

The Second American Revolution *

During the fateful years of 1860 and 1861, James A. Garfield, a representative in the Ohio legislature, corresponded with his former student at Hiram College, Burke Hinsdale, about the alarming developments in national affairs. They agreed that this "present revolution" of southern secession was sure to spark a future revolution of freedom for the slaves. Garfield quoted with approval William H. Seward's Irrepressible Conflict speech predicting a showdown between the slave South and the free-labor North. Garfield echoed Seward's certainty of the outcome. The rise of the Republican party, they agreed, was a "revolution," and "revolutions never go backward." If civil war followed from secession, wrote Garfield, so be it, for the Bible taught that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." Or as Hinsdale put it: "All the great charters of humanity have been writ in blood. . . . England's was engrossed in that [the blood] of the Stuarts— and that of the United States in [the blood] of England." Soon, perhaps, the slaves would achieve their charter of freedom in the blood of their masters.

When the war came, Garfield joined the Union army and rose eventually to the rank of major general. For him the war was, quite literally, the second American Revolution. In October 1862, he insisted that the conflict of arms must destroy "the old slaveholding, aristocratic social dynasty" that had ruled the nation, and replace it with a "new Republican one." A few months later, while reading Louis Adolphe Thiers's ten-volume *History of the French Revolution*, Garfield was "constantly struck" with "the remarkable analogy which the events of that day bear to our own rebellious times."

In December 1863, Garfield doffed his army uniform for the civilian garb of a congressman. During the first three of his seventeen years in Congress, he was one of the most radical of the radical Republicans. In his maiden speech to the House on January 28, 1864, Garfield called for the confiscation of the land of Confederate planters and its redistribution among freed slaves and white Unionists in the South. To illustrate the need for such action, he drew upon the experience of the English revolution against the Stuarts and the American Revolution against Britain. "Our situation," said Garfield, "affords a singular parallel to that of the people of Great Britain in their great revolution" and an even more important parallel to our forefathers of 1776. "Every one of the thirteen States, with a single exception, confiscated the real and personal property of Tories in arms." The southern planters were the Tories of this second American Revolution, he continued, and to break their power we must not only emancipate their slaves, "we must [also] take away the

platform on which slavery stands—the great landed estates of the armed rebels. . . . Take that land away, and divide it into homes for the men who have saved our country." And after their land was taken away, Garfield went on, "the leaders of this rebellion must be executed or banished. . . . They must follow the fate of the Tories of the Revolution." These were harsh measures, Garfield admitted, but "let no weak sentiments of misplaced sympathy deter us from inaugurating a measure which will cleanse our nation and make it the fit home of freedom. . . . Let us not despise the severe wisdom of our Revolutionary fathers when they served their generation in a similar way."

Garfield later receded from his commitment to confiscation and his belief in execution or banishment. But he continued to insist on the enfranchisement of freed slaves as voters, a measure that many contemporaries viewed as revolutionary. He linked this also to the ideas of the first American Revolution. The Declaration of Independence, said Garfield in a speech on July 4, 1865, proclaimed the equal birthright of all men and the need for the consent of the governed for a just government. This meant black men as well as white men, he said, and to exclude emancipated slaves from equal participation in government would be a denial of "the very axioms of the Declaration."

In 1866, Congress passed the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution as a compromise that granted blacks equal civil rights but not equal voting rights. When the southern states nevertheless refused to ratify this moderate measure, Garfield renewed his call for revolutionary change to be imposed on the South by its northern conquerors. Since southern whites, he said in early 1867, "would not co-operate with us in rebuilding what they had destroyed, we must remove the rubbish and rebuild from the bottom. . . . We must lay the heavy hand of military authority upon these Rebel communities, and . . . plant liberty on the ruins of slavery."

