refusal to "take part" in politics.[108] The true strength of the cooperative movement, Du Bois wrote, was that it did not "depend upon revolution or force or law:" "It depends upon education and enlightenment and persuasion and these are weapons which we can use in any state and at any time."[109] These statements highlight Du Bois's worry about turning to politics in order to create a new economic order. The communist and fascist or corporatist alternatives to twentieth century capitalism both relied on capturing the state apparatus and then

[105] Du Bois, 5; 1.
[106] Du Bois, "A Forum of Fact and Opinion, April 11, 1936," 2–3.
[107] Du Bois, "A Forum of Fact and Opinion, April 18, 1936," 4.
[108] Du Bois, 4–5.
[109] Du Bois, 5 Du Bois was repeating a common refrain of the cooperative movment. Since the launch of the Cooperative League in 1916, organizers touted the movmeent for its vision of social change that refused the tools of the anarchist or communist revolutionary.

wielding it to enforce new modes of production and distribution. Du Bois wholeheartedly agreed with movement leaders who understood cooperation as a voluntary form of action that would remake the fundamental social units of the economy from the bottom-up.[110]

After the completion of *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois leveraged his knowledge of the 1860s and 70s to criticize the prevailing liberal capitalist vision of reform as manifested in President Roosevelt's New Deal. Turning back to the Reconstruction moment helped Du Bois achieve clarity in his assessment of the problem of black freedom in the United States. Du Bois believed that unionization efforts and anti-discrimination legislation would fail to resolve the problem of white economic domination in the United States. Only black cooperation—imagined as an economic nation within a nation—could issue the economic freedom necessary to actualize the emancipation of black America.

His 1935 article in *Current History*, "A Negro Nation within a Nation," offered a rebuttal to welfare state liberalism in addition to defending the construction of a cooperative black commonwealth through practices of segregated consumption and production. The Great Depression, Du Bois declared, impacted black workers "like white workers" in the *kinds* of economic calamities it brought. Both white workers and black workers "lost jobs," "had mortgages foreclosed" on their properties, and were dispossessed of their small savings accounts; but the black worker suffered these ills to a greater degree.[111] "Technological displacement, which began before the depression, has been accelerated, while unemployment and falling wages

[110] Campbell, "Letter from The Cooperative League of the U.S.A. to W. E. B. Du Bois" At the request of Tage Palm, the League sent a letter to Du Bois after his defense of cooperatives in the Courier. The organization emphasized their critique of "rugged individualism" as well as the need to avoid "dependence on paternalistic protection." According to the League, cooperatives resisted "Individualistic Capitalism," "State Corporatism," and "State Communism."

[111] Du Bois, "A Negro Nation within a Nation," 1.

struck black men sooner, went to lower levels and will last longer."[112] The cause of this disproportionate impact could not be accounted for by the relative economic situations of black and white America so much as by the structure of aid provided in the wake of the collapse. Du Bois argued that "federal and State relief" held out few promises for the black worker because the government was uninterested in transforming the black worker's "relations to American industry and culture" even as it sought to rebuild the "whole industrial system."[113] Du Bois characterized the aid to white workers as "more than relief" and simultaneously accused the government of merely aiming to keep black workers from starvation.[114] These differentiated aims exposed the New Deal programs' partial grasp of the economic problems facing the United States. To rebuild the industrial system only to secure a minimum material existence for white workers and only to incorporate the voices of white workers in the planning of industry would eventually replicate the current disaster.

The failure of the New Deal to ameliorate the situation of black workers represented for Du Bois the difficulty of achieving economic non-domination through white and black political solidarity. Du Bois admitted that the "colored people of America"—in the face of New Deal neglect—finally realized that "most white Americans do not like them, and are planning neither for their survival nor for their definite future…"[115] The problem was not "ignorance" or "inexperience;" it was power. To truly rebuild the industrial system of America would require white Americans to acknowledge and accept the "free, self-assertive manhood" of the black worker.[116] The efforts of anti-racist scholars and journalists "by book and periodical, by speech

[112] Du Bois, 2.
[113] Du Bois, 2.
[114] Du Bois, 2.
[115] Du Bois, 2.
[116] Du Bois, 2.

and appeal, by various dramatic methods of agitation" could not change the minds of white Americans because they had a political stake in refusing say to the black worker in industry and politics. Feigned ignorance and naivety concealed the true intentions of the white citizen. Du Bois concluded that "there can be no doubt that Americans know the facts."[117]

