

Jubilee and the limits of African American freedom after Emancipation

BRIAN KELLY

Abstract: Scholarship generated in the post-civil rights US underpins a growing consensus that any honest confrontation with the American past requires an acknowledgment both of the nation's foundations in racially-based slave labour and of the critical role that the enslaved played in ending that system. But scholars equally need to examine why the end of slavery did not deliver freedom, but instead – after a short-lived 'jubilee' during which freedpeople savoured their 'brief moment in the sun' – opened up a period of extreme repression and violence. This article traces the political trajectory of one prominent ex-slave and Republican party organiser, Elias Hill, to assess the constraints in which black grassroots activists operated. Though mainly concerned with the dashed hopes of African Americans, their experience of a steep reversal is in many ways the shared and profoundly significant legacy of ex-slaves across the former plantation societies of the Atlantic world.

Brian Kelly, reader in US history at Queen's University Belfast, has published widely on the problem of racial antagonism and its impact on working-class politics in the US. His first book, *Race, Class and Power in the Alabama Coalfields, 1908–1921* (Illinois, 2001), won the Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize. Former director of the *After Slavery Project*, he is co-editor with Bruce Baker of *After Slavery: race, labor and citizenship in the Reconstruction South* (Florida, 2013), and is completing an extended monograph on grassroots black political mobilisation in Reconstruction South Carolina.

Race & Class

Copyright © 2016 Institute of Race Relations, Vol. 57(3): 59–70
10.1177/0306396815608357 <http://rac.sagepub.com>

Keywords: American Colonization Society, Elias Hill, freedpeople, Jim Crow, jubilee, Ku Klux Klan, Reconstruction, Republican Party, slavery

Elias Hill was born into slavery in upcountry South Carolina in 1819, making him just over 40 years old at the outset of the American Civil War. Struck with a debilitating neurological disease that left him severely disabled from a young age, in testimony given many years later Hill described himself as ‘among if not the worst afflicted person known on earth ... not only unable to walk, sit, or crawl [but] drawn [by] pain out of all human shape’, with ‘jaws so clinched’ that he ‘[could] not open his mouth, and [could] only feed himself through a broken-out tooth or two’. Others who had occasion to meet Hill described him as having the ‘arms, legs and feet of a small child, the body of a boy, and the head ... of a full-grown man’.¹

Hill’s physical deformities meant that as a labourer he was worthless to his master, and that therefore when his African-born father approached Elias’s master in an attempt to purchase the freedom of the boy’s mother, the owner insisted that as a condition he would have to take his son as well. ‘He could not get her without taking me’, as Hill put it many years later. ‘[A]s I was a cripple, they compelled him to take me when he bought his wife, my mother.’²

Despite his severe physical disabilities – even, we might speculate, because of the reprieve from physical labour that his condition allowed – Elias Hill was able to pour himself into his intellectual development in a way that few other slaves could manage. From listening in on white playmates on the plantation he gradually learned the alphabet, and then, with the Bible as his constant companion, to read and eventually to write as well. Well before the outbreak of war, he had developed a reputation as an influential Baptist preacher in his native Clay Hill in York County, just south of the North Carolina border.

Grassroots mobilisation among former slaves

In the new era ushered in by the end of the Civil War, Hill became, in his late 40s, the most influential grassroots-level organiser in a dense network of politically alert former slaves active across the Carolina upcountry.³ Preaching now to a far-flung congregation who travelled from twenty-five miles around to attend his twice-monthly sermons, Hill was described by federal officials as the ‘chief spiritual, social and political adviser for all the Negroes in this section’. Federal military commanders characterised him as ‘a man of very pure character and excellent sense’, reporting that he enjoyed ‘a very great influence among the negroes’.⁴ Journalists observed that ‘with all his hideous deformity of body,’ Hill had ‘a massive intellectual head, a clear, sonorous voice, and an intelligent, eagle-like expression’. It was this juxtaposition between his ‘singular physical helplessness’ and his impressive ‘mental attainments’ that elicited, among freedpeople, ‘a

reverence and awe' for Elias Hill which, according to one newspaper, 'amount[ed] almost to idolatry'.⁵

