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RED SEA, WHITE TIDES, AND BLUE HORIZONS

by

JOHN DEVINE

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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ABSTRACT

Red Sea, White Tides, and Blue Horizons

by
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Eric Hobsbawm, in his effort to explain the fundamental divide which produced the Second World War, convincingly argues that “the crucial lines in this civil war were not drawn between capitalism as such and communist social revolution, but between ideological families: on the one hand the descendants of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and the great revolutions including, obviously the Russian revolution’, on the other hand, its opponents.” This thesis argues that the American Civil War was a “great revolution” that represented a crucial transformative point in the formation of these two warring factions. The struggle was especially influential on the theory of Karl Marx, who declared in the preface to the First German Edition to *Capital Volume I*, that “As in the 18th century, the American war of independence sounded the tocsin for the European middle class, so that in the 19th century, the American Civil War sounded it for the European working class.” The death of slavery in the United States was not a inevitability, but the result of intense political struggle that emerged from a foundational material contradiction of North American settler colonialism and subsequent capitalist development which dramatically reshaped the transnational ideological dialectic between the forces for and against the rule of the masses.

Red Sea, White Tides, and Blue Horizons

In 1918, as the imperial powers of Europe smashed their apparatuses of mass violence against each other, the continent's newest statesman composed a love letter to the American working class. Echoing the language of the most famous text written by the historical materialist philosopher who most influenced his political practice, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars declared that "America has taken first place among the free and educated nations in the level of development of the productive forces of collective human endeavour, in the utilisation of machinery and of all the wonders of modern engineering." In particular he praised the "American people, who set the world an example in waging a revolutionary war against feudal slavery" and ridiculed all those who would deny "the immense, world-historic, progressive and revolutionary significance of the American Civil War of 1863-65!" Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov urged the American proletariat to revive the spirit of their rebellious past and transform the imperialist world war into a civil war against the bourgeoisie.¹

Lenin was not the only Bolshevik leader to draw ideological inspiration from the struggle between the Union and the Confederacy. In his reply to Karl Kautsky's critique of war communism, Leon Trostky justified the terroristic methods utilized by the Red Army against the Russian White Guard by drawing a comparison to the federal government's decision during the American Civil War to imprison citizens of Baltimore at Fort McHenry in violation of *Habeas Corpus*. He described how dissenting opinions were suppressed with revolutionary fervor throughout the Union, where "people frequently burst into the offices of newspapers which supported the revolting slave-owners and smashed their printing presses." With the abolition of

property in human beings at stake, “the institutions of democracy proved absolutely powerless to decide the argument in a peaceful way.”²

The social transformation unleashed by the American Civil War was unquestionably revolutionary. A struggle that emerged from a partisan dispute over the productive mode of imperial expansion into the Western territories, ended with the eradication of chattel slavery from the United States. C. Vann Woodward has suggested that “the end of slavery in the South can be described as the death of a society, though elsewhere it could more easily be characterized as the liquidation of an investment.”³ Yet, contrary to false narratives propagated in the aftermath of Reconstruction, the peculiar institution of the Southern social system was not experiencing a natural demise in the years leading up to the violent struggle between the Union and the Confederacy. In reality, property ownership in human beings and their exchange value on commodity markets had reached their zenith. In 1805 there were just over one million slaves in the United States valued around \$300 million; fifty-five years later the American planter class possessed the largest slave empire in the world where four million human beings in bondage were worth approximately \$3 billion.⁴

Their accumulated capital dramatically vanished as the slave masters’ most productive investment consciously liquidated themselves as a class in response to the outbreak of total war. As WEB Du Bois convincingly argues in *Black Reconstruction in America*, the withholding of labor by hundreds of thousands of enslaved people “was not merely the desire to stop work. It was a strike on a wide basis against the conditions of work. It was a general strike that involved directly in the end perhaps half a million people. They wanted to stop the economy of the plantation system, and to do that they left the plantations.”⁵ Not only did the rebelling slaves

momentarily disrupt the agricultural production that enriched their owners and provided sustenance for Confederate soldiers, they directly waged war against the civilization that had locked them in chains in a deliberate effort to permanently break them. By 1865 their asset value had been unwillingly exchanged into an armed revolutionary force as tens of thousands of formerly enslaved people joined the Union Army to overthrow their old masters. As President Lincoln observed, "without the military help of the black freedmen, the war against the south could not have been won."⁶ Thus the end of slavery was more than a passive expiration of the American South's peculiar institution, but the active destruction of the slave masters' regime by their class enemies through a revolutionary struggle that spurred the birth of a new society.

After exerting outsized influence over national politics for the first seven decades of the American republic, the slavocracy committed accidental class suicide in their effort to prevent their collective suffocation by the ascendent free labor political coalition. Prominent Southern families had held a dominating presence in all three branches of the federal government since its founding, but the election of the antislavery Republican Abraham Lincoln to the presidency shattered their faith in the Union to protect their peculiar form of private property. After years of Northern politicians acquiescing to the Slave Power, a political coalition committed to the principles of free labor consolidated within the newly formed Republican Party. Its prominent leaders promised to put slavery on a "course of ultimate extinction."⁷ In an attempt to preserve the foundational social relations of their society, the Southern ruling class launched a preemptive political counterrevolution against the state apparatus that had for several decades not merely enabled the continuation of property ownership in human beings, but expanded its domain by waging settler colonial wars of aggression against both the various indigenous nations of North

America and the Mexican Empire. While their aggressive strategy has been typically characterized by historians as an hysterical overreaction to electoral defeat, James Oakes notes that the secessionists were merely taking the “Republicans at their word.”⁸

In the decade leading up to the war, free labor ideologues castigated slave masters as “barbarians” who “prated of freedom for the sake of establishing and perpetuating slavery; who boasted of liberty that they might exercise despotism.”⁹ At that same time defenders of property ownership in human beings decried that wage labor was actually “more cruel” than slavery and a veiled disguise of what in reality was really just a “White Slave Trade.”¹⁰ Eric Foner asserts that in the same way in which “freedom and slavery were joined in the actual development of the New World, the definition of free labor depended on juxtaposition with its ideological opposite, slave labor.”¹¹ United in their pursuit of capital accumulation, the political economies of slavery and freedom split over the labor regime best suited for the appropriation of surplus-value and the concomitant progressive development of civilization. With the election of Abraham Lincoln to the White House, the material and ideological contradiction at the core of the early American republic burst into a violent class struggle that permanently altered the trajectory of world history. Hundreds of thousands died in the total war unleashed by the slave masters’ reaction to the threat posed to their peculiar means of capital accumulation by the ascendancy of a free labor politician to the highest seat of power in the United States.

Less than four years after his inauguration, slavery was abolished by an official decree of the Congress and ratified by the states before the end of that year.¹² Alongside the Republican Party and the Union army, newly freed men and women liquidated the Southern slavocracy that had dominated the federal government since its founding. In his letter to Abraham Lincoln on

behalf of the International Workingmen's Association, Karl Marx declared that "your re-election is Death to Slavery" and rejoiced that "this barrier to progress has been swept off by the red sea of civil war."¹³ There is no doubt that the greatest emancipation of labor during Marx's lifetime heavily influenced his understanding of the dialectic between capitalist development and violent class struggle. Yet the impact that the abolition of chattel slavery in the United States had on Marxian theory and practice is largely absent from prominent narratives on the European ideological civil war unleashed by the First World War. Even the most acclaimed historical materialist literature on the transformation of human civilization since the dual revolutions of the late eighteenth century overlooks how the nineteenth century war in which enslaved black Americans broke their own chains shaped the ideological struggles that defined the twentieth century.

In *The Age of Empire*, the conclusion to his renowned trilogy on the long-nineteenth century, Eric Hobsbawm demonstrates how the First World War shattered the foundations of European society. "What collapsed was clear: the liberal world system and nineteenth-century bourgeois society as the norm to which, as it were, any kind of 'civilization' aspired."¹⁴ Hobsbawm is certainly correct in his assessment that as millions of men marched to their doom in the summer of 1914 European society began to descend into an industrialized barbarism that would permanently revolutionize its power structures. Over the next three decades the horrors of mechanized warfare ravaged Europe in a series of civil and imperialist wars. In Russia, such unprecedented violence strained the autocracy beyond its breaking point as it proved increasingly incapable of effectively mobilizing its imperial subjects for mass human sacrifice on the front lines. The Czarist state's legitimacy disintegrated. More than a decade later in his reflection upon

the crisis unleashed in Russia by the First World War in which he would ultimately play a central role, revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky described how “Tracts of land were violently laid waste. Clouds of human locusts were driven to the rear with whips. The external rout was completed with an internal one.”¹⁵ On March 8th, 1917 strikes and bread riots broke out in Petrograd. Industrial workers and starving civilians took to the streets. Four days later the local garrison mutinied and overthrew the dynasty that had ruled over Russia for three centuries.¹⁶ The liquidation of the Romanov regime failed to pacify the insurrection that had precipitated its collapse, but rather catalyzed both an intensification and proliferation of revolutionary fervor across the decomposing remains of the Russian Empire.

The new Provisional Government proved incapable of establishing hegemony as its sovereignty was immediately contested in the trenches, countryside, and cities by class warfare and the soviet organizational form. Military discipline fractured as rank and file soldiers organized councils and abandoned the front in droves. Class hierarchy melted in the countryside as peasants set fire to the property of the landed gentry. War production stalled as overworked, starving industrial workers increasingly seized control of the factories. The masses demanded peace, land, and bread. While the Provisional Government was deaf to their ultimatum, the Bolsheviks heard their collective call. Lenin seized the opportunity to put his revolutionary theory into practice amidst the rebellion of “unprecedentedly large masses of proletarians who have just awakened to political life.”¹⁷ He justified launching the socialist revolution in Russia out of his analysis that it was the “weakest link” in the imperialist chain.¹⁸ The Bolsheviks gambled that the proletarian seizure of power in Russia would transform the World War into an international civil war against the various national ruling classes. At first it appeared as if the

workers of the world were uniting into a collective force for global revolution. Popular uprisings against the imperialist war spread westward across the European continent. As the Bolsheviks consolidated their power in Petrograd, it “was to Germany that [Lenin] looked most anxiously.”¹⁹ This was due to the fact that their more advanced capitalist economy represented a far better fit for the Marxist theory of proletarian revolution. Between 1871 and 1910 industrial production had increased fivefold in Germany, a process that transformed their economy into the most powerful force in continental Europe.²⁰ During that same period the proportion of people living within cities had risen from 36.1 percent to 60 percent.²¹ Meanwhile in Russia, four-fifths of the self-supporting population of Russia was still engaged in agricultural work on the eve of the revolution.²²