The potential for a repeat of the Depression evidenced Du Bois's claim that his own time was more "critical" for "the Negroes of America" than "1861" or "1867," a significant claim for a thinker just finishing a history of the post-Civil War period. Du Bois's renewed historical sensibility enabled him to see the failure of industrial democracy in one moment rehearsed in the battles of his own—and possibly—future times. He turned decidedly to Reconstruction to figure the moment as a possibility foreclosed and as the formative moment for the production of the conditions of his present. "The main weakness of the Negro's position is that since emancipation he has never had an adequate economic foundation."[118] Du Bois resolved the problem of white indifference into a problem of imbalanced power resulting from the failure to adequately reconstruct the American economy in the 1860s:

> Thaddeus Stevens recognized this [the need for an economic basis of power] and sought to transform the emancipated freedmen into peasant proprietors. If he had succeeded, he would have changed the economic history of the United States and perhaps saved the American farmer from his present plight. But to furnish 50,000,000 acres of good land to the Negroes would have cost more money than the North was willing to pay, and was regarded by the South as highway robbery.[119]

Thaddeus Stevens' bid to guarantee land to the freed people of the South contained an acknowledgement that freed people would need economic forms of power in order to protect and enact their freedom. His failure shut down the possibility that land ownership could be the route to secure black freedom. Black workers in future moments—including Du Bois's present—needed economic forms of power to achieve real democratic inclusion, but the land alone ceased

[117] Du Bois, 2.
[118] Du Bois, 2.
[119] Du Bois, 2–3.

to be fertile ground for growing that power. Du Bois argued that two more attempts were made to answer the fundamental problem of Reconstruction's failure: Booker T. Washington's program for black uplift and the movement to gain access to white unions. Both attempts failed to solve the dilemma facing black workers for different reasons. Washington understood that black people needed "a new economic foundation," but he made the error of predicting that American economic development in the twentieth century would "resemble that of the nineteenth."[120] Less a matter of having "technical skill" than understanding "basic organization," black workers trained at Tuskegee lacked the necessary tools to accumulate capital in the increasingly corporatized and financialized economy.[121] The new capitalist order of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century ushered in "more concentrated" industry, "land monopoly extended," and "technique changed" by the "wide introduction of machinery."[122] A focus on the methods of securing the material preconditions of freedom demanded an enlarged imagination about the ways by which black workers could accrue and assert their power.

The effort to coordinate interracial unions, though more imaginative than the capitalistic methods of Washington, also disappointed Du Bois who contended that the desire to join white unions mirrored a misguided impulse to press for integration before self-organization. White workers throughout American history had "murdered" and tormented black workers when they felt intimidated by competition. The deep-seated causes for the animosity and violence did not exculpate the offenders in Du Bois's opinion. He asserted that although white laborer must hate scabs for the threat they posed to their unionization efforts, they hated black scabs "not because

[120] Du Bois, 3.
[121] Du Bois, 3.
[122] Du Bois, 3.

they are scabs but because they are black."[123] As evidence Du Bois pointed to the fact that white laborers "[mobbed]" white scabs to tempt them into fellowship and mobbed black scabs "to starve and kill them."[124] While the attempt to secure economic power through unionization pushed beyond early nineteenth century ideas of how to appropriately achieve economic success, it fell prey to a desire to integrate black and white workers simultaneously with the effort to democratize industry. Thaddeus Stevens' scheme to redistribute confiscated property, by contrast, democratized the basis of mid-nineteenth century economic power without necessitating the integration of black and white workers in the workplace, which would have forced black workers to submit their interests to those of the white worker.

In order to achieve the economic power long sought after, Du Bois insisted that black workers must form an "economic nation within a nation" through self-organization.[125] White unions, Du Bois believed, would eventually win industrial reform and the present system of production would give way to "greater democratic control of production and distribution."[126] However, this transformation would no more than soften "the asperities and anomalies of race prejudice."[127] To combat the concentration of power in industry and society in the hands of white people, the world needed "a new school of Negro thought" that aimed at "a unified American nation, with economic classes and racial barriers leveled," but also realized that such a world

[123] This argument posed an interesting rejoinder to Frederick Douglass's claim that white yeomen hated black freed people not because they were black but because they represented economic competition. The inversion of the analysis is striking given that Du Bois celebrated Frederick Douglass's response to Johnson in BR. Du Bois, 3:3.
[124] Du Bois, 3.
[125] Du Bois, 5. Du Bois appropriated black Communist Harry Haywood's Black Belt Thesis, which exposed the relationship of the Negro question to the national question within American Communist discourse. While Haywood spoke of a "right to self-determination," Du Bois sought an economic nation that had no strict geographical boundaries or a plan for violent monopolization of political power. Haywood, "The Negro Problem and the Task of the Communist Party of the United States."
[126] Du Bois, "A Negro Nation within a Nation," 4.
[127] Du Bois, 4.