From the outset of the 'jubilee'⁶ set off by Emancipation – a period marked by an incredibly dynamic and sustained political mobilisation among freedmen and women – Hill became deeply engaged in Republican Party politics, rising quickly to prominence in the local party organisation. He was for a time the 'only colored schoolteacher' in the upcountry and, by 1867, was listed as president of the York County Union League, the local chapter of a popular grassroots organisation that had been transplanted into the South by Republican officials. Intended as a mere vote-gathering mechanism, it had been transformed under the leadership of former slaves into a combination trade union/freedpeoples' militia, with enthusiastic support across the former Confederacy. Hill headed the upcountry campaign to elect Ulysses S. Grant to the presidency in 1868 and was offered a position as Trial Justice by the state's Republican governor a year later, declining only because, as he explained, he was then consumed with mapping a strategy aimed at helping freedpeople acquire land.⁷

Hill was a remarkable figure in a period that, in setting 'the bottom rail on top', thrust former slaves to the very centre of the historical stage, and threw up exceptional grassroots leaders by the hundreds. There are elements in his profile typical among many of those individuals who rose to prominence in post-Emancipation black politics: his stature as a minister, with a large personal following established under slavery; his rare, hard-earned literacy;⁸ and his deep roots in a rural plantation district inhospitable to outside leadership. These characteristics Hill shared with many among the large cadre of native-born black Southerners who responded enthusiastically to the Republicans' attempt to organise across the former Confederacy.

But there is another aspect of Hill's profile that is especially striking, and one that in recent years has been obscured by the buoyant, celebratory tone in much of the new historical writing on slave emancipation: the steep and painful trajectory he followed between the high optimism of the immediate post-Emancipation years and the deep, suffocating despair that took hold of Hill (and many, many others) within a few short years, when it became clear that the end of slavery would not deliver meaningful freedom for African Americans.⁹

The record of Hill's activism during the years immediately following the conclusion of the war in April 1865 is a testament to the hopes that freedpeople invested in the Republican Party, and in the possibilities that military defeat of the world's largest and most powerful slaveholding class opened up for the revolutionary transformation of American democracy. By his own account, Hill believed all through this period in the possibility that former slaves like himself might assimilate, on terms of palpable equality, in a transformed American nation.

By the early 1870s, however, Elias Hill and many of his neighbours had given up on the possibility of attaining the semblance of any meaningful freedom within the borders of the US. By then York County was the site of perhaps the most intensive and sustained campaign of white paramilitary violence anywhere

in the South. There the Ku Klux Klan 'reigned more completely and supremely than ... in any other southern county'.¹⁰ Witnesses testified that nearly all black men, and many freedwomen as well, were unable to sleep in their homes at night, and had taken to sleeping out in the woods to avoid Klan attacks. One freedman reported that a mere three years after freedmen had won the franchise, the Republican Party in the South Carolina upcountry was 'just like scattered sheep ... beaten and run out'.¹¹

Klan violence and the turn to exodus

Given his prominence in local agitation, Hill inevitably became a target for Klan violence. Subject to a horrific night-time assault (by whipping) in May 1871, two months later he gave extensive testimony to a visiting Congressional Committee, dispatched to South Carolina to investigate the Klan. In it he declared, in unequivocal language, the end of his hopes for securing freedom in the US. 'We do not believe it possible', he told the Committee, 'from the past history and present aspect of affairs, for our people to live in this country peaceably, and educate and elevate their children to that degree which they desire. They do not believe it possible - neither do I.'¹²