By the fall of 1918, hundreds of thousands of German soldiers retreated from the endless graveyards of the Western Front.²³ German sailors joined in the revolt against their imperial government. The Second Reich crumbled and unleashed a struggle for power. The decision of the German Social Democratic Party to support the war effort four years prior created divisions amongst the organized forces of the left that proved impossible to heal. Revolutionary communists, led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, rose up to seize power in Berlin in January of 1919. Their insurrection rapidly collapsed as they lacked support from many of their former allies in the SDP. The government of Ebert and Scheidemann stood out of way as the Freikorps extinguished the rebellion. Luxemburg and Liebknecht were assassinated amidst the struggle. Their murders “rendered unbridgeable the gulf between the Majority Social Democrats and the revolutionaries.”²⁴ Communists momentarily seized power in other cities across the continent over the next few years, but they never managed to subordinate the propertied classes

to a socialist state anywhere outside of Russia. Ultimately, as Hobsbawm describes, “The world revolution, which justified Lenin’s decision to commit Russia to socialism, did not take place, and with it Soviet Russia was committed to a generation of impoverished and backward isolation.”²⁵

Revolution inevitably spurred counterrevolution. Unsurprisingly, the landed gentry and their allies refused to be sacrificed at the altar of egalitarian progress and human liberation. Financed by the foreign imperial powers, the remnants of the old regime organized into various White armies in their effort to return their class to state power. Millions perished in the Russian Civil War as famine and the competing reigns of terror ravaged the country. Tens of thousands of Jews were slaughtered by the Whites in Ukraine during a wave of pogroms in 1919. Admiral Kolchak, who led the counterrevolutionary campaign in Siberia, declared his intention “to exterminate and annihilate” Bolshevism. The Bolsheviks responded in kind as the Cheka, their new secret police, executed tens of thousands throughout the war.²⁶ In a radio address directed towards an American audience less than two decades later during the 1930s, Leon Trotsky argued that the “high costs of the revolution” were justified in the same manner that “the progressive forces of American society” rationalized the mass violence required to defeat the master class.²⁷ Civil war inevitably produced an unfortunate but unavoidable reality in which the struggle to overcome the forces of reaction necessitated regrettable sacrifices of human life. Within five years of the Bolshevik seizure of state power the counterrevolution had been crushed by the Red Army and purged from the Soviet Union. The peasantry overcame their suspicion of socialism to ultimately side with the Bolsheviks, who promised to redistribute the land, over the aristocrats, who viewed them as inherently inferior. Their contingent allegiance to the newly constructed

socialist state proved decisive. The revolution survived. Through the 600,000-strong centralized and disciplined Communist Party, the Bolsheviks constructed a new state.²⁸ However, as Arno Mayer notes, “the counterrevolution took root abroad. It developed and came of age throughout Europe in the form of Fascism.”²⁹

Hobsbawm asserts that the “rise of the radical Right after the First World War was undoubtedly a response to the danger, indeed to the reality, of social revolution and working-class power in general, to the October Revolution and Leninism in particular.”³⁰ Fascist leaders did not deny that the basis of their ideology was rooted in taking action against revolution. A decade following his seizure of power during the March on Rome, Mussolini wrote that “Fascism [is] the complete opposite of...Marxian Socialism.”³¹ While the various struggles of the twentieth century European civil war as well as the particularities of the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary ideological formations that emerged in that continental slaughterhouse are well beyond the scope of this essay, its end result is familiar to most with a basic understanding of modern history. Nazi Germany launched an unprecedented war of annihilation in a counterrevolutionary crusade to exterminate Bolshevism. Six million Jews were slaughtered by the death cult arm of private property while somewhere around eleven million Red Army soldiers as well as between seven and twenty million of the Soviet civilian population died in the struggle against Nazi imperial aggression.³² Yet less than two decades into the thousand year Reich, the Fuhrer’s utopian dream mutated into his worst nightmare. Hitler stabbed himself in the back as the Red Army overwhelmed the depleted Nazi forces in Berlin. While the triumph of their will proved short lived, the ascendancy of the genocidal Nazi Empire has shaken the collective consciousness of those who value human life ever since.

Civilizational collapse did not materialize out of thin air, but violently burst through the cross-class alliances that had consolidated their rule amidst the ‘Springtime of the Peoples.’ Crucially, as Hobsbawm states in *The Age of Capital*, the bourgeoisie ceased to be a politically revolutionary force in the European imperial core in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions.³³ Unlike the American slave owners, the European aristocracy prevented their liquidation in the nineteenth century through class compromise. The specter of social revolution pushed the capitalist class to export their “uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions” to the colonized periphery as they constructed a new form of hegemonic rule in a historic bloc with the ancien regime.³⁴ As Arno Mayer describes, “Postfeudal nobilities and landed elites generally survived into the twentieth century not simply or primarily because of their privileged political, social, and cultural positions but also because of their still massive, if slowly decreasing, economic weight.”³⁵ Even as the German Empire blazed a path towards industrialization and urbanization in the first decade of the twentieth century nearly half of the population still lived in villages and towns of less than 10,000. 20 percent of national income continued to be produced by the 40 percent of German laborers who remained in agriculture.³⁶ The uneasy, but strategically necessary relationship between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy combined with the materialization of a social Darwinian global imperium to foster even more ideological bloodlust, especially as war presented an opportunity for the old regime to reaffirm its supposedly inherent superiority. Even though capitalist market dependence increasingly seized power over all the propertied classes, the bourgeoisie had not actually emerged as hegemonically dominant in all of Europe as the continent’s competing national ruling classes soaked their civilization in blood.

Yet to even attempt to fully explore what produced the killing fields of Europe in the twentieth century requires escaping the confines of the continent itself. The manner in which the Civil War in the United States is largely absent from narrative explanations of the violent end to the Belle Époque is emblematic of how even anticapitalist intellectuals reinforce the national borders created by the social system they hope to see overthrown. While Hobsbawm accurately recognized imperial competition as the fundamental cause of the First World War, even he and other historians from the imperial core who were sympathetic to the plight of colonized people were blind to the extent of European barbarity waged against them. As Mike Davis articulates, “modern historians writing about nineteenth-century world history from a metropolitan vantage-point have ignored the late Victorian mega-droughts and famines that engulfed what we now call the ‘third world.’ Eric Hobsbawm, for example, makes no allusion in his famous trilogy on nineteenth-century history to the worst famines in perhaps 500 years in India and China.”³⁷

Such devastating famines existed under conditions in which the imperial elite had the power to prevent mass death, but the masters of the market refused to provide relief to a population they regarded as inferior. Feeding the starving peasants would have been a rejection of the ‘natural law’ of ‘survival of the fittest,’ a heretical violation of their social Darwinian principles. Instead British viceroys permitted huge grain exports to flow to the imperial metropole as the local population was reduced to skin and bones. Mass starvation was only made possible by the new social structures that emerged as the British imperial state increasingly penetrated the Indian countryside in their hunt for new sources of raw materials. The American Civil War had disrupted the flow of slave cultivated cotton into English textile factories. As Karl Marx noted, as a “consequence of the great demand for cotton after 1861, the production of

cotton, in some thickly populated districts of India, was extended at the expense of rice cultivation.”³⁸ Less than two years after the secession of the Confederacy, raw cotton production in India increased by 50 percent as the colony momentarily became their primary supplier. In Berar, the total acreage for cotton harvesting nearly doubled between 1861 and 1871. British imperial policy liquidated the village based governing structures and forced market dependence onto the locals.³⁹ What spurred the unprecedented mass slaughter on the European continent beginning in 1914 were the violent processes through which the ‘liberal world system’ originally emerged.

Hobsbawm by no means neglects the significance of the American Civil War in his brilliant narrative on the rise of bourgeois global hegemony. In *The Age of Capital*, the British Marxist asserts that the conflict was the “greatest of all wars” in the period between the European revolutions of 1848 and the Great Depression of the 1870s, while also articulating its disruptive impact on international commodity markets.⁴⁰ He certainly recognizes the central role that the war between the Union and the Confederacy had in the ascendancy of the American capitalist class. According to Hobsbawm, not only did the American Civil War result in “the triumph of the industrialized North over the agrarian South,” but additionally “might be regarded as an early if giant step on the road which was in the twentieth century to turn all the Americas from a British to an American economic dependency.”⁴¹ Yet what is underemphasized by Hobsbawm is not the crucial role that the American Civil War had in revolutionizing “the relations of production,” but rather how the political struggle that produced the violent liquidation of the American slavocracy and the emancipation of its most valuable asset altered the ideological development of

oppositional movements committed to either transforming or preserving the “whole relations of society.”⁴²

Eric Hobsbawm experienced these violent contradictions firsthand as a teenager in the streets of Berlin, as the Jewish communist fought alongside his German Bolshevik comrades against Nazi brownshirts. Later in his life, in his effort to explain the fundamental divide which produced the Second World War, Hobsbawm convincingly argues that “the crucial lines in this civil war were not drawn between capitalism as such and communist social revolution, but between ideological families: on the one hand the descendants of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and the great revolutions including, obviously the Russian revolution’, on the other hand, its opponents.”⁴³ His theoretical proposition is far more grounded in historical reality than liberal historians such as Mark Mazower who primarily blame the horrors of the Age of Catastrophe on the attempt of utopian ideologues “to remake society, the continent and the world in a New Order for mankind.”⁴⁴ Such narratives oversimplify the causes of mass death in Europe by downplaying the continental powers’ exportation of unrelenting violence to their colonies in the decades prior, while overlooking the conflicting philosophical ideals’ roots in the fundamental social contradictions of the Belle Epoch. With his own evidence Mazower contradicts his argument that utopianism was the primary catalyst that unleashed Europe’s dark twentieth century. He describes how “German anthropologists who shaped SS racial policy in eastern Europe during the Second World War had begun their careers with scholarly articles on ‘race mixing’ in pre-1914 colonial Africa and Asia, where their concerns were shared by British and French colleagues.”⁴⁵ While manmade ideologies absolutely shape the course of historical development, philosophers do not possess the power to change the world in the circumstances of

their own design. Rather, material reality and belief systems smash against one another in a cycle that perpetually reshapes both in an unpredictable trajectory.

While Hobsbawm correctly identifies the central contradiction that produced the warring factions of the European ideological civil war, there is still a missing piece within his epic narrative. The class war waged against the Slave Power in the United States is entirely absent from the chapter in *The Age of Capital* dedicated to the emergence of Marxism, despite the fact that Marx wrote extensively on the American Civil War. In the preface to the First German Edition to *Capital Volume I*, Karl Marx declared that “As in the 18th century, the American war of independence sounded the tocsin for the European middle class, so that in the 19th century, the American Civil War sounded it for the European working class.”⁴⁶ Additionally, he referred to the struggle between the Union and the Confederacy as “the one great event of contemporary history.”⁴⁷ The American Civil War was not only demonstrably one of “the great revolutions” that Hobsbawm referenced, but the struggle between the Union and the Confederacy represented a crucial transformative point in the emergence of these warring “ideological families.”