could be brought into being only through "intensified class and race consciousness."[128] Du Bois implored his black readers to associate and develop through "inner cooperation," to "found its own institutions," "educate its genius," and at the same time "keep in helpful touch… with the mass of the nation."[129] He imagined that black workers could form "a cooperative State" where the labor of black people produced, fed, aided, and educated fellow black people. Similar to Washington's plan for black uplift, black workers would work, study, and live without the input or interference of white Americans, but unlike in Washington's plan, the fruits of labor would be collective.[130]

In "A Negro Nation within a Nation," Du Bois held the failure to redistribute land during Reconstruction responsible for the impediments to black freedom in his present. Without foundational economic power, black Americans could not properly engage in politics—a reality that was evident in the indifference of the newly forming welfare state to the needs of black America. Du Bois's analysis of the New Deal presented Reconstruction's unanswered question, how can black workers secure the preconditions of freedom, as generating a persisting problem across time, but it also refused a return to the tactics and strategies of the 1860s to resolve the issue. Booker T. Washington and labor organizers tried to secure the necessary preconditions of freedom through means other than a mass confiscation and redistribution of land. They too met the fate of Stevens—not primarily because they could not muster a political coalition to bring their vision into being—because each strategy misapprehended the larger structural elements of capitalistic organization and white prejudice, respectively. Reflecting on the struggle for freedom

[128] Du Bois, 4.
[129] Du Bois, 5–6.
[130] Du Bois defended segregation against the "immediate reactions of most white and colored people" because he believed that only through self-organization could black workers ensure their efforts would produce genuine power for the collective, only by segregating themselves could black people dream of building "a full humanity" and not fall prey to "a petty white tyranny" (6).

since Emancipation, Du Bois was convinced that the answer to the decades old question demanded the segregation of black America into a cooperative nation.

Again in 1936 Du Bois raised criticisms of New Deal reforms in an article published in the *Journal of Negro Education*, "Social Planning for the Negro, Past and Present." Partially a history of the efforts to achieve black freedom since European colonization of the Americas and partially a critique of the present effort to overcome the persisting barriers, the article reproduced many of the ideas that Du Bois advanced in his 1935 article for *Current History*. Du Bois turned to Reconstruction with greater pessimism than he displayed in BR. Stating that "no such rapid transition from feudal slavery to industrial democracy could be expected," Du Bois figured the black freed people as already under the sway of the American Assumption at the moment of Emancipation: "These laborers were themselves under the direction and ideology of a capitalistic form of industry. Their idea of emancipation was the rise of an exploiting class of black capitalists."[131] Yet the freed people of the South made two major advances according to Du Bois. First, they experimented with new ways of organizing production in cooperative settings, and second, they elected "non-taxpaying laborer[s]" to state governments.[132] Like his earlier figuration of a "new capitalist" order, Du Bois cited the identification of mutual interests in "new

[131] Du Bois, "A Negro Nation within a Nation," 29; Conversely, Du Bois claimed in BR that the radicalization of black workers in the South—and a growing sympathetic leadership—played no uncertain part in spooking the financial wing of the abolition democracy coalition. This radicalism included an acknowledgment that to secure black freedom, industry must be restructured. Du Bois, "Social Planning for the Negro, Past and Present," 29; A year later, in 1937, James Allen would agree with Du Bois' choice to temper his characterization of the black workers, calling them instigators of a bourgeois revolution. Allen, *Reconstruction*.

[132] Du Bois, 3:29; Du Bois's interest in this subject matter continued into the 1940s. In a memorandum written to Jackson Davis in 1940, Du Bois outlined a number of topics on which he wanted articles written for his journal, *Phylon*. Included among the topics was one such "Negro rural community in Mississippi which since Emancipation has been carrying out a communal economic life evidently traceable to African influence." Du Bois cited Will Winton Alexander, assistant administrator of the U.S. Resettlement Administration (The New Deal's comprehensive rural anti-poverty program), who suggested that someone study the community before it "lost its character." This prediction is surprising given that the RA sought—though unsuccessfully—to organize cooperatives in the South. Du Bois, "Outline of Topics for Phylon Articles," 3.

exploitation" between the North and South as forcing the end of Reconstruction's moment of possibility.[133] After Reconstruction's demise, Du Bois noted that Booker T. Washington and the anti-discrimination movement succeeded the dreams of the freed people, but entirely misapprehended the problem. While Washington's unquestionable adherence to "capitalistic organization" rendered his efforts impotent, the anti-discrimination movement sought to solve a problem that was fundamentally an economic problem with legal rights.[134]