This rhetoric of revolution was hardly unique to Garfield. Numerous abolitionists, radical Republicans, and radical army officers were saying the same things. The abolitionist Wendell Phillips was the most articulate spokesman for a revolutionary policy. He insisted that the Civil War "is primarily a social revolution. . . . The war can only be ended by annihilating that Oligarchy which formed and rules the South and makes the war—by annihilating a state of society. . . . The whole social system of the Gulf States must be taken to pieces." The congressional leader of the radical Republicans, Thaddeus Stevens, was equally outspoken. We must "treat this war as a radical revolution," he said. Reconstruction must "revolutionize Southern institutions, habits, and manners.... The foundations of their institutions . . . must be broken up and relaid, or all our blood and treasure have been spent in vain." The colonel of a Massachusetts regiment stationed in the occupied portion of South Carolina during 1862 said that the war could be won and peace made permanent only by "changing, revolutionizing, absorbing the institutions, life, and manners of the conquered people."

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European radicals also viewed the American Civil War as a revolution. In London, Karl Marx followed the American war with intense interest. He wrote about it in articles for a Vienna newspaper and in private letters to his colleague Friedrich Engels. Marx described the war for the Union against the "slave oligarchy" as a potentially "world transforming . . . revolutionary movement" if the North would only seize the moment to proclaim the abolition of slavery. When Lincoln did so, Marx was ecstatic. "*Never* has such a gigantic transformation taken place so rapidly" as the liberation of four million slaves. "Out of the death of slavery" would spring "a new and vigorous life" for working-class people of all races, wrote Marx, for "labor with a white skin cannot emancipate itself where labor with a black skin is branded. . . . Workingmen of Europe feel sure that as the American War of Independence initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle class, so the American Antislavery War will do for the working classes." Georges Clemenceau of France, future leader of the French Left and premier of France in the later stages of World War I, was the American correspondent of a radical French newspaper from 1866 to 1869. In articles written from Washington, where Clemenceau came particularly to admire Thaddeus Stevens, the young French journalist described the abolition of slavery and enfranchisement of the freedmen as "one of the most radical revolutions known in history." A British writer chimed in with a description of Stevens as "the Robespierre, Danton, and Marat of America, all rolled into one.

Hostile contemporaries concurred with this appraisal of the Civil War's revolutionary impact. The conservative and pro-Confederate *Times* of London described the radical Republicans as the Jacobins of the second American Revolution, a label picked up by subsequent historians who used it as an epithet to portray the radicals as bloodthirsty fanatics. A Democratic newspaper in Boston likewise compared radicals to "the 'Committee of Twelve' of the days of the Reign of Terror." A few weeks after Appomattox the *New York Herald*, notorious during the war for its hostility to Republican war policies including emancipation, concluded that by destroying both slavery and "the domineering slaveholding aristocracy . . . this tremendous war has wrought in four years the revolutionary changes which would probably have required a hundred years of peace." An anguished editor in Memphis declared in 1865 that "the events of the last five years have produced an entire revolution in the entire Southern country." And two years later a South Carolina journalist, reacting to the enfranchisement of the freedmen, pronounced it "the maddest, most infamous revolution in history."

I

Among historians the notion of the Civil War as the second American Revolution is identified most closely with Charles A. Beard. But in Beard's view,

slavery and emancipation were almost incidental to the real causes and consequences of the war. The sectional conflict arose from the contending economic interests of plantation agriculture and industrializing capitalism. Slavery happened to be the labor system of plantation agriculture, Beard conceded, but apart from that it was not a crucial issue in and of itself except for a handful of abolitionists. In effect, the war was a class conflict between a Yankee capitalist bourgeoisie and a southern planter aristocracy. "Merely by the accidents of climate, soil, and geography," wrote Beard, "was it a sectional struggle." The triumph of the North under the leadership of the Republican party, which represented the interests of northern capitalism, brought about "the unquestioned establishment of a new power in the government, making vast changes in the arrangement of classes, in the distribution of wealth, in the course of industrial development." If the overthrow of the king and the aristocracy by the middle classes of England in the 1640s was to be known as the Puritan Revolution, and the overthrow of king, nobility, and clergy by the middle classes and peasants of France as the French Revolution, maintained Beard, then "the social cataclysm in which the capitalists, laborers, and farmers of the North and West drove from power in the national government the planting aristocracy of the South" was the "Second American Revolution, and in a strict sense, the First"—the first because the Revolution of 1776 had produced no such changes in the distribution of wealth and power among classes.