The Confederate ruling class’ rationalization of secession fully elucidates what particular aspects of the great revolutions have produced this violent schism. While Alexander Stephens feared the consequences of a potential war abolitionism, he gradually embraced disunion through his belief that the central role that chattel slavery played in the international circulation of commodities would ensure security for the master class. “In olden times the olive branch was considered the emblem of peace; we will send to the nations of the earth another and far more potential emblem of the same, the cotton plant.”⁴⁸ In an appeal to the British government in 1861 R.M.T Hunter, the Confederate Secretary of State, argued that secession established “no

precedent for the overthrow of the lawful authority of a regular Government by revolutionary violence” but rather was sovereign states acting in coordination to “preserve their old institutions.”⁴⁹ Southern newspapers decried that the Republicans were “active and bristling with terrible designs and as ready for blood and forcible realities as ever characterized the ideas of the French revolution.”⁵⁰ The forces of reaction have not opposed the unprecedented accumulation of wealth and technological development spurred by capitalist production, nor have they inherently rejected Smithian notions of the free market. What has been untenable for the unenlightened faction of the ruling class and their sycophants have been the efforts to materialize the egalitarian ideals of the great revolutions. The Confederate political project was an antidemocratic counterrevolution against any perceived threat to the chattel slave mode of production. In his Second Inaugural Address, Confederate President Jefferson Davis clearly laid out the slavocracy’s justification for secession: “To save ourselves from a revolution which, in its silent but rapid progress, was about to place us under the despotism of numbers.”⁵¹ President Lincoln offered a diametrically opposed theory of who has the right to rule. In the Gettysburg Address, he declared “that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”⁵² The death of slavery in the United States was not a inevitability, but the result of intense political struggle that emerged from a foundational material contradiction of North American settler colonialism and subsequent capitalist development which dramatically reshaped the transnational ideological dialectic between the forces for and against the rule of the masses.

The violent political antagonism that exploded into the bloodiest conflict in the history of the United States did not materialize out of purely idealistic differences between the Southern

states and the rest of the American republic. Since the first decades of English settlement in North America, colonialists in what would later become the Union and the Confederacy constructed distinct land and labor regimes in reaction to the social transformation in their motherland. Proletarianization, the process through which the agricultural producing class became dependent on selling their labor to the owners of private property to survive that ultimately developed into mass production in factories, first occurred in the English countryside as an unintended consequence to the crisis of feudalism. As their tenants attempted to exert customary rights and take advantage of competition between lords, English elites utilized their preeminent class institution, the monarchical state, to legally strip peasants of access to their land and violently crush any uprisings against the emerging social order. Consequently the mass of agricultural producers were forced to increase productivity in order to maintain any semblance of their former way of life.⁵³ The intelligentsia of the ascendant bourgeoisie celebrated their society's exceptional productivity by naturalizing these historically unique social relations as inevitable byproducts of the sacred laws of human development. However, as Karl Marx noted, "spoliation of the church's property, the fraudulent alienation of the State domains, the robbery of the common lands, the usurpation of feudal and clan property" had been erased from their narrative. A history of violence had been washed away by the new religion of progress.

The dispossession of the English peasantry was not the only "reckless terrorism" required for the rising global dictatorship of capital accumulation.⁵⁴ Empire was the means through which the English ruling class transformed land and labor regimes around the world for their own benefit. New England settlers attempted to escape the worst consequence of proletarianization by fleeing across the Atlantic Ocean to not commodified territory but ultimately spread the domain

of market dependent social relations to North America. The colonizers purposely developed a political economy rooted in widespread land ownership. Local town governments managed prices, wages, and migration in an effort to stave off the overwhelming pauperization that had disturbed the moral senses of the Puritans in England. As Barry Levy summarizes, “New England’s male workers exercised more political power and enjoyed more equality than almost any other producers in the Atlantic World.”⁵⁵ Colonization in Virginia and the Carolinas followed a different course from the onset. The settlers hoped to replicate the immense and concentrated wealth of the British gentry. However, there was no mass of landless wage laborers to exploit in North America as in England. As imported indentured servants proved difficult to control, racialized slave labor kidnapped from Africa filled the void.⁵⁶

As the particular trajectories of economic development in North America generated lucrative means for commodity production and capital accumulation, the imperial state in London constructed a legal regime to meet the demands of the metropole’s financial profiteers. Representatives of the British propertied classes fostered market dependent social relations on their North American colonial subjects in the eighteenth century. In response to Virginia planters resisting the demands of English creditors, Parliament decreed the Act for the More Easy Recovery of Debts in his Majesty’s Plantations and Colonies in America in 1732. All forms of property were obtainable for debt collectors. Claire Priest describes how not only did this imperial policy “diminish the role of landed inheritance in American society by privileging the claims of creditors over heirs when debtors died” but that it “promoted the slave trade by explicitly repealing all colonial property exemptions to land, houses, and slaves and by requiring colonial courts to administer streamlined processes for seizing and selling these assets.”⁵⁷ While

some state legislatures placed limitations on debt collectors in the aftermath of the American Revolution, slaves remained legally defined as seizable assets.

Contradictorily, as the various former colonies were integrated into the newly established American national state following the War of Independence, the gulf between their political economies broadened exponentially. As slave labor was gradually abolished in the Northern states, property ownership in human beings proliferated across the South. The expansion of the master class' plantation empire was the direct consequence of what Eric Hobsbawm describes as "probably the most important event in world history."⁵⁸ By the nineteenth century this new set of market dependent social relations had utterly revolutionized a historically agricultural civilization into an urban society. In 1750 approximately 8 percent of the population lived in the countryside, by 1850 nearly half of the English people lived in cities. During the first half of the nineteenth century the population of London nearly tripled from 960,000 to 2,685,000.⁵⁹ A new class emerged, the industrial bourgeoisie, who increasingly accumulated capital as their wage laborers utilized machines to transform raw materials into marketable goods on a mass scale. As factory workers replaced the individualist workshop guild as the dominant form of the division of labor in manufacturing it ushered in an era of historically unprecedented economic growth. Pig iron production in England rose from an annual average of just 69 thousand metric tonnes per year in the 1780s to approximately 3.5 million metric tonnes per year by the end of the 1850s, while the output of coal and lignite grew from approximately 17.7 million metric tonnes in 1822 to 158.9 million metric tonnes in 1882.⁶⁰

The Industrial Revolution in England increased production in its textile factories on an unprecedented scale which in turn spurred gluttonous demand for raw cotton, as imports into the

workshop of the world grew from 11 million pounds in 1785 to 588 million pounds by 1850.⁶¹ American slave plantations seized the lucrative opportunity to become their primary supplier. The growth of their export oriented industry was dramatic. Cotton production soared from 1.5 million pounds in 1790 to 2.28 billions pounds on the eve of the American Civil War.⁶² As the British industrialists revolutionized the instruments of production, American slave owners spread their relations of production westward across the North American continent. Yet this circulation of exchange did more than merely extend the sphere of chattel slavery, it utterly metamorphosed the basis of its existence. Karl Marx noted that as the American master class cultivated raw materials for the British industrial bourgeoisie it furthered the commodification of labor power on both sides of the Atlantic. As “the cotton industry introduced child-slavery in England, it gave in the United States a stimulus to the transformation of the earlier, more or less patriarchal slavery, into a system of commercial exploitation. In fact, the veiled slavery of the wage workers in Europe needed, for its pedestal, slavery pure and simple in the new world.”⁶³ Unlike Lenin, Marx did not characterize nineteenth century American chattel slavery as feudal, but rather formulated that the ancient practice of appropriating surplus-value through slave labor had been revolutionized by the increasing dependence of the master class on the market. In order to preserve their status as property owners, slave owners needed to continually accumulate more capital. Even though the United States had achieved political independence, the Southern states became increasingly economically dependent on the emerging factory system in England as commodified plantation labor cultivated raw materials for mass production overseas. Thus this most important world historical development was rooted in the mutually profitable exchange between the British bourgeoisie and American slave masters.

Industrialization was not the only dramatic social transformation of the late eighteenth century that was shaped by the emerging American republic and in turn altered the new nation's political economic trajectory. The United States was born during a period of unprecedented upheaval all across the Atlantic World, now commonly referred to as the Age of Revolution. Popular revolt in the European metropole and their colonies exposed the weaknesses of the old regimes. Imperial war pushed the French monarchical state to its breaking point as its support of the American War of Independence, in an effort to undermine its English rival, led to bankruptcy. The parameters of global political struggle were permanently altered by the active destruction of what had been Europe's most powerful ancien regime. Like their American counterparts, French revolutionary leaders drew ideological inspiration from the Enlightenment. However, Hobsbawm argues that the transformation they presided over "was far more fundamental" and "its consequences were therefore far more profound." The most dramatic result of the American War of Independence was the negation of "the political control of the British," while the struggle in France was "a mass social revolution" whose ideals reverberated around the world.⁶⁴ Arno Mayer goes even further to suggest that the American Revolution "was actually a restoration" primarily "driven by tradition." In contrast to the French revolutionaries who produced "a decisive change in the very meaning of the word-concept revolution" when they "abolished seignorial rights and feudal privileges and adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen."⁶⁵ During the midst of the Civil War in the United States, Marx posited a different understand than Mayer's later analysis on the role that the American Revolution had in bourgeois ideological development when he declared that "the American War of Independence initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle class" in Europe.⁶⁶ While Hobsbawm convincingly

demonstrates how the French Revolution represented a more radical transformation than the American Revolution, his assessment is more aligned with Marx in the sense that he argues that the revolt of the American colonists “helped to stimulate the French” revolutionaries and served as “inspiration for democratic-radical movements.”⁶⁷ In particular, the similar ideals of the two revolutions’ most famous declarations provides strong evidence of a shared political lineage between the two struggles. Yet, Mayer’s hesitancy in drawing this connection is rooted in the reality that chattel slavery was not merely preserved in the aftermath of the War of Independence, but aggressively expanded until it was dramatically extinguished in the American Civil War.

Another revolution during this era of unprecedented social transformation did bring about the destruction of property ownership in human beings. The first successful slave revolt in history not only shook the nerves of the master class and reshaped their ideological justification of chattel slavery, but reconfigured the economy of the Atlantic World. While this most dramatic and immediate global repercussion of the French Revolution is underemphasized in both Hobsbawm’s and Mayer’s narratives, the uprising in Haiti undeniably altered global capitalist development. In 1789 French Saint Domingue was the wealthiest colony in the Caribbean where 452,000 slaves annually produced 177,000,000 pounds of sugar and 74,000,000 pounds of coffee, more than anywhere else in the world.⁶⁸ This paradise of profits for the French maritime bourgeoisie was a hell on earth for its laborers. If they survived the charnel boats of the Atlantic passage, the slaves were often worked to death on the plantations. Torture was the response to the mildest transgression as “masters poured burning wax on their arms and hands and shoulders, emptied the boiling cane sugar over their heads, burned them alive, roasted them on slow fires, filled them with gunpowder and blew them up with a match.”⁶⁹ The slave owners' reign of terror

was flipped on its head after the liquidation of the aristocratic monarchy in the imperial capital spurred an uprising in its most profitable colony. Jacobinism spread to Haiti as revolting slaves melted their own chains with fire and blood. After more than a decade of various revolutionary and imperial conflicts, the colony severed ties with France in 1803 after formerly enslaved black masses overcame Napoleon's attempt to return them to bondage. As CLR James articulates, former slaves "had seen at last that without independence they could not maintain their liberty, and liberty was far more concrete for former slaves than the elusive forms of political democracy in France."⁷⁰ Out of both fear of another counterrevolutionary challenge to their liberation and a desire for revenge over decades of violent exploitation, the armed forces of the newly independent black republic massacred most of the remaining French whites.