The New Deal could not address the problems of the black worker because the New Deal was not intended to bring about the kind of industrial democracy that freed people imagined. "Everything that has happened in the NRA and the New Deal," Du Bois declared, "might easily have been foretold before the NRA was established."[135] The problem obstructing the New Deal programs was race prejudice. Even if the New Deal subsidized access to credit, built homes, or offered relief, it could not ensure the empowerment of black laborers.[136] Du Bois cited the racial prejudices of "local agents," "segregation," and "discrimination" as reasons for the uneven application of the government programs, but he also went beyond these concerns to demonstrate how none of the New Deal policies aimed in their first instance to make black laborers a force to be reckoned with, to charge black labor with powers that would enable it to shape the content and form of industrial life. Du Bois re-presented the problem of economic depression as a chain on black political agency: "In order to be efficient co-workers in *this* reconstruction, we have got to escape the present threat of starvation, to conserve our schools and social organizations and to get regular, decently paid work. With that foundation settled we can fight discrimination."[137]

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[133] Du Bois, "Social Planning for the Negro, Past and Present," 30.
[134] Du Bois, "A Negro Nation within a Nation," 32–33; 35.
[135] Du Bois, 37.
[136] Du Bois, 37.
[137] Du Bois, 36.

The New Deal not only failed to ease the weight of day-to-day economic insecurity for black workers because it was administered by white agents and intended to help members of the former white middle class, the policies also could not guarantee that laborers regardless of race would have the sufficient method and means to assert their authority.

In rejecting the alternatives available to black workers, Du Bois referred the audience to the new economic solidarity that he put forth in the *Current History* article. The labor unions that activists discussed were primarily white organizations whose history of exclusion in order to protect member privileges dissuaded Du Bois from investing any serious belief in their emancipatory potential.[138] If black laborers found welcoming memberships, they should "unite," but Du Bois lacked confidence in interracial unionization as a strategy to solve the dilemma posed by Reconstruction's failure. Socialism also failed to satisfy Du Bois. Though he remained "convinced of the essential truth of Marxian philosophy," socialism alone did not have the "automatic power" to "override" and "suppress" race prejudice.[139] Like the efforts of unions, the proponents of the American Communist Party were more interested in the oppression of working-class white men than the oppression of the worker generally.[140] Du Bois presented black economic and political self-organization as the antidote to the problem and announced that "in the midst of all this whirlpool" black people had to secure "such beginnings of economy security" that would guarantee their power to "work out [their] destiny."[141] This economic solidarity would finally answer the question raised in the wake of Emancipation; how might

[138] Du Bois, 38.
[139] Du Bois, 38.
[140] Du Bois also chided the Communists for their belief in "immediate violent and bloody revolution," which Du Bois called "a silly program *even* for white men" 38. Drawing on pacifistic ideas about the corruption brought about by leveraging violence to create a new world (and reflecting on the bloodshed of the Great War), Du Bois refuted Marxian arguments that entailed violent overthrow: "The proletariat which stands for violence is that proletariat which becomes the tool to carry out capitalistic violence" 39.
[141] Du Bois, "A Negro Nation within a Nation," 37.

black folks obtain the economic power to assert their authority as political agents? Du Bois summarized his plan:

> …so to organize the vast consumers' power of this group as to secure wide economic independence through the exchange of services and the exchange and manufacture of goods. Through these methods, to train the American Negroes so that they will realize in their own group and realize at first, the kind of social reformation which the whole world is bound to come to some day. And above all to stop this great people from being ashamed of itself, of its color and history; of living together and working together and to realize that race segregation is the white man's loss and not the black man's damnation.[142]

Du Bois's plan for black economic solidarity cast the problem of the 1930s in different terms than the proponents of unionization or communism. While these movements sought to create the conditions for industrial democracy through a mere "reaction toward capitalism," Du Bois insisted that the self-organization of black folks in the United States offered a way forward that did not reduce the problem into an issue of race-neutral class oppression.

By recovering Du Bois's involvement in the twentieth century cooperative movement, I shed light on his political vision and how he displaced the centrality of the land question in black critiques of white economic domination. For Du Bois, black freedom demanded a re-founding of the American economic order. Rather than assimilate this project into the reformist ploy to tame capitalism through an expanded welfare state or the radical attempt to remake the system of production through communist revolution, Du Bois hoped that black workers would voluntarily opt into the movement for consumers' cooperation. Constructing a nation of cooperatives avoided important pitfalls in either of the two reigning left-liberal alternatives to depression and stagnating standards of living. As a response to the goals of the American Communist Party before 1935, consumers' cooperation depended on voluntary, independent action to form the basis of a new economic order. With respect to the New Deal program of government

[142] Du Bois, 40.

intervention, black consumers' cooperation ensured that any efforts would support and maintain black economic power.