Beard's interpretation was a modern variant of Marx's perception of the Civil War, with the question of slavery—which was of central importance for Marx—shunted into the wings. Although not strictly a Marxist, Beard was influenced by reading Marx. Avowed Marxian historians such as Herbert Aptheker and James S. Allen (the pen name of Sol Auerbach) have emphasized more than did Beard the issue of slavery. For them, the outcome of the Civil War was not merely a triumph of northern industrial capitalism over plantation agriculture; it was also a victory of the radical bourgeoisie in alliance with the black proletariat and elements of the white proletariat over the southern aristocracy. That a large percentage of the white "proletariat" in both North and South either supported the Confederacy or opposed emancipation, however, is something of an embarrassment to the Marxian interpretation.

A scholar whose work owes much to Marxian analytical categories is Barrington Moore, who has portrayed the Civil War as "the last Capitalist Revolution." Moore's argument is subtle and complex, hard to summarize briefly without distortion. He sees the revolutionary dimension of the war not simply as a triumph of freedom over slavery, or industrialism over agriculture, or the bourgeoisie over the plantation gentry—but as a combination of all these things. Plantation agriculture in the South was not a form of feudalism, Moore insists; rather, it was a special form of capitalism that spawned a value system and an ideology that glorified hereditary privilege, racial caste, and slavery while

it rejected bourgeois conceptions of equality of opportunity, free labor, and social mobility. Thus the war was a struggle between two conflicting capitalist systems—one reactionary, based on slave labor, and fearful of change; the other progressive, competitive, innovative, and democratic. Although the slave system presented no obstacle to the growth of industrial capitalism as an *economic* system (here is where Moore differs from Beard), it did present a "formidable obstacle to the establishment of industrial capitalist democracy ... at least any conception of democracy that includes the goals of human equality, even the limited form of equality of opportunity, and human freedom. . . . Labor-repressive agricultural systems, and plantation slavery in particular, are political obstacles to a *particular kind* of capitalism, at a specific historical stage: competitive democratic capitalism we must call it for lack of a more precise term." In this sense the free-labor ideology of the Republican party in the Civil War era was heir to the radical bourgeois ideologies of the English and French Revolutions; the triumph of this ideology in the 1860s was therefore the "last revolutionary offensive on the part of what one may legitimately call urban or bourgeois capitalist democracy. . . . It was a violent breakthrough against an older social structure."

II

The number of historians as well as contemporaries who have perceived the Civil War as a revolutionary experience would seem to have established something of a consensus on this question. But in the 1960s and 1970s several historians questioned the idea that the Civil War accomplished any sort of genuine revolution, and some even denied that it produced much significant change in the social and economic structure of the South or in the status of black people.

The initial challenge to Beard's thesis of the war as an economic revolution came from economic historians in the 1960s. They argued, first, that the basic developments which produced the industrial revolution in the United States—the railroad, the corporation, the factory system, the techniques of mass production of interchangeable parts, the mechanization of agriculture, and many other aspects of a modernizing industrial economy—began a generation or more before the Civil War, and that while the war may have confirmed and accelerated some of these developments, it produced no fundamental change of direction. Economic historians demonstrated, second, that the decade of the 1860s experienced an actual slowing of the rate of economic growth, and therefore the war may have retarded rather than promoted industrialization.

The first of these arguments is well taken. Crucial innovations in transportation, technology, agriculture, the organization of manufacturing, capital formation, and investment did take place in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Civil War did not begin the modernization and

industrialization of the American economy. But this truth actually supports rather than contravenes the Beard and Moore theses. Most of these antebellum modernizing developments were concentrated in the North. The South remained a labor-intensive, labor-repressive undiversified agricultural economy. The contrasting economic systems of the antebellum North and South helped to generate the conflicting proslavery and antislavery ideologies that eventually led to war. Northern victory in the war was therefore a triumph for the northern economic system and the social values it had generated. The war discredited the economic ideology and destroyed the national political power of the planter class. In this sense, then, the Civil War produced a massive shift toward national domination by the northern model of competitive democratic free-labor capitalism, a transformation of revolutionary proportions as described by Beard and Moore.