Hill's 'jubilee' had been short-lived, lasting less than five years. Turning his back on the possibilities for assimilation, he joined tens of thousands of former slaves looking to exodus as the only solution to their predicament. As the possibilities for liberation collapsed around them, some travelled further south to Florida to take up homesteads on government-owned swampland; others abandoned the South for Kansas or Oklahoma and points further west. But Hill was sceptical about finding safety anywhere on the continent: 'In [the West] these outrages are as bad as they are here', he reasoned. '[T]hose Western States to which we looked are worse plagued than we are, if it is possible, and I did not know where to flee.' 'For certain of us, we have lost hope entirely.'¹³

One gets the sense from the documentary record that Hill came to this judgement reluctantly, and only after having exhausted his hopes for a transformed South. One close collaborator - presumably a white Republican - writing under the pseudonym 'Senex' had reportedly 'remonstrated with him for leaving the United States just at the time his race had taken a "new departure", when a new life was open to them', and remarked that Hill was fully versed in the large literature on emigration: 'Every Congressional and State document on the subject of the lands of the west and the south, and the homestead and pre-emption laws, he had read and digested in his mind.' It was only 'after this full investigation', Senex admitted, that Hill declared his hand, announcing that 'Africa ["where my father came from", as he put it before Congress] was his choice'.¹⁴

When testifying before the Congressional investigation into the effects of Klan activity, Hill denied that he had led the exodus movement in the locality of Clay Hill, but the records reveal that from 1870 onwards he pursued an extended correspondence with leading figures in the American Colonization Society (ACS).

The ACS (founded by white philanthropists in the early antebellum period to promote repatriation of free blacks as a 'solution' to the problem of racial antagonism in the US) had provoked deep antipathy among Northern free blacks and white abolitionists for its evasion of the fight for emancipation and racial equality. During the early period of Reconstruction, it was often viewed by freed slaves in the Republican ranks as part of a conservative plot. Grassroots activists like Hill were implacably opposed to encouraging migration out of the South at a time when their greatest adversaries were doing their best to whittle down the black vote, and ACS supporters across the region reported violent opposition from the Republican grassroots, a hostility that seemed to become particularly acute at election time. From North Carolina, a black organiser wrote in 1868 that the Union League was 'opposed to my leaving this country with a party of coloured people', and that it had gone as far as intercepting his orders from the local post office to prevent an exodus. Similar frustrations marked efforts in Aiken, South Carolina, where an organiser reported that a 'Grate dele of [prospective emigrants]' now 'Declined Gowing to Liberia' after 'some body turned there Mind'. At Sumter, in the midst of tight elections four years later, one correspondent reported that it was

impossible to do much towards interesting the negroes in [the Liberia] cause on account of the great political excitement ... Every negro is made to believe, that on his vote [and] influence the whole welfare of the U. S. Government depends [and] they feel their importance in a wonderful degree.¹⁵

Taken together, Hill's testimony before Congress and his private correspondence with the ACS illuminate his motivations in turning towards an option that he would have ruled out just a year or two earlier. By May 1870, he revealed, freedmen and women in York county 'had become so alarmed [by Klan night-riding] that they did not sleep in their houses at night', but took to the woods; he pointed to the example of his brother-in-law, June Moore, whose wife 'went out with their little babe and slept every night in the rain, until late in the spring'.¹⁶ Writing to the ACS just three months before he appeared in public to testify before the visiting Congressional Committee, Hill explained that 'very many yea all in york county union chester and laurens counties they all ... is seeking a refuge any or every where ... such being the case hundreds [and] thousands would under the present circumstances Embrace the 1st opportunity to leave [out of] fear'. Alongside nearly 200 of his near neighbours, Hill severed the deep ties to his upcountry roots later that autumn, trekked a couple of hundred miles of dusty road to the Atlantic coast and boarded a ship to Liberia. He died there, as many did, within a few years.