The first successful slave uprising in history provided a profound challenge to the United States' leading slave owners' commitment to bourgeois ideals of liberty. American federal policy towards Haiti gradually changed as the constitutional republic experienced its first partisan transfer of power in the executive branch. In the last year of the eighteenth century, President John Adams, a representative of the New England merchant class, signed legislation that established independent diplomatic relations with the Haitian leader Toussaint as well as legalized trade with the island, despite the embargo with France. The ascendancy of the slave owning Thomas Jefferson to the presidency represented a profound shift in the United States' relationship to Haiti, especially in the aftermath of its bloody struggle for independence.⁷¹ On February 28, 1806 Jefferson signed into law a bill that banned trade with the black republic and denied it diplomatic recognition. William Plumer, a Federalist Senator from New Hampshire, decried that "several of the Senators from the Southern States declared that almost the only

reason that reconciled them to the bill was the fatal influence that the independence of the Haytians would have on their own slaves."⁷² A new counterrevolutionary ideology had begun to emerge. In his famous writings on agriculture, John Taylor, the Democratic-Republican Senator from Virginia, proclaimed that "making republicans of negro slaves" ultimately produced an political crisis in which "one colour must perish." His critique of equality went beyond the Haitian Revolution. While he sympathized with the "abstract principles" of the French Revolution, Taylor asserted that the attempt to implement them in practice "turned out to be a foolish and mischievous speculation."⁷³ Elizabeth Dillon and Michael Drexler argue that Taylor's work represented a moment in which "slave owners shifted from apologetic defenses of slavery to aggressive ones that described slavery as a positive good."⁷⁴ Paranoia about a similar uprising in the American South combined with the unforeseen demand for slave cultivated cotton unleashed by the Industrial Revolution in England resulted in a reconfiguration of the dominant ideology of the master class.

The specter of slave revolt was just one of many social questions faced by the ruling elite of the early American republic as they constructed their new state apparatus. Even though the various propertied classes of the newly established United States would increasingly split apart over the right to own human beings as chattel, the continuation of the settler colonial project provided a unifying force in the first decades of national development. The vanguard of the American Revolution did not abandon their former colonial overseers' commitment to capital accumulation, but rather they viewed the territorial spread of modern private property as the political means through which to secure the perpetuation of their dominant position atop the social hierarchy in the so-called New World. Joshua Simon frames the American War of

Independence in the broader context of “anti-imperial imperialist” revolutions across the Americas. He argues that “Hamilton, Bolivar, and Alaman all converged on an important set of ideas, defending American independence as a response to the unequal conditions imposed on Creoles by European imperial rule, proposing, constitutions designed to protect Creole privileges within independent societies by unifying former colonies and granting executives extensive authority, and seeking to consolidate their states’ sovereignty through territorial expansion and internal colonization.”⁹⁶ What made this ideological project more successful in the United States than the rest of the hemisphere was that the competing political factions were able to find enough common ground to facilitate peaceful transfers of state power in the first decades after the American Revolution. In the Federalist Papers, James Madison had offered a theoretical solution to the class violence of European society. “Extend the sphere” of the Union in order to prevent an “improper or wicked project” such as the “equal division of property” from descending the nation into civil war.⁷⁵ Despite the significant differences between the parties that Hamilton and Madison represented, the distinct propertied classes in the United States built a cross-class alliance on the shared principle that imperialism would ensure social stability and provide the opportunity to generate more profit.

More than twenty years after the ratification of the Constitution, former President Thomas Jefferson wrote to then President Madison to congratulate his administration on the resumption of trade with the English. He also noted how bright the prospects had become for American imperialism. He believed that “no constitution was ever before so well calculated as ours for extensive empire.”⁷⁶ Only a few years before, during his own presidency, Jefferson had taken advantage of Napoleon’s failure to reestablish colonial domination over Haiti to cheaply

purchase France's North American territory. While in reality much of the land was still controlled by the indigenous population, the Louisiana Purchase nearly doubled the territory available to American settlers for colonization. Madison's political theory appeared to be delivering in practice. In an 1822 message to Congress, President Monroe reiterated the rhetoric of his predecessors. He declared that the "greater the expansion, the greater the advantage" for the United States.⁷⁷ Earlier in Monroe's presidency, General Andrew Jackson had taken an aggressive action that the Commander and Chief was unwilling to pursue, but happy to condone once it proved successful. The American occupation of Spanish Florida paved the way for its annexation by the United States. Secretary of State John Quincy Adams declared that "law of nature" made it "unavoidable that the remainder of the continent should ultimately be ours."⁷⁸ The American founders' ideological justification for territorial conquest proliferated well beyond the boundaries of North America. Five years before the onset of the twentieth-century, as the British imperial apparatus starved millions of peasants to death in their colonies, British millionaire Cecil Rhodes echoed a similar sentiment. He proposed that "colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced in the factories and mines. The Empire, as I have always said, is a bread and butter question. If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists."⁷⁹

Material reality proved to be far more contradictory. Ultimately the various developments unleashed by the Age of Revolution did not resolve the fundamental contradiction of North American settler society, but further intensified the division over the foundational social question in the United States. Settler colonial conquest on the periphery unleashed political antagonism in the imperial core, specifically over whom would most benefit from the

expropriated plunder. Due to the electoral system of unequal representation inscribed into the Constitution, the Southern slavocracy held a firm grip on the United States federal government from the founding. They utilized the powers of the executive branch to seize land from the indigenous population in order to proliferate chattel slavery westward across the continent. As the American republic expanded westward and plantation owners weaponized the antidemocratic mechanisms of the Constitution to their advantage, representatives from the far more populous free states became increasingly antagonistic to the Slave Power. Iowa Congressman Josiah Grinnell observed in 1865 that in the last few decades before the Civil War slaveholders “have had the Secretaryship of State for two thirds of the time; and... . . for four fifths of the time have the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy been from the South.”⁸⁰ The 7 percent of the Southern population that owned three-fourths of the nearly four million slaves not only ruled over their plantations with a bloody whip, they exploited their grip over their local estates to seize control of the federal government. This minority of landed oligarchs utilized their entrenched power to determine “eleven out of sixteen Presidents, seventeen out of twenty-eight Judges of the Supreme Court, fourteen out of nineteen Attorneys-General, twenty-one out of thirty-three Speakers of the House, eighty out of one hundred thirty-four Foreign Ministers.”⁸¹ Yet their dominance over the political institutions of the United States concealed their society’s relative weakness compared to the rapidly industrializing states where slavery had been abolished. Karl Marx recognized how it had become an absolute necessity for the master class to exert their outsized influence on the federal government in order to further spread the reach of their social relations of production and maintain the legitimacy of the plantation regime. “Moreover, the oligarchy of the 300,000 slaveowners could not even maintain their sway at home save by

constantly throwing out to their white plebeians the bait of prospective conquests within and without the frontiers of the United States.”⁸² With their strong hold over the state apparatus, the Southern slavocracy pursued a program of vast imperial expansion in order to further germinate their social order across North America.

Foreshadowed by the general’s invasion of Florida a decade prior to his election to the presidency, the transition from the republic’s founding generation to the Jacksonian consensus represented the acceleration of the settler colonial project and the vulgarization of its ideological justification. During the 1830s, Democratic administrations ethnically cleansed the southeastern states of their indigenous population through the forced removal of 85,000 people. In the fifteen years prior to the election of Abraham Lincoln, the native population of California declined by more than 100,000.⁸³ President Andrew Jackson believed the more gradual expansionist strategy of his predecessors was too accommodating to the native population. Their negotiating tactics were insufficient to meet the needs of the growing slave empire. In 1830 he signed into law the Indian Removal Act, which mandated that federal troops purge the lands east of the Mississippi of their indigenous peoples. He justified his imperial policy through the implicit language of white supremacy. “What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry execute, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization and religion?”⁸⁴ State sanctioned mass violence on the border was foundational to the ideological project of Jacksonian *herren-volk* democracy. In the antebellum United States, freedom was defined by the unlimited violence white Americans could perpetuate upon the racialized peoples

walled outside of the body politic. For Jackson, liberty meant the freedom for white settlers to clear any land of their former inhabitants in order to bring it under the plantation regime. Barbaric violence was the most effective means through which to spread the enlightened civilization of the master class. Whiteness was the new religion that provided a moral justification to his imperial crusade. War on the frontier brought new fertile lands under cultivation that produced a lucrative bounty for King Cotton but simultaneously unleashed the political crisis that ultimately liquidated his throne.

The territorial annexation of Mexican land north of the Rio Grande heightened tension between the increasingly distinct regions of the United States political economy. During the 1820s the Mexican imperial government, intent on suppressing indigenous revolt, encouraged American settlement in what would ultimately become the state of Texas. Anglo colonists brought with them a vision of enriching themselves through the spread of chattel slavery. Leading settler Stephen Austin declared that the “primary product that will elevate us from poverty is Cotton.” He believed that property ownership in human beings was a necessary precondition to produce that wealth.⁸⁵ Conflicts over slavery spurred civil war in Mexico and led to the secession of Texas from the empire. The struggle unleashed ripple effects that generated open antagonism in the halls of the United States government. When pursuing the annexation of Texas as Speaker of the House, James Polk faced the wrath of a free state congressman for his commitment to westward expansion on behalf of the slavocracy. Polk was demeaned as “the slave holder sitting in the chair” by John Quincy Adams, who had become increasingly disillusioned with the imperial project since his time in the Monroe administration as the prerogatives of a more brazen master class steered American foreign policy. The former

president accurately ridiculed Polk as a “slave-holding exterminator of Indians.”⁸⁶ Yet his words were powerless to stop the relentless advance of the vast Southern empire. By the middle of the next decade Polk was elected president and pursued an ambitious imperial agenda that only further intensified sectional hatred in Washington. In a speech directed against President Polk’s foreign policy in the House of Representatives while the American military waged war on Mexico, Connecticut Congressman Gideon Welles declared “The time has come, when the Northern democracy should take a stand. Everything has taken a Southern shape and been controlled by Southern caprice for years.”⁸⁷

Less than a year prior to the ‘Springtime of the Peoples’ in Europe, soldiers in the United States army marched into the Plaza de Armas as the American flag arose above the Mexican capital. Despite the outsized role of the planter class in leading this imperial war of westward expansion, certain historians have asserted that the slave owners were a provincial ruling class primarily concerned with preserving traditional values through their local dominion. Eugene Genovese claims that they possessed “an aristocratic, antibourgeois spirit” that “recoiled at the notions that profit should be the goal of life.”⁸⁸ He goes as far as to argue that the “planters, in truth, grew into the closest thing to feudal lords imaginable in a nineteenth-century bourgeois republic” while literal descendants of European feudal lords still maintained massive estates across the Atlantic.⁸⁹ While Genovese is certainly correct in his assessment of the central role that the master-slave relationship played in determining the characteristics of Southern society, their social relations of production did not inherently reproduce the ideological culture of European aristocrats. As James Oakes demonstrates, “by the late eighteenth century the bourgeois critique of slavery had become something like the consensus among leading Americans.”⁹⁰

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, the preeminent intellectuals of the slaveholding class in the early American republic, embraced the principles of classical political economy put forth by their contemporaries Adam Smith and Benjamin Franklin who argued that slave labor was inefficient compared to wage labor. Contrary to false narratives propagated in the aftermath of the Civil War, the plantation owners were an imperially oriented, bourgeois educated ruling class concerned with capital accumulation and territorial expansion from the onset of the American republic who increasingly turned towards pseudo-scientific racism as the global cotton trade produced unprecedented wealth for their class. Through their growing dependence on the international circulation of commodities and the concomitant acceleration of the settler colonial project arose a new creed of white nationalist free market zealotry that served their material interests as well as provided the master class with a powerful ideological weapon on the emerging terrain of mass politics.