This ties in with the second point concerning the slowdown in the rate of economic growth in the 1860s. It is true that growth during the decade which included the war was lower than in any other decade between the 1830s and 1930s. But these growth data include the South. The war accomplished a wholesale devastation of southern economic resources. If we consider the northern states alone, the stimulus of war production probably caused a spurt in the economic growth rate. It was the destruction of the southern economy that caused the lag. After the war the national economy grew at the fastest rate of the century for a couple of decades, a growth that represented a catching-up process from the lag of the 1860s caused by the war's impact on the South.

Let us take a closer look at that impact. Union invasion of the Confederacy and the destruction of southern war industries and transportation facilities, the abolition of slavery, the wastage of southern livestock, and the killing of one-quarter of the South's white male population of military age made an economic desert of large areas of the South. While the total value of northern wealth increased by 50 percent during the 1860s, southern wealth *decreased* by at least 60 percent. In 1860 the South's share of national wealth was 30 percent; in 1870 it was only 12 percent. In 1860 the average per capita income of southerners, including slaves, was two-thirds of the northern average; after the war the southern average dropped to less than two-fifths of the northern, and did not rise above that level for the rest of the nineteenth century.

The withdrawal of southern representatives and senators from Congress when their states seceded also made possible the passage of Republican-sponsored legislation to promote certain kinds of economic development. For years the southern-dominated Democratic party had blocked these measures. But Congress during the war enacted higher tariffs to foster industrial development; national banking acts to restore part of the centralized banking system destroyed in the 1830s by Jacksonian Democrats; land grants and government loans to build the first transcontinental railroad; a homestead act to grant 160 acres of government land to settlers; and the land-grant college

act of 1862, which turned over federal land to the states to provide income for the establishment of state agricultural and vocational colleges, which became the basis of the modern land-grant universities.

The war had a crucial impact on the long-term sectional balance of power in the nation. Before 1861 the slave states, despite their declining percentage of the population, had used their domination first of the Jeffersonian Republican party and then the Jacksonian Democratic party to achieve an extraordinary degree of power in the national government. In 1861 the United States had lived under the Constitution for seventy-two years. During forty-nine of those years the president had been a southerner—and a slaveholder. After the Civil War a century passed before another resident of the South was elected president. In Congress, twenty-three of the thirty-six speakers of the House down to 1861, and twenty-four of the thirty-six presidents pro tern of the Senate, were from the South. For half a century after the war, *none* of the speakers or presidents pro tern was from the South. From 1789 to 1861, twenty of the thirty-five Supreme Court justices had been southerners. At all times during those years the South had a majority on the Court. But only five of the twenty-six justices appointed during the next half-century were southerners.

These sweeping transformations in the balance of economic and political power between North and South undoubtedly merit the label of revolution. But this was a revolution in an *external* sense. It was only part of what contemporaries meant when they described the war as a revolution. More important, in the eyes of many, was the *internal* revolution: the emancipation of four million slaves, their elevation to civil and political equality with whites, and the destruction of the old ruling class in the South—all within the space of a half-dozen years. This was what the disgruntled South Carolinian quoted earlier meant when he deplored Reconstruction as "the maddest, most infamous revolution in history." It was what Georges Clemenceau meant when he spoke of "one of the most radical revolutions known to history." This was what freed slaves meant in the 1860s when they said jubilantly, "the bottom rail's on top."