Optimism to despair

Elias Hill's trajectory – from heady optimism and intense engagement in grassroots Republican politics to deep despair and a scramble for escape – fits

awkwardly alongside a recent historical literature that has emphasised black agency and resilience. But the arc he was compelled to travel is one that many, and probably most, former slaves must have experienced in some way or another with the collapse of Reconstruction. White paramilitary terror was not always the critical factor in undermining black expectations. In some places, where demographic and other advantages favoured freedpeople, the Klan never managed to operate effectively. The pace and tempo of counter-revolution varied. But everywhere across the US South the dream that had animated the slaves' jubilee died, or was stillborn. Land and the autonomy it might bring remained out of reach for most freedpeople. Overwhelmingly, black Southerners remained trapped in poverty, caught in a web of repressive labour arrangements – debt peonage and sharecropping, the crop lien, convict labour and the chain gang – that made a mockery of their new freedom, and often in more desperate material straits than they had known even under slavery. In time, of course, freedmen and women were driven from the public sphere, barred from the voting booth and subjected to decades of horrific, gratuitous racial violence. As W. E. B. Du Bois put it, without exaggeration on either end, after their brief 'moment in the sun' emancipated African Americans were driven 'back towards slavery'.¹⁷

Reacting against a formerly dominant literature that viewed slaves as passive objects in the outcome of the Civil War, and Emancipation as an almost incidental outcome of that conflict, scholars have in recent years developed an impressive historiography that acknowledges slaves as central actors in the overthrow of slavery, and the struggle for emancipation as the most significant social upheaval in all of US history. Entirely sympathetic to that trend, I want to nevertheless suggest that, if we are going to acknowledge the centrality of slavery in shaping American society, and the importance of Emancipation in laying the foundations for the modern US, then we need also to understand, and be able to explain, the sharp reversal in the possibilities for black freedom that followed so soon after the slaves' jubilee.

Many of the commemorative events organised over the past several years to mark the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War have been marked by an upbeat atmosphere of national back-slapping and self-congratulation, reminiscent of New Labour's packaging of British abolition in 2006–2007.¹⁸ One could easily come away from these with the impression that while enslaved African Americans had been horribly oppressed and abused, all of that came to an abrupt end in April 1865. Slavery was a stain on the national character but in ridding itself of the institution, the Obama-era consensus seemed to stress, the US could now justifiably lay claim to moral leadership on a global scale, proselytising and, if need be, going to war to bring the blessings of capitalist democracy to a waiting world.

This eagerness, this determination to draw a firm line under an uncomfortable aspect of the American past finds its way into popular assumptions as well, and is often bundled into a range of ideologically driven assertions about black 'pathology'.¹⁹ Framed this way, of course, the descendants of those brutalised in the past are held up as villains: if freedom arrived fully formed in April 1865 then

the inability of many African Americans to 'make it' reflects not any systemic defects in American political economy, but the moral failings and cultural deficiencies of individuals and the communities from which they come. We find this especially on the malicious and increasingly militant racist Right, but also, occasionally, among sections of mainstream black political leadership itself: Al Sharpton's admonition at the Michael Brown funeral that African Americans needed to stop 'sitting around, feeling sorry for ourselves', his lamentation that 'it ain't black no more to be successful' are part of a tradition of 'up-by-the-bootstraps' sermonising by conservative elements in the black middle class that originated in the ordeal of Reconstruction's collapse.²⁰

Emancipation and reversal

If there is a consensus today that any honest confrontation with the American past requires an acknowledgement both of the nation's foundations in racially based slave labour and of the critical role that the enslaved played in bringing that system to an end, we should be equally attentive to explaining why it was that the end of slavery did not deliver freedom for the oppressed, but instead – after a brief interlude during which freedpeople savoured their 'brief moment in the sun' – opened up what Leon Litwack has characterised as 'the most violent and repressive period in the history of race relations in the United States'.²¹ And while this essay is mainly concerned with the dashed hopes of African Americans, their experience of a steep reversal is in many ways the shared and profoundly significant experience of ex-slaves across the former plantation societies of the Atlantic world.