Following the conquest of Mexico, South Carolinian politician William Gilmore Simms proclaimed that the war had secured “the perpetuation of slavery for the next thousand years.”⁹¹ While Simms clearly lacked foresight, his optimistic mindset reflected the ambitions of a ruling class who oversaw decades of unprecedented national development. Between the ratification of the Constitution and the midpoint of the nineteenth century, Americans quadrupled the size of their country through the violent displacement of the native population. During this same period, the gross national product ballooned more than sevenfold, to a great extent on the lacerated backs of the enslaved black population.⁹² It has been estimated that the master class earned an average 10 percent rate of return on investments in human bondage during this period.⁹³ Slave owners moved their profitable assets to the lucrative opportunities in their newly conquered territory.

The population of enslaved persons working in states that had not been established at the founding of the American republic tripled between 1820 and 1840. On the eve of the Civil War, a majority of slaves, over two million, labored in these newer states whose plantations had become the predominant suppliers of British textile mills.⁹⁴ Chattel slavery in the antebellum United States cultivated more than two-thirds of the the world's cotton.⁹⁵ Throughout the Western Hemisphere “the total value of trade in slave-produced goods nearly doubled between 1820 and 1860.”⁹⁶ Plantation produced commodities not only dominated the world market, the raw cotton helped fuel the textile factories that had launched the industrial revolution on both sides of the North Atlantic. Such developments only further entrenched the chattel slavery based social system in the American South and deepened the master class' ideological commitment to its preservation.

The sprawling growth of the American experiment unleashed contradictions that would shatter the relations of production and political structure upon which the republic was originally founded. Verbal altercations in the halls of republican government were a reflection of the increasing divergence between the social relations of production of the South and the rest of the United States spurred by the dramatic rate of economic transformation. In the fifty years before the election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency, industrial production skyrocketed more than fifteen fold.⁹⁷ During those same five decades the percentage of the labor force engaged in non-agricultural pursuits more than doubled, increasing from 21 to 45 percent. By 1860 the United States had built a larger network of railroads than the rest of the world combined, with 30,000 total miles of track. Traditional notions of time and space were liquidated by this transportation revolution. The shipment time for freight between New York and Cincinnati was reduced by a

thousand percent, from fifty to five days of travel.⁹⁸ Concurrent with this dramatic economic metamorphosis was the rapid growth of the American population, which expanded six times faster than the world average.⁹⁹ Charles Post describes how in the aftermath of the American Revolution “federal land-policies radically altered the relationship of rural households to landholding, making the appropriation, maintenance and expansion of land dependent upon successful commodity-production.”¹⁰⁰ Compelled by legally imposed market dependence, property owners were forced to compete amongst themselves to increase productivity if they wanted to maintain ownership of their property. These new state enforced social relations led to an age of unprecedented economic growth through a perpetual cycle of capital accumulation.

However such development was geographically uneven. Due to its particular trajectory of colonial settlement, capitalist development in the states where slavery was abolished generated a political economy with a far more dynamic internal market that was not dependent upon British industrial production. While the plantation regime was clearly immensely profitable, the draconian labor system that produced its wealth was ill-suited for internal market development. Export oriented political economies have accumulated massive wealth for their local ruling classes throughout history, but their extractive nature and their reliance on hyper-exploitation has often generated resistance from the propertied classes to social investment as well as obstructed the emergence of a consumer market for the laboring classes. While the master class was heavily engaged in and dependent upon the capitalist world market, their primary asset was in slaves whose value was mainly determined by the price of cotton on the international commodity market. What was absent from the American South was the dynamic relationship between the city and the countryside that had emerged in the rest of the United States as the result of owner-

operator farmers competing to maintain control of their means of production. As opposed to the semi-colonial relationship that developed in the Southern states as American slave masters supplied the British bourgeoisie with raw materials for mass production in English textile factories, a domestic system of industrial manufacturing emerged in the Northern states. The competing political factions that ultimately clashed in the struggle between the Union and the Confederacy emerged from this foundational material contradiction of settler colonialism and capitalist development in North America.

The transition from a self-sufficient household economy to a market dependent society altered the very basis of social life. In New England, where these relations of production first materialized in North America, the size of families declined throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Fertility rates declined as the male heads of households lost control over their familial labor force.¹⁰¹ Their cash crops fed the towns and cities as capitalist manufacturers within these growing urban centers simultaneously competed amongst themselves to efficiently produce tools that best suited the demands of the agricultural owner-operators. Those who lost control over their means of subsistence joined the swelling ranks of the American proletariat alongside the growing wave of European immigrants. This emerging set of social relations required new infrastructure to efficiently function. Massive networks of railroads developed to meet the demands of the petty bourgeois agriculturists and the newly established manufacturing centers as settlement expanded westward.¹⁰² The construction of canals was also crucial to the rapid expansion of economic activity in the United States during this period. Around 35,000 workers built over 2,000 miles of canals during the 1830s. Brutal conditions on these construction sites where the laborers lived in “temporary settlement of ramshackle huts”

highlighted the ways in which the freedom of wage labor was a double edged sword for the working class that would only become more obvious in the aftermath of the Civil War.¹⁰³

While property owners were increasingly dependent on commodity markets for their social reproduction all across the United States, the predominance of petty-bourgeois farmers in the Ohio Valley and the Great Plains as well as the prevalence of both a rising industrial capitalist class and relatively highly paid wage laborers in Northern cities created vastly different economic incentives and political values than in the South. These emerging relations of production provided a powerful incentive to revolutionize the instruments of production. Of the 143 significant inventions patented in the United States in the seven decades prior to the Civil War, more than 90 percent came from inventors located in the states where slavery had been abolished. The emerging factory system was predominantly based in New England.¹⁰⁴ While Northern firms produced 222,577 tons of railroad iron, the South failed to produce even 30,000 tons prior to the Civil War. Only one company existed in the South that built railroad engines, compared to nineteen such businesses in the North.¹⁰⁵ During the first six decades of the nineteenth century the proportion of the Northern labor force in agriculture dropped by nearly half while the Southern proportion remained stable. According to the census, only 10 percent of Southerners lived in urban areas, contrasted with a quarter of the Northern population. Almost twice the percentage of Northern children attended school. Nearly half of the Southern residents were illiterate, a phenomenon that was becoming increasingly rare in the free states where only 6 percent of people could not read.¹⁰⁶ The agrarian basis of the Southern economy does not explain the lack of intellectual development in that region. Before 1850, “the rural North led the world in the building of schools, the hiring of teachers, and overall enrollments.”¹⁰⁷ It was the social

property relations of chattel slavery, in which the laboring class was legally barred from literacy training, that stunted social progress.

The growing disparity between the North and South made Yankees more openly antagonistic towards the peculiar institution of the planter class. In the 1840s, Whig leader and future Republican Secretary of State William Henry Seward decried that slavery produced “an exhausted soil, old and decaying towns, wretchedly neglected roads” that inevitably lead to “an absence of enterprise and improvement.”¹⁰⁸ Former slave Frederick Douglass, in his autobiographical account of his experience in bondage that proved to be one of the most consequential liberatory texts of the antebellum United States, echoed similar sentiments. “From the wharves I strolled around and over the town, gazing with wonder and admiration at the splendid churches, beautiful dwellings, and finely cultivated gardens; evincing an amount of wealth, comfort, taste, and refinement, such as I had never seen in any part of slaveholding Maryland.”¹⁰⁹ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* simultaneously highlighted the violent brutality of chattel slavery while humanizing the racialized laborers whom that system branded as property. Douglass described the barbaric torture inherent to the plantation system in vivid detail. He had “often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heartrending shrieks” of his aunt as the overseer whipped “her naked back till she was literally covered with blood.”¹¹⁰

Perhaps the most powerful aspect of his life’s story for propagandistic purposes was the manner in which Douglass centered how chattel slavery led to the systematic breaking up of families. “My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant - before I knew her as my mother. It is a common custom in the part of Maryland from which I ran away, to part children from their mothers at a very early age.”¹¹¹ Family separation was not merely a method through

which to discipline human chattel into submission on the local plantation, but a means of transforming people into exchange value on the market. In the last four decades prior to the Civil War, approximately 300,000 humans were sold between owners on the interstate slave market.¹¹² The commodification of enslaved Africans was fundamental to the planter class' ability to secure investment for an expansion of production. Rather than land, private property in human beings was the means through which the master class accessed credit.¹¹³ Through their slave-based collateral arrangements with factors, local merchants who provided slave owners access to the international market, indebted masters were able to maintain their social status. This system of trading in human beings produced intense criticism from the antislavery political movement in the free states. Abolitionists propagated slave masters' own words in some of their most effective condemnations of the institution. Theodore Weld simply reprinted advertisements like the following from a New Orleans newspaper: "NEGROES FOR SALE. - A negro woman 24 years of age, and two children, one eight and the other three years. Said negroes will be sold separately or together as desired."¹¹⁴

Yet the increasing popularity of Northern critiques of chattel slavery only further pushed the master class to redouble their commitment to the foundational social relations of their civilization. In the late 1830s William Harper published *Memoir on Slavery*, an ideological manifesto that justified human bondage through a repudiation of the Declaration of Independence in its opening pages. He argued that all men were not created equal. Instead Harper insisted that "the strong and wise should control the weak and the ignorant."¹¹⁵ His ideas were a precursor to the emergence of social Darwinian rationalizations of inequality later in the century. In a similar justification of human bondage, American diplomat and ardent secessionist

William Trescot theorized that the regime of racial slavery prevented class conflict by constructing a system where “labour is dependent on capital, and having ceased to be rivals, they have ceased to be enemies.”¹¹⁶ He did not characterize the slaveholding class as traditionalists, but rather as a superior class of capitalists who had overcome the social question through their mastery of slaves. Their “command of the Gulf and the cotton trade” would secure their class’ role as “guardian of the world’s commerce.”¹¹⁷ While Trescot’s vehement separatism was not yet the dominant position in the South, political strife over the next decade would increasingly push the majority of the master class towards his point of view.