But during the later 1960s and 1970s—in the climate of disillusionment produced by the Vietnam War and the aftermath of the civil rights movement—a number of skeptical historians maintained that the bottom rail never was on top and that a true internal social revolution never took place. Some argued that the Republican party's commitment to equal rights for freed slaves was superficial, flawed by racism, only partly implemented, and quickly abandoned. Other historians maintained that the policies of the Union occupation army, the Freedmen's Bureau, and the national government operated in the interests of the white landowners rather than the black freedmen, and that they were designed to preserve a docile, dependent, cheap labor force in the South rather than to encourage a revolutionary transformation of land tenure and economic status. And finally, another group of scholars asserted that the domination of the southern economy by the old planter class continued unbroken after the

Civil War. By such devices as the crop lien system, debt peonage, sharecropping, and a host of legal restrictions on black labor mobility, the planters kept their labor force subservient and poor in a manner little different from slavery. Thus, in the words of historian Louis Gerteis, the war and Reconstruction produced no "fundamental changes" in the "antebellum forms of economic and social organization in the South." No "social revolution" took place because the abolition of slavery produced no "specific changes either in the status of the former slaves or in the conditions under which they labored."

These studies left the question of the Civil War's revolutionary dimensions in considerable doubt and confusion. Part of the problem stemmed from the elastic meaning of the word "revolution." The term is often thrown around with careless abandon. The concept has almost become trivialized. In our own time we have lived through the technological revolution, the cybernetic revolution, the sexual revolution, the black revolution, the green revolution, the feminist revolution, the youth revolution, the paperback revolution, and the revolution of rising expectations—to name but a few.

By such standards the Civil War was indeed a revolution—but so was just about everything else in American history. If we turn for help to the large scholarly literature on revolutions, we find almost as wide a variety of meanings as in common parlance. Definitions range from such brief statements as: Revolution "connotes a sudden and far reaching change, a major break in the continuity of development"; or "a sudden overthrow of established authority, aimed at a fundamental change in the existing social order"; to more complex and sweeping definitions, such as "a Revolution is a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies." Some analysts, mainly political scientists and political historians, focus on revolutions that overthrow existing governments. For one such analyst, revolution is a "sudden and violent change in the political system and government of a state," while another defines it as "the drastic, sudden substitution of one group in charge of the running of a territorial political entity for another group." But for other scholars, especially but by no means exclusively those influenced by Marxist thought, even a violent overthrow of political institutions or rulers is not a genuine revolution unless, in Marx's words, it produces "a social transformation in which the power of the obsolescent class is overthrown, and that of the progressive, revolutionary class is established in its place."

Faced with such a bewildering variety of definitions, one is tempted to agree with the French historian who decided that the only way to study revolutions was to "accept as revolution what men of a certain period experienced as revolution and so named it themselves." But since many contemporaries called the American Civil War a revolution, that would not help us with the analytical problem raised by historians who deny that it really *was* a

revolution. Let us instead adopt a common-sense working definition of revolution, and then return to the question whether the Civil War meets this definition. Let us define revolution simply as the overthrow of the existing social and political order by internal violence. Does the Civil War qualify? Certainly it does on the grounds of violence. It was by far the most violent event in American history. The 620,000 soldiers killed in the Civil War almost equals the number of American fighting men killed in all the country's other wars combined. What about the overthrow of the existing social and political order? As noted earlier, in an external sense the war did destroy the South's national political power, so thoroughly crippled the region's economy that it took nearly a century to recover, and by abolishing slavery undermined the basis of the antebellum social order. In these respects, the Civil War overthrew the *ancien regime* about as thoroughly as any previous revolution in history had done.

But we must still confront the arguments that the war and Reconstruction did not accomplish a genuine revolution in race relations or labor relations in the South. To a considerable degree, these arguments are flawed by presentism, by a tendency to read history backwards, measuring change over time from the point of arrival rather than the point of departure. Such a viewpoint looks first at the disabilities and discrimination suffered by black Americans in the twentieth century and concludes that there must have been little or no change since slavery. But this is the wrong way to measure change. It is like looking through the wrong end of a telescope—everything appears smaller than it really is.