Unlike communist revolution or liberal Democratic plans for an expanded welfare state, cooperation was based on voluntary action, preserving at the outset a pluralistic world and the representation of competing programs. Du Bois emphasized the benefits of cooperation against the alternatives in *Dusk of Dawn*:

> A nation can depend on force and therefore carry through plans of capitalistic industry, or state socialism, or co-operative commonwealth, despite the opposition of large and powerful minorities. They can use police and the militia to enforce their will, but this is dangerous. In the long run force defeats itself. It is only the consensus of the intelligent men of good will in a community or in a state that really can carry out a great program with absolute and ultimate authority.[143]

According to Du Bois, addressing economic domination by way of state coercion or force threatened the sustainability of the transformation because counter-revolution and retrenchment lurked in the distance, ready to enact their revenge. Only through persuasion and education could the cooperative movement unseat the authority of either major alternative. For this reason, I argue that Du Bois's turn to cooperation reveals a pragmatic approach to the problem of white economic domination. Du Bois was weary of the use of force and violence to build an economy free of domination and centralized control. He believed that any sufficient response to white economic domination required the embrace of new modes of action instead of rehearsing the "mere reaction" exemplified by communist revolution and the New Deal. Located within this program was a concern about using state power as the sole mechanism for economic change.

*E. The Historical and Psychic Significance of Grounded Freedom*

Du Bois's narrative in *Quest* foregrounded the specificity of place and the importance of local political action in contesting white supremacy. These two themes received treatment in his

[143] Du Bois, "W. E. B. Du Bois," 715.

speech "Behold the Land," delivered in 1946 as the principal address at the closing session of the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC). The speech amounted to a rallying cry for a new generation of black and white youth leaders and implored the audience to understand the fight for racial justice as a battle for control of Southern soil. Speaking against calls for resistance through exiting the SOuth, Du Bois argued that black people must remain in the South and win their emancipation through protracted political struggle. While the combative language highlighted the aggressiveness required to meet the severity of white racism, Du Bois insisted that the "uplift of mankind never calls for force or death."[144] Instead Du Bois envisioned the battle consisting of two strategies: publicizing the general social and economic conditions of the South and building a counter economy much like the one that Zora organizes at the end of *Quest*.[145] Both strategies presumed that black and white progressives would form an attachment to the Southern landscape and in grounding their freedom in the lands where their forbears suffered and died, achieve a kind of psychic freedom.

The speech began with a simple assertion: "The future of American Negroes is in the South."[146] Without historical context, it is all too easy to overlook the gravity of Du Bois's words. Between 1914 and 1946 almost two million black Americans moved North seeking better job prospects and an escape from the economic conditions of the sharecropper South. Over the next twenty-five years, another four million would follow suite. In this context of black Southern pessimism, Du Bois's call for black Americans to remain in the South appeared counterintuitive, if not slightly destructive. Du Bois challenged these patterns of resistance through flight by stressing the particular historic value that the South held for black people in the United States

[144] Du Bois, "Behold the Land," 10.
[145] Du Bois, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, 350.
[146] Du Bois, "Behold the Land," 7.

with a repetitive "here." The South, Du Bois claimed, represented a second homeland for people of the African diaspora because it marked three significant events in the construction of their collective fate. It was the place of entry for the first black slaves; the place where black people had made "their greatest contribution to American culture;" and the place of collective suffering and violence brought on by slavery, a failed Reconstruction, and widespread lynching.[147] Therefore, Du Bois anointed the South a "battleground" and recognized the work of SNYC as a "great crusade."[148] Similar to his refrains in BR that the failure to dismantle the slave system during Reconstruction produced a new global capitalist system of domination, Du Bois imbued the struggle against white supremacy in the South with far-reaching importance: "This is the firing line not simply for the emancipation of the African Negro… [but] for the emancipation of the colored races; and for the emancipation of the white slaves of modern capitalistic monopoly." The opening paragraph of the speech galvanized the audience members by emphasizing the global implications of their struggle and focused their attention on the need to secure land in the South to defeat white monopoly of Southern political and economic life.