Developments in the exchange value of their peculiar institution’s primary export commodity on the world market only served to further reinforce the slave owners’ belief in the glorious future of their vast Southern empire. During the 1850s the price of cotton more than doubled, which in turn increased production to four million bales annually by the end of the decade. It was also a boom time for the tobacco and sugar trade. In 1858, South Carolinian Senator James Hammond proclaimed that the “slaveholding South is now the controlling power of the world. Cotton, rice, tobacco and naval stores command the world... No power on earth dares... to make war on cotton. Cotton is king.”¹¹⁸ Considering the predominance of the Slave Power and its hegemonic ideology of white supremacist settler colonialism, many contemporary observers would have been shocked to discover that less than two decades after European workers stormed the barricades that the greatest emancipation of labor in their lifetimes would in fact occur in the United States. Greg Grandin argues that American wage workers faced similar social problems as their European counterparts during this period, but “instead of waging class war upward - on aristocrats and owners - they waged race war outward, on the frontier.”¹¹⁹

While he is certainly correct that the settler colonialist project undermined working class solidarity in the nineteenth century, such a generalized assessment overlooks the emergence of proletarian organization across the United States during that same period. Steven Hahn describes how, as early as the mid-1830s, “citywide trade unions and federations had been established in urban centers large and small, east and west—in St. Louis, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Louisville, and Cleveland; in Buffalo, Albany, Troy, Newark, and New Brunswick; as well as in New York, Boston, and Baltimore—and union membership spiked to near 300,000, composing somewhere between one-fifth and one-third of all urban journeymen.”¹²⁰ However, working class organizations in the antebellum United States lacked sufficient power to address their grievances at the national level and therefore were largely subordinate to the political prerogatives of the rich merchants and slave masters. Yet as the brazen actions of the increasingly arrogant slave owning faction of the American ruling class conjured up a cross-class mass movement committed to ending the tyranny of the Slave Power, hundreds of thousands industrial proletarians would not only help elect the free labor coalition to the federal government but serve as a mass base for the armed forces of war abolitionism.

With their sights set on further consolidating their mastery of the North American political economy, the lords of the Cotton Kingdom weaponized their grip on the federal government to unleash state violence against the enemies of their class during the last decade before the Civil War. As a means of preventing slaves fleeing north on the Underground Railroad towards their abolitionist comrades, Southern congressmen and their Northern allies passed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Rather than quelling sectional antagonism, the law increased violence on the frontline between the people of the free and slave states. Just two years after its

passing, Free Soil Congressman Joshua R. Giddings of Ohio asserted that “Civil War may be said to exist on the borders of” Pennsylvania.¹²¹ Abolitionist leader Wendell Phillips declared that Bostonians “must trample this law under our feet.”¹²² The Fugitive Slave Act was merely one provision within the Compromise of 1850 that “brought the South to war with the farmers and laborers in the North and West, who wanted free soil but did not want to compete with slave labor.”¹²³ The Kansas-Nebraska Bill of 1854, which stripped Congress of their authority to ban slavery from the territories, only further exacerbated tensions between the Slave Power and the rest of the United States. Kansas devolved into a proxy war between the plantation masters and their class enemies. In late May of 1856, proslavery guerrilla forces launched an attack on Lawrence, Kansas and burned it to the ground. Future abolitionist martyr John Brown led a retaliatory raid on the residents of three dwellings alongside the Pottawatomie Creek. His men murdered five supporters of the slave owners’ cause, mutilating them to death with broadswords. Frederick Douglass, a personal acquaintance and comrade of Brown, defended the vigilante act of class war “wrought by his iron hand.”¹²⁴ As the slavocracy became increasingly brazen throughout the 1850s, the leading intellectual of the black abolitionist vanguard more openly embraced revolutionary violence.

Warfare in Kansas also solidified the emerging broad political coalition opposed to the Slave Power, the Republican Party. Primarily rooted in the mass social base of owner-operators, it was organized around an ideology of free-labor, perhaps best summarized by President Abraham Lincoln in an 1861 address to the House of Representatives: “The prudent, penniless beginner in the world labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land for himself, then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new

beginner to help him. This is the just and generous and prosperous system which opens the way to all, gives hope to all, and consequent energy and progress and improvement of condition to all.”¹²⁵ For American free laborites the difference between the oppositional social relations of production in North American was not the only distinction crucial for their ideological development. The higher living standards of the working class in the United States as compared to England created a belief in American exceptionalism. English intellectuals such as Charles Dickens confirmed their sense of superiority. When juxtaposing the working conditions in Lowell and the factories of England, he wrote, “The contrast would be a strong one, for it would be between the Good and Evil, the living light and deepest shadow.” As Joshua Freeman notes “in the Old World, cotton mills came to be seen as dystopian, in the New World, they were repeatedly hailed as beacons of a bright future.”¹²⁶ While this illusion of peace between labor and capital in the United States was exaggerated by those who most profited from the new economic developments and would ultimately explode into open violent struggle later in the century, the inherent antagonism between the industrial bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the United States remained subsumed until the class struggle against the Slave Power reached its conclusion.

In 1848 at the New York Industrial Congress, a supposedly working class institution dominated by middle class reformers, it was declared that, “There is now but one issue. Either slavery must have full liberty and sweep to expand itself in infinity or else it must meet in fell encounter with death. You cannot touch a single question of general policy in which slavery does not get some moral thrust. It cannot be avoided. Slavery must be extinguished.”¹²⁷ By the 1856 presidential election, Republicans surged to become the dominant party in the North, empowered by their mesmerizing slogan: “Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Men, Frémont!”¹²⁸ At their national

convention the Republicans ridiculed the chattel slave relations of production as a “relic of barbarism.”¹²⁹ Ohio governor Salmon P. Chase clearly defined the stakes of the election as a struggle over oppositional social systems. He declared that “the issue is boldly made between Freedom and Slavery - a Republic and a Despotism! ... The chain-gang and Republicanism cannot coexist, and you must now elect whether you will vindicate the one at whatever cost, or whether you will yield to the other.”¹³⁰ Republican organizer Francis Blair proclaimed that the 1856 elections represented more than a partisan contest, “but rather the war of a class - the slaveholders - against the laboring people of all classes.”¹³¹ Even though the Republican Party failed to win the presidency in 1856, the four years leading up to the next election served to further antagonize the Northern population against the Slave Power to their eventual political benefit. In particular, the *Dred Scott* decision by the Southern dominated Supreme Court that guaranteed the rights of property ownership in human beings even in states where slavery was abolished seemed to legitimate fears that chattel slave masters planned to export their peculiar form of commodified labor into the free states.

As the decade came to a close, ideological violence could no longer be contained to the periphery of American settler empire. On October 16th, 1859 John Brown and a small number of his abolitionist comrades seized the armory at Harpers Ferry in Virginia. Their effort to immediately inspire an insurrection of slaves failed spectacularly. Within two days of their raid, their uprising against the master class had been crushed. John Brown willingly accepted his fate as he was executed before the new year. “I am worth inconceivably more to hang than for any other purpose.”¹³² That statement proved to be far more in touch with reality than his attempt to directly incite rebellion. Despite their denial of its potentiality, the specter of slave insurrection

haunted the master class, especially in the aftermath of events like the Haitian Revolution and Nat Turner's rebellion. The political climate in which Brown and his comrades launched their raid produced an intense reaction from slave owners. South Carolina passed multiple pieces of legislation to secure slave property from outside agitators, including an Act to Require and Regulate Licenses to Itinerant Salesmen and Traveling Agents. An editorial in an Alabama newspaper advocated for the execution of all abolitionists.¹³³ As many prominent Northerners celebrated Brown as a martyr, the master class increasingly consolidated around the belief that an electoral victory for the Republicans would entail the death of their profitable institution. Their class enemies in the free states agreed.

In the 1860 elections the Republicans dominated the ballot box north of the 41st parallel, where Lincoln won more than 60 percent of the vote.¹³⁴ Abolitionist Wendell Phillips proclaimed "Lincoln is in place, Garrison in power."¹³⁵ On the day following Lincoln's victory, Charles Francis Adams, son of the aforementioned John Quincy Adams, wrote in his notebook: "The great revolution has actually taken place.... The country has once and for all thrown off the domination of the Slaveholders."¹³⁶ Just prior to his execution, John Brown more accurately foresaw the kind of struggle necessary to liquidate the chains of the slave masters. Their power "will never be purged but with blood."¹³⁷ Many Republicans had actually shared that belief for years. Yet their embrace of the notion that the Constitution barred direct interference with property ownership in human beings where it already existed has led to many historians to deny the Republican Party's commitment to the destruction of slavery. This narrative overlooks the dual strategies developed by antislavery politicians in the last decades prior to the Civil War. If their attempt to contain the South's peculiar institution through peaceful means spurred a violent

rebellion of the master class then the Republicans were prepared to legally justify emancipation as a military necessity. As early as the 1830s John Quincy Adams had declared that the “power” of the national state to free slaves during wartime “is tremendous” and “it is strictly constitutional.”¹³⁸ War abolitionism was not an accident of history but a premeditated revolutionary policy developed by those ideologically committed to the liquidation of the Slave Power.

John Brown’s failed attempt to incite a slave revolt at Harpers Ferry followed by the electoral victory of the Republican Party affirmed the Southern ruling class’ worst nightmares. Slaveholding states quickly moved to break off from the Union. The South Carolinian declaration of secession made it clear that their purposes were to protect their peculiar mode of capital accumulation from the newly elected Republican Party who they believed were committed to the idea that “a war must be waged against slavery until it shall cease throughout the United States.”¹³⁹ The specter of social revolution through war abolitionism induced a reign of night terrors for the master class. Jefferson Davis openly feared that an invasion of the South would spur a widespread uprising of slaves. In his last speech to the U.S. Senate on January 10, 1861 he referred to images that captured the brutality unleashed against the French whites by revolting slaves during the Haitian Revolution. He pleaded with Northern senators to permit the South to peacefully secede to prevent violent class struggle, but it was too late to contain the demand for black liberation. News of Lincoln’s election had already spread to the slaves and cracked open their political horizons. Louisiana sugar planter Alexander Pugh noted that “negroes have got it into their heads they are going to be free of the 4th of March.”¹⁴⁰ Paranoia over the revolutionary implications of Republican victory led the master class to secede from the

Union that they had politically dominated since its founding but that they could no longer control. As Karl Marx elegantly described in the International Workingmen's Association's address to President Lincoln, "an oligarchy of 300,000 slaveholders dared to inscribe, for the first time in the annals of the world, "slavery" on the banner of armed revolt."¹⁴¹

If, as some of the so-called new historians of capitalism argue, the Northern and Southern political economies were more alike than different, then why did the slave masters secede from the United States and descend the nation into a vicious class struggle in which hundreds of thousands died? At the time of the American Civil War, in an article for the Austrian newspaper *Die Presse*, Marx ridiculed English writers who refused to recognize that slavery was the fundamental *casus belli*. "If, therefore, it was indeed only in defense of the Union that the North drew the sword, had not the South already declared that the continuance of slavery was no longer compatible with the continuance of the Union?"¹⁴² While he acknowledges the important work of the new historians of capitalism who have effectively demonstrated that the "slave economy was often closely connected to the industrial and financial interests of the North and Great Britain," James Oakes correctly asserts that "the fact that they were connected does not mean they were the same."¹⁴³ However, the crucial distinction between the social relations of production in the free and slave states does not inherently lead to the conclusion that the master class was not capitalist. Waged work is not necessary for capital accumulation and is not the only form of exploited labor that can emerge from stripping producers from their means of production. As John Clegg convincingly argues, "violent enslavement of millions of Africans and their progeny proved an effective means of commodifying labor in a context in which the violent expropriation of native lands gave European settlers a ready alternative to selling their labor. In that context

debt and foreclosure became an important mechanism for enforcing capitalist patterns of behavior, for it both ensured the liquidity of capital markets, and closed off alternative subsistence pathways.”¹⁴⁴