A few statistics will illustrate the point. When slavery was abolished, about 90 percent of the black population was illiterate. By 1880 the rate of black illiteracy had been reduced to 70 percent, and by 1900 to less than 50 percent. From the perspective of today, this may seem like minimal progress. The illiteracy of almost half the black population in 1900, compared with less than a tenth of the white population, may seem shameful. But viewed from the standpoint of 1865 the rate of literacy for blacks increased by 200 percent in fifteen years and by 400 percent in thirty-five years. This was significant change. Or take another set of educational data: in 1860 only 2 percent of the black children of school age in the United States were attending school. By 1880 this had increased to 34 percent. During the same period the proportion of white children of school age attending school had grown only from 60 to 62 percent. From one viewpoint, the proportion of black school attendance was still only half the proportion of white in 1880. But the change since 1860 was dramatic—indeed, revolutionary. The relative proportions of blacks and whites attending school had jumped from one-thirtieth to more than one-half. No other period of American history witnessed anything like so great a rate of relative change.

Or let us look at the economic condition of the freed slaves in the generation after emancipation. This is the issue that has attracted most of the attention of historians who deny the existence of meaningful change. The grim

reality of share-cropping and rural poverty in the South seems at first glance to confirm their argument. But studies of the economic consequences of emancipation by Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch provide evidence for a different conclusion. In the first place, Ransom and Sutch point out, the abolition of slavery represented a confiscation of about three billion dollars of property—the equivalent as a proportion of national wealth to at least three *trillion* dollars in 1990. In effect, the government in 1865 confiscated the principal form of property in one-third of the country, without compensation. That was without parallel in American history—it dwarfed the confiscation of Tory property in the American Revolution. When such a massive confiscation of property takes place as a consequence of violent internal upheaval on the scale of the American Civil War, it is quite properly called revolutionary.

The slaves constituted what economists call "human capital." Emancipation transferred the ownership of this capital to the freed slaves themselves. This had important consequences for the new owners of the capital, according to Ransom and Sutch. They calculate that under slavery, the slaves in the seven cotton states of the lower South had received in the form of food, clothing, and shelter only 22 percent of the income produced by the plantations and farms on which they worked. With the coming of freedom, this proportion jumped to 56 percent, owing to the ability of free laborers to bargain for higher wages—in the form of money or a share of the crop—than they had received as slaves. This did not mean that the overall standard of living improved quite so dramatically for blacks, because the postwar poverty of the southern agricultural economy meant that the average per capita income in the region declined. Blacks were getting a bigger share of the pie, but it was a smaller pie. Nevertheless, Ransom and Sutch conclude that between 1857 and 1879 the average per capita income for blacks in southern agriculture increased by 46 percent, while the per capita income of whites declined by about 35 percent. Put another way, black per capita income in these seven states jumped from a relative level of only 23 percent of white income under slavery to 52 percent of the white level by 1880. Thus, while blacks still had a standard of living only half as high as whites in the poorest region of the country—the negative point emphasized by the historians cited earlier—this relative redistribution of income within the South was by far the greatest in American history.

Or consider the question of land ownership, a vital measure of wealth and status in an agricultural society. Again, at first glance the picture seems to confirm the argument of the "no change" historians. Abolitionists and Republicans like Garfield had urged the confiscation of land owned by wealthy Confederates and the allocation of part of this land to freed slaves. This would have been a truly revolutionary act. But confiscation was too radical for most Republicans, and even if they had tried it the Supreme Court might have ruled it unconstitutional. There was no meaningful land reform in the South. Planters lost their slaves but not their land. In this respect the war accomplished only

half a revolution. Nevertheless, there were significant changes even in the matter of land ownership. In 1865 few blacks owned land in the South. But by 1880, 20 percent of the black farm operators owned part or all of the land they farmed (the rest were renters or sharecroppers). By 1910, 25 percent of the black farmers owned land. At the same time the proportion of white farmers who owned land was decreasing from more than 80 percent at the end of the war to 60 percent in 1910. Here again, while blacks remained far below whites, the war made possible a large and important relative change.