To begin with the last point: the descent from millennialist elation at jubilee to deep despondency a few short years later was the experience not only of many African Americans, but of their counterparts across much of the Americas, with an enduring legacy, and with consequences that continue to shape, in tangible and profound ways, social relations up to the present day. It's hard to conceive of an aspect of human experience where Marx's dictum about the 'tradition of dead generations' weighing 'like a nightmare on [the present]' is more palpably borne out than in the persistence of racial oppression and social inequality in those 'New World' societies founded upon the transatlantic slave trade.²² Understanding that broader experience, situating the dashed expectations of freedpeople in the American South in the context of a general retreat from capitalism's democratic and liberating pretensions, helps to illuminate the universal dimensions of a problem often viewed in the specific, parochial terms of North American race relations.

'Everywhere', Eric Foner has written, 'the outcome of the emancipation process and the degree of autonomy achieved by the former slaves depended upon an elaborate series of power relations.' Those structural impediments to freedom were clear in the most carefully choreographed process directed from above – British abolition – which 'left the planter class with its landholdings and political

power intact [and] provided it with twenty million pounds in compensation, so as to avoid the precedent of confiscating private property'.²³ But they were also evident, Laurent Dubois writes, in the aftermath of triumphant slave rebellion in Haiti, where Toussaint's determination to revive sugar production for the world market led him to 'limit the liberty of the ex-slaves, responding to their attempts to move freely, acquire land, and escape plantation labor' by constructing a heavily militarised labour regime. Haiti's experience is instructive in demonstrating that, even where freedpeople could turn back white paramilitaries, or indeed defeat the most advanced imperial armies in the world, market forces – global capitalism – had means at its disposal for subverting attempts to give substance to freedom. In Dubois's account, the ambiguous outcome in Haiti, which saw plantation labourers engaged in bitter strikes against the government of the world's first black republic, 'marked the beginning of a longer story of how emancipation ultimately failed to bring true equality and independence to former slaves'.²⁴

Was there a relationship between the retreat from a thoroughgoing reform of the American South after the war and wider patterns in the evolution of capitalist democracy, between the disappointed hopes of freed slaves in the plantation societies of the Atlantic world and the attenuation of democratic power experienced by the working classes in the Northern US and beyond, in metropolitan Europe and the colonial world? The British historian W. R. Brock wrote perceptively in 1963 that the failure to remake the American South was 'part of the wider failure of bourgeois liberalism to solve the problems of the new age which was dawning'. His insistence that 'the problem [of Reconstruction] transcends its domestic context' stands out against a historical literature marked by parochialism and an unwillingness to traverse the line between the lives of the recently emancipated and those who could claim a longer acquaintance with free labour conditions.²⁵

Just as in the British context formal equality under the law had proven compatible with 'aristocratic privilege, an established Church, denial of suffrage to the masses, and the exploitation of low paid labor',²⁶ so too in the United States the limits of the particular variant of freedom available to former slaves (and to many whites, for that matter) were sharply circumscribed by the economic and social imperatives attending the drive to modern industrial capitalism, a drive that had been accelerated by Northern victory in the Civil War. Republicans 'undertook to promote political equality', one historian wrote, 'in a society characterized by equality in almost nothing else'.²⁷ The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed above all the sharp attenuation of 'free labour ideology', between a glorious zenith in the thick of the confrontation with pro-slavery forces at the middle of the nineteenth century and its base adaptation to corporate power a few decades later. The bourgeois limits of Republican ideology – the Party's inability to reconcile its obligation to freedpeople and a deep attachment to property – can be seen even at the height of its power in the summer of 1866, when passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, arguably the most important constitutional advance

of the Reconstruction era, occurred almost simultaneously with the Party's definitive retreat from land redistribution.