Given the interracial character of the audience and the resulting rhetorical force of calls for interracial coalition building, Du Bois spoke optimistically about the possibility of allying with white Southerners. In the first two sections of the speech, he invited the white working classes and white youth to join in the battle. Unlike his turn to black segregation as a strategy after writing BR, in "Behold the Land" Du Bois supported black and white coalition building, referring to "the white working classes" as the "first and greatest" allies of the black South.[149] Du Bois positioned the white working classes against an unspecified elite who encouraged race hate

[147] Du Bois, 7.
[148] Du Bois, 7.
[149] Du Bois, 8.

and inevitably would suffer "eternal damnation" after being crushed by the "march of civilization."[150] His figuring of white animosity echoed his narrative in white Reconstruction, wherein the ex-planter aristocracy and Northern capitalists tempted the white working class of the South with fantasies of racial superiority in order to stifle interracial organization. "Behold the Land" suggested that white working people were also duped, lead astray, and fooled for and by the promise of racial superiority.

Perhaps the most surprising argument of the speech was Du Bois's refutation of exit or escape as a strategy for achieving real emancipation.[151] In previous writing, Du Bois celebrated flight and marronage as a vital form of black resistance under conditions of domination. His theory of the general strike in BR relied on his figuration of streams of slaves fleeing plantations and congregating behind Union lines.[152] In front of an audience of young black activists, however, Du Bois chose to sever marronage and flight as strategies from the idea of true freedom for black people in the United States:

> If now you young people instead of running away from battle here in Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, instead of seeking freedom and opportunity in Chicago and New York—which do spell opportunity—nevertheless grit your teeth and make up your minds to fight it our (sic) right here if it takes every day of your lives and the lives of your children's children…[153]

The fight upon which Du Bois insisted stood in opposition to "running away." Whereas fleeing the conditions of the South represented a search for freedom, Du Bois drew the audience's

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[150] Du Bois, 8–9.

[151] This criticism of marronage and flight has intellectual roots that predate the publication of BR. In 1934, writing in The Crisis, Du Bois equated mass migration and the cultivation of the "art of skulking to escape the Color Line" with a fear of the self. He argued that black people in the U.S. must "renounce a program that always involves humiliating self-stultifying scrambling to crawl somewhere where we are not wanted." Such a critique of mobility as protest positioned fighting and building "manhood" as the appropriate response: "stand erect in a mud-puddle and tell the white world to go to hell, rather than lick boots in a parlor." Du Bois, "Postscript: The Anti-Segregation Campaign," 182.

[152] Saidiya Hartman underscores the importance of flight to Du Bois's early formation as a scholar of black America. Watching thousands of rural black people rush to the city, Du Bois used language at the turn of the twentieth century that would later come to define his description of the general strike. Hartman recounts these details to foreground refusal, "no saying," and flight in Du Bois's theory of black resistance. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 108–9.

[153] Du Bois, "Behold the Land," 10.

attention toward a truer freedom that could be found in an intergenerational commitment to a single place. There, freedom would not necessarily consist of escaping the immediate conditions of domination; instead, it would be actualized through a protracted struggle to remain in place—to make the land of the South, the land of oppression, a home. Du Bois admitted that it "is no easy thing for a young black man or a young black woman to live in the South today and plan to continue to live here," but he affirmed that such a "sacrifice" is "only the Beginning of Battle."[154] Establishing a home would require efforts to re-build the South.

This new form of freedom with which Du Bois tempted the audience could only be achieved through two reconstructive plans of action: publicity and counter economic organization. Insisting that "what is going to win in this world is reason," Du Bois charged the audience with the responsibility of publicizing the conditions of the South.[155] Such responsibility consisted of two tasks for Du Bois. First, activists had to ensure that the people of the United States and the world knew "what is going on in the South;" they had to spread information about the conditions of domination. Second, the audience had to "make it impossible" for any person to live in the South and ignore the "barbarities" that prevail.[156] This second task amounted to more than a simple information campaign. Black communities would need to exert their power in order to force white Southerners to take a stand with or against their political movement.

At the same time, Du Bois pressed the audience to consider plans for reconstructing Southern life through counter economic organization. A "new nation" that rejected "slavery, monopoly and race hate" required a "new Economy" and a "new culture."[157] The new economy

[154] Du Bois, 11–12.
[155] Du Bois, 11.
[156] Du Bois, 11.
[157] Du Bois, 12.

would begin with new relationships to the land, envisioned as "cooperative agriculture on renewed land owned by the State with capital furnished by the State."[158] Once a novel experiment in agricultural production that ensured collective ownership of the land was in place, Du Bois imagined powerful unions functioning without race prejudice and "cooperative industry" buttressing their efforts.[159] These visions of possible counter-economic organization related to Du Bois's ideas in "A Negro Nation within A Nation" and his work on consumer cooperatives in the 1930s. Economic organization built on "public service" instead of "private profit" suggested the overturning of the American Assumption once and for all and sought to identify and eradicate the modes of economic production that fed racial animosity as outlined in BR.