Finally, let us look at one more index of change within the South—political power. At the beginning of 1867 no black man could vote in the South. A year later, blacks were a majority of registered voters in several ex-Confederate states. No black man yet held political office. But three or four years later, about 15 percent of the officeholders in the South were black—a larger proportion than in 1990. In 1870, blacks provided three-fourths of the votes in the South for the Republican party, which controlled the governments of a dozen states in which five years earlier most of these black voters had been slaves. It was this phenomenon, more than anything else, that caused contemporaries to describe the events of those years as a revolution.

It has also caused the historiographical pendulum in the 1980s to swing back toward a perception of the Civil War and Reconstruction as a revolutionary experience. Two books by Eric Foner have been instrumental in this process. Foner points out that the United States was unique among post-emancipation societies in granting freed slaves equal political rights. This revolutionary act had important consequences for social and economic relations in the new order. "The Second American Revolution," writes Foner, "profoundly if temporarily affected the relationship of the state to the economic order. . . . The freedmen won, in the vote, a form of leverage their counterparts in other societies did not possess. . . . Radical Reconstruction stands as a unique moment when ... political authority actually sought to advance the interests of the black laborer." As a South Carolina planter complained in 1872, "under the laws of most of the Southern States ample protection is afforded to tenants and very little to landlords."

In Foner's judgment, this exercise of political power was more important than land redistribution would have been. The experience of freed slaves and of non-white peoples in the Caribbean, Africa, and other regions demonstrates that nominal ownership of land does little to foster economic independence "where political power rests with classes that are at worst hostile and at best indifferent to the fate of the rural population." Reconstruction legislatures enacted certain taxes, mechanic's and renter's lien laws, measures concerning credit and the like that protected the interests of sharecroppers and wage-earners against landlords and employers. The "Redeemer" governments that overthrew Reconstruction in the 1870s reversed the relationship. A few examples will illustrate the point. In 1865-66 southern state governments had

adopted "Black Codes" to keep black labor in a state of dependence and subjection as close to slavery as possible. The Freedmen's Bureau and federal courts suspended these codes; Republican state governments repealed them during Reconstruction; Redeemer governments in effect restored some of them in the form of landlord's liens, vagrancy laws, contract labor laws that amounted to peonage, anti-enticement laws to limit labor mobility, criminal statutes rigged against blacks, and a pattern of law enforcement that favored white over black and landlord over cropper. During Reconstruction the state of South Carolina set up a land commission that sold land to 14,000 black families on easy terms; the Redeemer government retained the commission but changed its administration in such a way as to foreclose on the properties of most of these families and transfer the land to white ownership. When Republicans controlled the South Carolina government, black rice workers struck for higher wages in 1876 and won; across the Savannah River in Georgia, where Democrats ruled, wages on the rice plantations averaged less than half the level in South Carolina.

In 1868 a black speaker at a political meeting in Savannah declared that "a revolution gave us the right to vote, and it will take a revolution to get it away from us." That, unfortunately, is what happened. For freed slaves the second American Revolution turned out, in Foner's words, to be "America's unfinished revolution" because many of its gains were reversed by what Vice-President Henry Wilson described in 1874 as "a Counter-Revolution." The Civil War *did* partially overthrow the existing social and political order in the South—overthrow it at least as much as did the English Revolution of the 1640s or the French Revolution of the 1790s. Neither of those revolutions totally destroyed the *ancien regime*, and both were followed by counterrevolutions that restored part of the old order, including the monarchy. But scarcely anyone denies the label revolution to those events in English and French history. The events of the 1860s in the United States equally deserve the label revolution. It also was followed by a counterrevolution which combined white violence in the South with a revival of the Democratic party in the North and a growing indifference of northern Republicans toward the plight of southern blacks. The counterrevolution overthrew the fledgling experiment in racial equality. But it did not fully restore the old order. Slavery was not reinstated. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments were not repealed. Blacks continued to own land and to go to school. The counterrevolution was not as successful as the revolution had been. The second American Revolution left a legacy of black educational and social institutions, a tradition of civil rights activism, and constitutional amendments that provided the legal framework for the second Reconstruction of the 1960s.