More revealing is the chronology of US military deployment at the end of Reconstruction in 1877: federal troops withdrawn at the behest of white supremacists from providing military protection for Southern blacks moved in two directions out of the South – to the North, where they would be deployed to suppress the 'Great Upheaval', a semi-insurrectionary general strike along the railroads, and to the West, where they would complete the genocidal wars being waged against the last of the great indigenous North American civilisations on the Great Plains.²⁸ All three of these monumental acts: defeat of the slaveholding Confederacy at the South; the militarisation of the state for a new era of explosive industrial confrontation; and the clearing of the Great Plains for full-throttled exploitation of its vast resources are part of a single process of consolidation of bourgeois rule in the late nineteenth-century US. Barrington Moore, Jr. characterised the American Civil War as the 'the last revolutionary offensive on the part of what one may legitimately call urban or bourgeois capitalist democracy'. Viewed in this light, it is unsurprising that the defence of freedpeoples' rights ranked so low on the Republicans' list of priorities.²⁹

One other element is essential for explaining the predicament that confronted African Americans after the collapse of Reconstruction. It was not merely the case that American capital intended to abandon the freedpeople; more than that, it aimed to resubjugate and exploit them in a modernising South fully integrated into a rapidly industrialising national economy. On the very cusp of the end of the Civil War, in December 1865, the most sophisticated exponent of free market ideology of its time, the London-based *Economist*, took stock of the changes that the collapse of American slavery would bring, spelling out the implications for the world economy and for the racial and class hierarchies that upheld it:

The one necessity essential to the development of ... new sources of prosperity is the arrangement of some industrial system under which very large bodies of dark labourers will work willingly under a very few European supervisors ... without strikes or quarrels[.]

Slavery had held such an arrangement in place for centuries, it acknowledged, but slavery was now gone; the *Economist* did not mourn its passing, but welcomed the triumph of a new order based on free labour and 'mutual self-interest'. The difficulty, it understood, was in finding a means of resubordinating black labour under nominally 'free labour' arrangements: it was 'clear', it reasoned, 'that the dark races must in some way or other be induced to obey white men willingly'.³⁰

Conclusion

Advocates of the 'free labour' regeneration of the former slave South held up an idealised vision of the new order they aimed to usher in after the overthrow of

Reconstruction.³¹ Though pockets of industrialisation marked its landscape, the South remained a backward, stagnant and overwhelmingly agrarian region until well into the twentieth century. Away from the cotton belt, in urban areas where a measure of development did take off, industrial 'progress' went hand in hand with repressive labour regimes. In the extractive sector that dominated Southern industry, large gangs of low-paid, nominally free black and white labourers worked at wages well below their Northern counterparts, cutting down timber, digging out the phosphates, the coal and iron ore, tapping the oil reserves and shipping the vast natural resources of the region north to feed a growing industrial economy. Jim Crow, with all the violence and inhumanity that it entailed, was not merely a system for enforcing racial etiquette: it took shape after the eclipse of the slaves' jubilee to provide an arrangement by which the 'dark races' of the American South could be 'induced' to 'obey white men' without 'strikes or quarrels'.³²

The successful challenge to a racist historiography that dominated American historical writing between the end of the Civil War and the mid-twentieth century marks an important advance, and one that we need to cherish and defend. But if, as Du Bois wrote, history is to be more than simply a means of 'inflating our national ego, [or] giving a false but pleasurable sense of accomplishment', scholars need to begin to grapple also with the less flattering story of how and why jubilee came unravelled, of what drove men and women like Elias Hill to abandon any hope of securing their freedom in a country that had seen off slavery but overseen the revival of exploitation and racial oppression. In his sometimes cryptic but often profound reflections, Walter Benjamin wrote that 'only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that [not] *even the dead* will ... be safe from the enemy, if he wins'. An honest rendering, a full reckoning with the story of the age of Emancipation offers bright sparks of hope in abundance, but also clear evidence that the great work of human liberation undertaken above all by the slaves and their allies remains unfinished.³³