The final two sections of the speech mirrored the introduction in their invocation of a repetitive "here" to stress the particular place for which activists needed to struggle. Du Bois spoke of the shame of "[surrendering] this glorious land" and entreated his audience to rescue and restore it.[160] The land was important for its productive potential and the resources that it could muster, but it was also in need of and worthy of saving. Harkening back to his depiction of the degradation of the land in *Souls*, Du Bois argued that economic monopoly, profiteering, and lynching enslaved the Southern people as well as desecrated the sacred potential of the land. Paraphrasing Deuteronomy 1:21, Du Bois cast the audience as the people of Israel and himself as Moses: "Behold the beautiful land which the Lord thy God hath given thee." Du Bois invited the audience to enter the promise land and make it their home, asking them not to run from the work that lied in front of them. "Behold the land, the rich and resourceful land, from which for a

[158] Du Bois, 12.
[159] Du Bois, 12.
[160] Du Bois, 13.

hundred years its best elements have been running away, its youth and hope, black and white, scurrying North because they are afraid of each other…"[161] To claim the land was to confront and oppose the forces of racial prejudice and economic domination that pervaded Southern life. Du Bois again stressed the global implication of such action by equating the choice to remain in the South and fight for control of the land with lifting "the banner of humanity" and building "in the world a culture led by black folks and joined by peoples of all colors and all races…"[162] While he admonished narrow thinking that understood the crusade for the South as a violent struggle, he ended the speech quoting Goethe's *Faust*: "Happy man whom Death shall find in Victory's splendor." Du Bois concluded by embedding the promise of freedom in struggle, contest, and disagreement.[163]

**Conclusion**

Du Bois presents a particularly complicated understanding of grounded freedom. The development of industrial and corporate capitalism during the latter half of the nineteenth century resulted in the transformation of the role of land in the economy and society. Land was losing its value as a source of capital under the pressures of mass industrialization and early financialization. This background change further dissuaded African American thinkers from the view that land ownership was a necessary condition of freedom. As I stated in the introduction, however, the persistence of land in visions of African American freedom depended not only on a first level analysis—that land literally and materially conditioned one's practice of freedom—but also a secondary level. Du Bois's turn to cooperation, inspired by reflections on the rural South,

[161] Du Bois, 13.
[162] Du Bois, 14.
[163] Du Bois also read a truncated portion of Arna Bontemps' poem "Nocturne at Bethesda." His choice to shorten that text was probably an attempt to shift the tone from one of a somber afterlife reflection to the confidence of midlife: "And in the waterfalls stand and speak."

demonstrates the staying power of this secondary level of analysis. In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois theorized the kinds of political and economic relationships that mass landlessness produced, concluding that a new political-economic regime fed itself from those social arrangements. To usurp the authority of such a regime, Du Bois contended that African Americans would need to reorganize and re-educate themselves into cooperatives. Though he early on suggested that land could not serve as a basis for cooperative ventures, he recanted that view by the 1940s and fully took up the land question once again. For Du Bois, collective ownership of the land offered two outcomes. First, it combatted the individualized wealth-hoarding mindset of twentieth century capitalism, resisting the economic domination that was born in the original denial of radical Reconstruction. Second, reclaiming the land of the South promised a form of psychic freedom founded on the overcoming of generations of injustice.

# CHAPTER SIX

## Conclusion

By this point in the study, readers should understand that unequal access to land was an enduring topic of concern in African American political thought from the Emancipation period through the second World War. "Grounded Freedom" detailed four episodes in this tradition of thinking to shed light on the potential benefits and costs of tethering the idea of freedom to land. In this conclusion I summarize the findings of my investigation, recognize the limitations of the study, and gesture toward promising questions for future work.

As I outlined in the introductory chapter, I have been concerned with the question of why the freedpeople, the formerly enslaved, seized upon the agrarian republican idea that free citizenship required access to land. Historians have readily observed that black interest in land was fueled by a desire to form independent producer households and limit the power of white landholding class in the South. I contributed to this well-known understanding by adding another meaning of independence beyond ownership of productive property. Harriet Jacobs's analysis of the slave system demonstrated that independence for the formerly enslaved included the ideal of privacy, an ideal that could be best secured through the formation of independent households. Jacobs never emphasized the need for private property rights in land to experience privacy, but the legal conditions of the post-war South made privacy difficult to come by outside of such relations.

Thaddeus Stevens's legislative plan to confiscate large plantations and redistribute the land to poor whites and freedpeople provided another reason for wanting land: to break the slave power. In the agrarian South, land represented the major form of capital and the desire to have land often came with a corollary desire to see former enslavers stripped of their power. This

desire for disempowerment, though well-founded on the abuses of power that marked the antebellum slave regime, produced a contentious political debate that haunted public discussions of Reconstruction in the immediate postwar years. Unable to overcome the popular attachment to private property rights, radical abolitionists failed to realize the goals of the freedpeople in their policy-making.