Southern secession was clearly not in opposition to global capitalist development. As representatives of the seceded Lower States convened to establish a constitution, they voted to reject protectionism. South Carolinian politician Rhett rejoiced that “for the first time in the history of the world, the great principle of Free-trade became a part of the fundamental Law of a People.” Even those who opposed the amendment did not do so out of animosity towards capitalist market relations, but rather because they feared it would be an impediment to industrialization.¹⁴⁵ What the Confederacy represented was not an attempt to return to a parochial past, but an effort by the master class to continually accumulate capital with absolute control over commodified labor. Slave owners envisioned a wealthy imperium that spanned the hemisphere and would liquidate the social question of bourgeois society through a hegemonic ideology of racial solidarity. The Confederacy’s new leadership was explicit about their commitment to preserving the racial hierarchy that maintained their dominant position atop the social relations of production. Immediately after Alexander Stephens was sworn in as their first vice president, he declared that their new government was founded “upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.”¹⁴⁶ The master class lacked the forces to wage a violent struggle for the defense of their property ownership in human beings entirely on their own. Arno Mayer asserts that, “Counterrevolution, which originates with the classes, remains lame and ineffectual unless it connects with the anti-revolution, which is a matter of the masses.”¹⁴⁷ In order to defeat war

abolitionism, the Confederate ruling elite required the support of the far more populous class of the impoverished non-slaveholding white landowners.

The slavocracy needed to convince enough of the Southern yeoman farmers that the free labor political coalition was a threat to their way of life and that the perpetuation of black bondage was in their interest. Just days after the election of President Lincoln, Alabama politician James Phelan declared that the South must prevent “the slow but certain destruction” of their peculiar institution by the “Black Republican administration” for “the common cause of humanity.”¹⁴⁸ In an effort to build popular support for secession Georgia Governor George Brown declared that racialized slavery was “the poor man’s best government,” since the “white laborer” “belongs to the only true aristocracy, the race of white men.”¹⁴⁹ Racial solidarity was the means through which the slave masters attempted to suppress class antagonism and construct their new political regime founded upon the premise that not all men were created equal. Rather, as William Lowndes Yancey proclaimed on the eve of the 1860 election, the fundamental tenet of the Confederacy’s national ideology was that the “white race is the citizen, and the master race, and the white man is the equal of every other white man.”¹⁵⁰ The Southern ruling class utilized their press outfits to propagate fears of race war as a means of recruiting the non-slaveholding whites to fight for the preservation of their peculiar institution. An Alabama newspaper declared that Abraham Lincoln’s ascendancy to the presidency “shows that the North [intends] to free the negroes and force amalgamation between them and the children of the poor men of the South.”¹⁵¹ Racism had its intended effect on thousands of poor whites who fought for the Confederacy. Landless yeoman like Jim Jeffcoat explained to his family that he’d “rather get killed, than have all these niggers freed and claimin’ they’s as good as I is.”¹⁵² Only through a regime of explicit

white nationalism could the plantation owners transform their conservative ruling class project to preserve private property into a counterrevolutionary “elitist movement of the masses, an effort to create a new-old regime that, in one way or another, makes privilege popular.”¹⁵³ While the Confederacy would ultimately collapse, its ideological foundation of white nationalist imperialism would continually rear its head amidst major crises of bourgeois civilization as the most dangerous political weapon wielded by the reactionary faction of private property.

Ultimately secessionists failed to erase the social question from capitalist society, but rather fomented class warfare that ended their reign. As James McPherson convincingly argues in *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, the overzealous actions of the Southern slavocracy planted the seeds of their own doom. By launching what he deems a “preemptive counterrevolution” against the newly elected Republican Party, the plantation owners directly undermined the labor system that empowered their class.¹⁵⁴ As the Union Army penetrated deep into the South in order to reunify the nation, they dismembered the relations of production that undergirded the Confederacy. Thousands of slaves fled the plantations seeking freedom from bondage. In July of 1861, General Benjamin Butler wrote to the Secretary of War that he was “compelled by this reasoning to look upon them as men and women.”¹⁵⁵ He refused to return them to their former masters who were now in open rebellion against the Union. In a letter to Friedrich Engels in the summer of 1862, Karl Marx predicted that in “the end the North will make war seriously, adopt revolutionary methods and throw over the domination of the border slave statesmen. A single Negro regiment would have a remarkable effect on Southern nerves.”¹⁵⁶ By 1862 the dominant war emancipationist faction in the federal government had already begun to adopt the more radical measures that Marx described and military officials like Butler had already enacted by

reacting to the shifting balance of forces on the ground. That September Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation.

During the summer of 1863 the Union Army pierced the Confederacy in the heart of King Cotton, shaking the foundations of his throne with a wave of battlefield victories that liberated slaves in their wake. By early July the master class had lost control of Vicksburg to their enemies. The Union Army seized Port Hudson only five days later. After successful campaigns earlier in the war to break the power of the slave owners in Nashville and New Orleans, the federal government regained their hold over the strategically crucial Mississippi River.¹⁵⁷ Enslaved blacks approached the Union-held Vicksburg as “the very gate of heaven” that would deliver them to the promised land of freedom. Thousands fled from their former masters to the army camps that proliferated across the region: 8,550 at Young’s Point, 3,000 near Vicksburg, 2,800 at Paw Paw Island, 2,400 at the Yazoo River, and more than 1,000 at Goodrich’s Landing. Newly liberated blacks celebrated their first Independence Day as they assembled by the levee “laughing and rejoicing with inexpressible delight.” Their numbers continued to grow over the following months.¹⁵⁸ The Union conquering of Vicksburg coincided with the Confederate Army being repulsed from Pennsylvania at Gettysburg. Grant wrote to his congressional patron, Illinois representative Elisha Washburne, to declare that the master class no longer had a future. “What Vice President Stephens acknowledges is the cornerstone of the Confederacy is already knocked out. Slavery is dead and cannot be resurrected. It would take a standing army to maintain slavery in the South if we were to make peace today, guaranteeing to the South all their former constitutional privileges.”¹⁵⁹

As tens of thousands of slaves were fleeing plantations towards Union lines, “Lincoln faced the truth, front forward; and that truth was bit simply that Negroes ought to be free; it was that thousands of them were already free, and that either the power which slaves put into the hands of the South was to be taken from it, or the North could not win the war.”¹⁶⁰ An estimated 186,017 black troops served in the Union Army, of which nearly 70,000 died. Thousands more contributed to the Union cause through their labor and espionage.¹⁶¹ The most critical, yet most overlooked, agents in this great liberation struggle, were the slaves who broke their own chains. As Senator Charles Sumner later declared, “Without emancipation, followed by the arming of the slaves, rebel slavery would not have been overcome.”¹⁶² However, that does inherently lead to the conclusion, which Chandra Manning argues, that “emancipation began in the intimate details of the everyday, in the specific settings to which black men, women, and children ran.”¹⁶³ While her account of the contraband camps provides valuable detail about the process through which enslaved black Americans liberated themselves from bondage, it overemphasizes a particular moment in a manner that erases the long struggle that led to abolition. Both the enraged master class’ reaction to Lincoln’s electoral victory as well as the networks of communications that had been built over the decades by black abolitionists had made slaves aware of the political ascendancy of the free labor coalition. Prior to the special session of the U.S. Congress summoned by President Lincoln in July of 1861, plantation mistress Kate Stone noted that normally docile “house servants have been giving a lot of trouble lately - lazy and disobedient. ... I suppose the excitement in the air has infected them.”¹⁶⁴ Additionally, Manning’s claim that “the idea that the U.S. government would treat with an enslaved person directly as a person and not indirectly as the possession of a white property owner simply made no sense” before the war

is directly contradicted by the widely held belief among Republicans in emancipation by military necessity.¹⁶⁵ These revolutionary developments were not unexpected but rather fulfilled the antislavery prophecy of war abolitionism. “Whenever our armies march into the Southern states,” Republican politician Orville Browning wrote, “the negroes will, of course, flock to our standards—They will rise in rebellion, and strike a blow for emancipation from servitude, and to avenge the wrongs of ages. This,” he proclaimed, “is inevitable.”¹⁶⁶

Class warfare in the Confederacy was not limited to the struggle between master and slave. Secession lacked support in the mountainous enclaves of Arkansas, Tennessee, and Virginia as well as other regions like the highlands of the Mississippi River Valley where property ownership in human beings was not predominant. Internal divisions within states where slavery existed proved crucial in preventing the Border States from joining the Confederacy. Elected leaders in the western territory of Virginia broke off from the seceded state and proclaimed their allegiance to the Union. A major strategy of the Lincoln administration was to intensify antagonism between the subsistence yeoman farmers and the commercial planter class in order to highlight the antidemocratic character of the Confederacy.¹⁶⁷ Later in his life, Newt Knight, who deserted the Confederate Army and established the free state of Jones in Mississippi, described his justification for rebelling against the slave owners’ government. His county had elected a cooperationist candidate who betrayed his constituents and joined the strong majority of delegates who backed secession. “Then next thing we knew,” said Knight, “they were conscripting us. The rebels passed a law conscripting everybody between 18 and 35. They just came around with a squad of soldiers [and] took you.” He declared that “if they had a right to conscript me when I didn’t want to fight the Union, I had a right to quit when I got ready.”¹⁶⁸

Not only did soldiers abandon the battlefields as the Union Army penetrated further into Confederate territory, but entire communities rebelled against the master class' state. All across the South tensions heightened between the wealthy slave owners and yeoman farmers, even sometimes bursting into openly violent conflict. Racial solidarity weakened in the face of mass starvation. While the commercial regions dominated by the master class possessed both the slave labor and enough land to reorient their local economies towards food-producing activities, poorer farmers lacked the resources to make that shift. Too much labor had been lost to the war mobilization. The yeomanry could not overcome the crisis with their own limited capacity for subsistence production while the Confederate infrastructure was not capable of moving surplus grain over the long distances needed to support them. Even though they lacked the transportation network to save poorer farmers from debilitating hunger, the greedy behavior of 'great' planters made the situation worse by setting a terrible example for the medium and smaller-sized slaveholders who were in a better position to provide substantial aid to starving yeoman families.