References

- 1 'Rev. E. Hill's report of abuse, to Major Merrill', included in Colonel Lewis Merrill Testimony, 26 July 1871, in US Congress Joint Select Committee, *Ku Klux Conspiracy: testimony taken by the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the condition of affairs in the late insurrectionary states* (Vol. 5, South Carolina, part 3) [hereafter *Ku Klux Conspiracy*] (Washington, DC, 1872), p. 1477; 'KuKlux in South Carolina', *Morning Reporter* (15 September 1871, Little Rock).
- 2 'Elias Hill Testimony', *Ku Klux Conspiracy*, op. cit. (25 July 1871), p. 1406.
- 3 Hill was memorialised (as one of two lead characters, 'Eliab Hill') in the compelling Reconstruction-era novel by the white Radical Republican tribune Albion Tourgée, *Bricks without Straw* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2009).
- 4 'Colonel Lewis Merrill Testimony', *Ku Klux Conspiracy*, op. cit. (Vol. 4, South Carolina, part 3), p. 1486.
- 5 'A black man with a history', *New York Evangelist* (17 August 1871); 'KuKlux in South Carolina', op. cit.

- 6 The term refers to the Old Testament (Leviticus 25: 8–24), in which slaves are freed, debts forgiven and sins pardoned. On its meaning for American slaves, see Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: the aftermath of slavery* (New York, Vintage Books, 1980), pp. 177–78, 212, 216–18.
- 7 ‘Ervin Smith Interview’, *Slave Narratives: a folk history of slavery in the United States from interviews with former slaves*, Volume 4 (Arkansas), (Amazon Digital), p. 190. On Hill’s involvement in grassroots Republican politics, see Elias Hill to Governor Robert K. Scott, 11 September 1869, in Governor Scott Papers, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia.
- 8 Merrill’s method for verifying Hill’s correspondence for the Congressional committee investigating Klan violence in July 1871 is revealing: ‘[T]here are only two negroes in that country I know of who are able to write’, he reasoned, ‘and this is not the handwriting of the other one.’ ‘Merrill Testimony’, *Ku Klux Conspiracy*, op. cit., p. 1477.
- 9 Peter Coclanis penned an early critique of this trend in ‘Slavery, African American agency, and the world we have lost’, *Georgia Historical Quarterly* (Vol. 39, no. 4, Winter 1995), pp. 873–84. For a more recent general assessment of this literature, see Brian Kelly, ‘No easy way through: black workers and race leadership at the nadir’, *Labor: Journal of the Working-Class History of the Americas* (Vol. 7, no. 3, November 2010), pp. 79–93.
- 10 Jerry L. West, *The Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan in York County, South Carolina, 1865–1877* (North Carolina, McFarland, 2002), p. 5.
- 11 ‘Sam Nuckles Testimony’, *Ku Klux Conspiracy*, op. cit., Vol. 4 (South Carolina), Part 3, p. 1161.
- 12 ‘Elias Hill Testimony’, *Ku Klux Conspiracy*, op. cit., p. 1410.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 1412, 1410.
- 14 ‘A thrilling story’, *Philadelphia Press* (31 August 1871).
- 15 Unknown correspondent (Halifax, North Carolina) to William Coppinger, 20 July 1868; C. S. Hayne (Aiken, South Carolina) to William Coppinger, 12 April 1868; J. S. Bartelle (Sumter, South Carolina) to William Coppinger, 5 August 1873; in American Colonization Society Records, Incoming Correspondence, 1819–1917.
- 16 ‘Elias Hill Testimony’, *Ku Klux Conspiracy*, op. cit., p. 1409.
- 17 W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1935), p. 30.
- 18 The tone is evident in a commentary published by the *Telegraph*, in which Charles Moore suggests that ‘the bicentenary should be a cause for celebration (a point that Mr Blair did make, sotto voce). Apart from a brief abolition by the French First Republic, which was rescinded by Napoleon, Britain was the first country to abolish the slave trade. After Waterloo, it insisted on spreading that abolition to other European countries. The Royal Navy did a great deal to stamp out the trade. In 1833, Parliament made all slavery illegal. In law and in practice, Britain took the lead.’ ‘Blair’s sorry apology for slavery’, *Telegraph* (2 December 2006), available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3634825/Blairs-sorry-apology-for-slavery.html>.
- 19 ‘Obama-era progressives view white supremacy as something awful that happened in the past’, Ta-Nehisi Coates writes, insisting that it might be more accurately understood as ‘one of the central organizing forces in [contemporary] American life’. See Coates, ‘Black pathology and the closing of the progressive mind’, *Atlantic* (21 March 2014), available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/03/black-pathology-and-the-closing-of-the-progressive-mind/284523/>.
- 20 Byron York, ‘At Michael Brown funeral, Al Sharpton’s double-edged eulogy evokes anger’ *Washington Examiner* (25 August 2014), available at: <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/at-michael-brown-funeral-al-sharptons-double-edged-eulogy-evokes-anger/article/2552433>. On the Obama presidency and race more generally, see Thomas Frank’s interview with Cornel West in *Salon* (24 August 2014), available at: http://www.salon.com/2014/08/24/cornel_west_he_posed_as_a_progressive_and_turned_out_to_be_counterfeit_we_ended_up_with_a_wall_street_presidency_a_drone_presidency/.