In the fourth chapter, Pauline Hopkins's novel *Winona* allowed me to articulate the justice claims of the formerly enslaved that continued into the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Hopkins weaved together the stories of African Americans and indigenous people in her novel, focusing on the centrality of disinheritance in American history. Like the Seneca peoples who had been rendered invisible by the growth of the American nation, Judah and Winona risk a similar fate of falling into obscurity as slaves after their father's death. To escape their condition of bondage, both characters join the abolitionist cause and draw upon the cultural resources of their heritage as members of the Seneca nation. Their pursuit of rightful inheritance at the end of the novel amounts to a reclamation of land and property denied them as non-white individuals. From this vantage point we can read the pursuit of land in the post-emancipation moment as an act of reclamation, an attempt to cast the wealth of white Americans as partially belonging to the indigenous, African, and Asian peoples who labored and died to enable accumulation.

Finally, chapter five offered another reason for continuing the pursuit of land: psychic freedom. Though W.E.B. Du Bois presented the Reconstruction Era land question as merely one historical expression of a broader struggle for productive capital, he continued to think about the meaning of land for black freedom. By the mid-1940s, his firm commitment to cooperative economics led him to re-discover the land question for the twentieth-century, albeit in a new

register. Du Bois argued that collective ownership of southern land would contribute to the freedom of African Americans by riding them of the weight of historical oppression on Southern land and their simultaneous dislocation from it. Mass cooperative ownership of Southern land would break the psychic power of historical oppression and enable more equal forms of production.

I also aimed to formulate an answer to the question of how the idea of grounded freedom negotiated emerging power structures in the post-emancipation period. The thinkers that I considered in this study offer two answers to this question. First, Pauline Hopkins's novel showed that African American thinkers understood that unequal land distribution stemmed from an original dispossession of indigenous peoples. Combining an analysis of black unfreedom with settler dispossession highlighted the need for black land claims to unseat the authority of white claims to prior possession. African Americans—in claiming land—questioned the idea that America was a "white man's nation" and criticized the reigning imperial consensus that white people (figured as a more civilized race) were more fit to govern the Earth and its inhabitants.

Du Bois's turn toward cooperative ownership provides an even clearer response to this second question. Du Bois understood that the monopolistic economic power of American corporations could not be undone by a simple widening of access to land. His turn to cooperative ventures and his attempts to organize a mass cooperative movement emerged from an understanding that achieving the freedom foreclosed during Reconstruction required the generation of entirely new modes of being in the world. Du Bois sought to rejuvenate American political culture and implant new values of cooperative production to combat the greed and profit-seeking that characterized early twentieth-century American capitalism. And yet,

cooperation would need to achieve collective ownership of southern land if it were to eradicate all forms of post-emancipation unfreedom.

As an investigation of a series of episodes in American history, this dissertation lacks the intellectual depth to conclusively evaluate the normative merits of grounded freedom. I cannot answer whether grounded freedom was an erroneous or ill-fated conception of freedom that misled reformers or energized white backlash. The closest I came to issuing a normative evaluation of the idea of grounded freedom was in relation to the freedpeople's original desire for land. On that occasion I was more interested in resisting contemporary labels like cruel optimism or ugly freedom which cast the demand for land in an assimilationist or conservative light. I have proceeded with caution in detailing the arguments of the various thinkers to avoid offering final pronouncements on their ideas. Instead, I have approached these texts with an historical sensibility, with the intention to identify the problem-spaces of the thinkers.

There are also two important silences in my investigation that prevent me from providing a definitive story about the idea of grounded freedom. The first piece missing from my story is the precursor to the emancipation moment. Agrarian republican thought long wrestled with the problem of landlessness and early modern receptions of Roman law brought those considerations to the fore. To fill out my study, I need to extend my research into the antebellum period to show what the agrarian ideal of freedom looked like before slave emancipation and how that event affected its development. Second, as I mentioned in the introduction, I lack serious attention to black nationalist thought, a tradition that has roots in the antebellum period and runs concurrently with some of my chosen theorists of grounded freedom. Black nationalists could be thought of as theorists of grounded freedom and the long durée of black nationalism might be a key to understanding how and why the idea of grounded has diminished in the second half of the

twentieth century. These limitations point to further research. The episodic structure of the dissertation has enabled me to cover a lot of material, but future work on this topic would benefit from a narrower historical window and the ability to speak with greater depth about the various ideas at play.

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