¹⁶⁹ In places like Jones County, deteriorating social conditions erupted into a full-scale uprising by late 1863.¹⁷⁰ Deserters in similar regions across the South armed themselves and formed the cutting edge of an organized lower-class movement. While the majority of soldiers who fled the frontline would rejoin the Confederate Army when threatened with arrest, more than fifty thousand white men from the seceding states waged war for the Union during the struggle against the master class.¹⁷¹ In letters written to President Jefferson Davis and Governor Charles Clark in 1864, Judge Robert S. Hudson of Leake County denounced the increasingly disloyal population in central Mississippi. Hudson urged President Davis to subject anti-Confederate "women and noncombatants" to "the most radical and severe treatment."¹⁷² Yet the internal

disintegration of the slavocracy and their hold on state power could not be stopped. As Armstead L. Robinson argues “a proper epitaph to the failed struggle for Southern independence should read instead: Confederate States of America. 1861-1865. Died of Class Conflict.”¹⁷³

Earlier in the war as General Grant’s forces surrounded the Confederate Army at Fort Donelson, he declared to their leadership that “No terms except unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted.”¹⁷⁴ Three years later, the armed forces of the slaveholders' rebellion laid down their weapons at Appomattox Court House and went home as paroled prisoners. General Lee appeared relieved that the term “unconditional surrender” was absent from the proceedings, but in reality what Grant proposed to the rapidly decomposing Confederate military was similar to what had occurred after his earlier victories.¹⁷⁵ This concept was not a tenant of international law, but rather was adapted from commercial law. It entails a surrender of private property. By utilizing this legal framework, as Enzo Traverso argues, “the victors wished to show that the Confederacy had not only been defeated, but had definitely disappeared - that it did not exist anymore.”¹⁷⁶ The formulation of “unconditional surrender” would remain outside of the confines of violent conflict until the conclusion of the European ideological civil war. Class warfare against the Slave Power produced a liquidation of private property without precedent. The Southern property owning class experienced widespread bankruptcy. Richard Kilbourne asserts that the “apt comparison might be Russia after the 1917 revolution” where “Communists simply outlawed private property.”¹⁷⁷

Over a million former slaves who had either liberated themselves by fleeing the plantations or gained freedom through legal decrees in the Border States during the war had direct federal protection as the war reached its conclusion. Millions more required political

action in Washington. An estimated 200,000 enslaved persons died during the struggle to overcome the master class that ultimately produced the legislative revolution that permanently melted their chains.¹⁷⁸ By the end of the year the Thirteenth Amendment was passed and ratified by the states, officially banning slavery in the United States. While there was much to be done to transform this legal proclamation into a material reality, it was clear to the dying Slave Power that their old world would never come back. Upon returning home after years of fighting against the Union, a Louisiana planter decried that “Society has been completely changed by the war. The [French] revolution of ‘89 did not produce a greater change in the ‘Ancien Regime’ than this has in our social life.”¹⁷⁹ By 1870 only two representatives from their class that had previously held an outsized presence in the federal government still appeared in the United States legislative branch.¹⁸⁰

Yet as social revolution unfolded, the forces of private property did not retreat quietly into the night, but reconstituted their corporeal form for a new age of class struggle. Just months after Lee’s surrender at Appomattox Court House, Marx wrote to Engels that the “reaction has already begun in America.”¹⁸¹ As the bourgeoisie squashed the utopian visions of free-labor ideology in the North, white supremacist domination would return to the South in the new form of sharecropping and legalized segregation. Crucially however, the Southern landowners failed to achieve the dominance over black labor that they had pushed for during the war and in its aftermath. Abolition democracy from above and working class struggle from below prevented a reincarnation of chattel slavery. As WEB Du Bois describes, Radical Republican politicians such as Thaddeus Stevens “said that military rule must continue in the South until order was restored, democracy established, and the political power built on slavery smashed.”¹⁸² In the decade

following the Civil War, black workers took advantage of their new right to vote to create political circumstances favorable to improving their material conditions. In particular, “through establishing public schools and private colleges, and by organizing the Negro church, the Negro had acquired enough leadership and knowledge to thwart the worst designs of the new slave drivers.”¹⁸³ Additionally, in places like the South Carolinian Sea Islands where they had an overwhelming majority and dominated the local government, former slaves resisted proletarianization and struggled for control over their personal means of production. A landowner observed that “negroes object so strongly to wages, it is so late and the labor is so demoralized that I think almost any sort of contract is better than the risk of losing more time and perhaps the labor entirely and coming out minus.”¹⁸⁴

Plans to redistribute land to the recently liberated slaves were ultimately crushed by “the settled determination of the planter South to keep the bulk of Negroes as landless laborers.”¹⁸⁵ The armed wing of Southern private property and their sycophants organized into white supremacist death squads that unleashed a counterrevolutionary reign of terror upon black labor. In only nine counties in South Carolina, the Ku Klux Klan lynched and murdered thirty-five men during just a six month period of Reconstruction.¹⁸⁶ As the big landholders regained hold over state and local governments through this racist cross-class alliance with middle class and poor whites, not only were civil rights for blacks restricted but their labor organizing efforts were violently suppressed. Whenever workers withheld their labor to improve their living standards, they were beaten back into exploitative commodity production. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s in South Carolina, the state utilized its militia to liquidate the organizations of black agricultural workers. Louisiana sugar workers went on strike in 1887 to secure higher wages. White

vigilantes massacred over one hundred of the black laborers in response. Four years later in Arkansas, fifteen leaders of a cotton pickers' strike were slaughtered. Nine of them were lynched after they had been locked up by the local sheriff.¹⁸⁷

Robert Paxton has argued that the Klan represented “the earliest phenomenon that can be functionally related to fascism” since they “constituted an alternate civic authority, parallel to the legal state” that undermined a new democratic government they viewed as inherently illegitimate.¹⁸⁸ The counterrevolution against Reconstruction in the American South built a mass base for the rule of private property through the promise of a return to white nationalist glory that provided landowners with both a government that restricted the political rights of their racialized labor force and an army that violently crushed emerging working class institutions. Leaders of the European counterrevolution during the twentieth century civil war drew inspiration not only from the efforts that undermined Reconstruction, but proclaimed a shared ideological lineage with the Confederacy. While the fascists liquidated organs of working class power and dismantled the democratic mechanisms of the Weimar Republic, their new Fuhrer lamented the lost opportunity that the American Civil War represented for the forces of reaction. Adolf Hitler declared that the “beginnings of a great new social order based on the principle of slavery and inequality were destroyed by that war, and with them also the embryo of a future great America that would not have been ruled by a corrupt caste of tradesmen, but by a real *Herren*-class that would have swept away all the falsities of liberty and equality.”¹⁸⁹ Obviously Hitler’s interpretation of history always leaves much to be desired and there were important differences between the counterrevolutionary projects of the American and European modern civil wars, but it is undeniably significant that the head butcher of the genocidal Nazi Empire considered the

Confederacy as a regrettably lost cause of his reactionary mythology. In his magnum opus that was published only two years after Hitler's seizure of power in Germany, Du Bois elegantly captured the universal belief that united the particular counterrevolutionary ideologies. "We rule by junta; we turn Fascist, because we do not believe in men; yet the basis of fact in this disbelief is incredibly narrow. We know perfectly well that most human beings have never had a decent human chance to be full men."¹⁹⁰

To be recognized as fully human, the workers of the world were forced to struggle as the liquidation of the slave owning class ultimately empowered the industrial capitalists in the United States above all others and therefore unleashed new class antagonisms that remain with us to this very day. Sven Beckert describes how Manhattan's economic elite emerged as the most dynamic social class in the world, "making the United States the most bourgeois of all nineteenth century societies."¹⁹¹ Their social and cultural institutions enabled the New York bourgeoisie to realize their class consciousness so that they could collectively exert their power to squash the rebellion of the Southern slavocracy and then even more thoroughly organize against an increasingly unruly proletariat in the aftermath of the Civil War. With his usual flare for the dramatic, Marx put this development in starker terms on the last page of *Capital Volume I*. He wrote that "the American Civil War brought in its train a colossal national debt, and, with it, pressure of taxes, the rise of the vilest financial aristocracy, the squandering of a huge part of the public land on speculative companies for the exploitation of railways, mines, &c., in brief, the most rapid centralisation of capital. The great republic has, therefore, ceased to be the promised land for emigrant labourers. Capitalistic production advances there with giant strides, even though the lowering of wages and the dependence of the wage-worker are yet far from being

brought down to the normal European level.”¹⁹² The American bourgeoisie would do everything in its power to make that happen. As Eric Hobsbawm notes, the “United States, alone among states in the bourgeois world, was a country of private justice and private armed forces.”¹⁹³ In fact, the United States has had the bloodiest labor history of industrialization of any nation in the imperial core.¹⁹⁴ What made the American experience exceptional was that the national bourgeoisie in the United States subordinated all other propertied classes far earlier than its European counterparts and utilized its firm grip over the state apparatus to wage direct war against the working class.

In the fifty years following the American Civil War, industrial capacity in the United States would grow by more than tenfold. Mean productivity growth averaged a 2.8 percent increase each year.¹⁹⁵ Materially and, as Sven Beckert persuasively argues, “Ideologically, the war seemed to complete (and in this sense also end) the revolutionary promises of American republicanism while at the same time undermining the social basis for free-labor ideology, as well as mercantile stewardship.”¹⁹⁶ Less than a decade after the Civil War, a Pittsburgh labor weekly acknowledged that “These dreams have not been realized. . . . The working people of this country . . . suddenly find capital as rigid as an absolute monarchy.”¹⁹⁷ Waged labor during the process of rapid industrialization in the United States transformed into a nightmare for American laborers. From 1880 to 1900 a total of 35,000 workers were killed on the job.¹⁹⁸ Eric Foner explains how the “dichotomy between slave and free labor masked the fact that ‘free labor’ itself referred to two distinct economic conditions—the wage laborer seeking employment in the marketplace, and the property-owning small producer enjoying a modicum of economic

independence.”¹⁹⁹ The commonality between these melted into air with the liquidation of the master class and the ascendance of industrial capitalism.

Karl Marx declared that in “the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralysed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours’ agitation, that ran with the seven-leagued boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California.”²⁰⁰ Even though the full emancipation of labor that Marx anticipated has yet to come to pass, a new phase of class struggle did indeed arise in the United States following the America Civil War. A radical Massachusetts clergyman drew on the earlier legacy of the American Revolution amidst this new balance of forces and proclaimed that the 1877 railroad strikers were “the lineal descendants of Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and the Massachusetts yeomen who began so great a disturbance a hundred years ago . . . only now the kings are money kings and then they were political kings.”²⁰¹ Through Marx’s engagement with the American Civil War emerged a central tenet of his revolutionary socialist philosophy. As opposed to German socialists like Ferdinand Lassalle, Marx rejected the notion that all classes but the proletariat were inherently reactionary.²⁰² He argued instead that struggles lead by colonized, hyper-exploited populations against non-bourgeois ruling classes were a necessary prerequisite for the liberation of all the workers of the world. A century later the successful revolutionary struggles waged by Marxist organizations had occurred not in the industrially advanced imperial core, but in countries with primarily agriculturally based economies where the political institutions were dominated by foreign capitalists and the national landowning classes.

Yet the seizures of national states by socialist revolutionaries proved to be far from a death blow to the international ruling class, but rather the opening salvo in an increasingly intense political struggle. What the Civil War in the United States and its aftermath most significantly demonstrate is that the real story of modernity is a continuously violent struggle over egalitarianism between the forces of revolution and counterrevolution, colored by the historical racialization of property ownership, unleashed by the permanent revolution of capital accumulation.

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