- 21 Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, op. cit., p. 30; Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: black southerners in the age of Jim Crow* (New York, Knopf, 1998), p. xiv.
- 22 The phrase is from Karl Marx's 'Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' (1852).
- 23 Eric Foner, 'The anatomy of emancipation', in *Nothing but Freedom: emancipation and its legacy* (Baton Rouge, LSU Press, 1983), pp. 10, 14.
- 24 Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: the story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 173.
- 25 William R. Brock, *An American Crisis: congress and Reconstruction, 1865-67* (London, Harrap, 1963), pp. 302, vii. An important exception to these trends can be found in some of the recent comparative studies of emancipation. The essays in Eric Foner's *Nothing but Freedom* showcased the possibilities in such an approach, but see also Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: race, labor and slavery in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 289.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 289; William McKee Evans, *Ballots and Fence Rails: Reconstruction on the Lower Cape Fear* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 251.
- 28 Peter Camejo, *Racism Revolution Reaction 1861- 1877: the rise and fall of radical Reconstruction* (New York, Pathfinder Press, 1976), pp. 172-73.
- 29 Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: lord and peasant in the making of the modern world* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1966), p. 112.
- 30 'The economic value of justice to the dark races', *Economist* (9 December 1865), pp. 1487-89.
- 31 *Atlanta Constitution* editor Henry Grady, a prominent advocate of New South industrialisation, articulated the free labour vision of a modernising South before a New York audience in 1886. '[N]o section [of the US] shows a more prosperous laboring population than the negroes of the South', he boasted, 'none in fuller sympathy with the employing and land-owning class. He shares our school fund, has the fullest protection of our laws and the friendship of our people. Self-interest, as well as honor, demand that he should have this. Our future, our very existence depend upon our working out this problem in full and exact justice.' See Grady, 'The New South', in *The New South: writings and speeches of Henry Grady* (Savannah, Beehive Press, 1971).
- 32 On race and industrialisation in the post-Reconstruction South see Brian Kelly, 'Materialism and the persistence of race in the Jim Crow South' (Deutscher Memorial Prize Lecture), *Historical Materialism* (Vol. 12, no. 2, 2004), pp. 3-19, and 'Labor, race and the search for a central theme in the history of the Jim Crow South', *Irish Journal of American Studies* (Vol. 10, 2001), pp. 55-73.
- 33 Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, op. cit., p. 714; Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the philosophy of history', in *Illuminations* (New York, Penguin Random House, 1969), p. 255.