A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration Study Guide

A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration by Steven Hahn

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Plot Summary

In *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*, Steven Hahn traces the development and negotiation of African American politics in the South. He focuses on such topics as how African Americans constructed themselves as political actors, how they engaged in political struggled during slavery and after emancipation, and how they helped shape American politics during the nineteenth century.

The first part of the book discusses African American political resistance under slavery and during the Civil War. Hahn argues that blacks were much more political during the time of slavery than many people think. They resisted white oppression by forming ties with one another, collectively struggling for better lives, and by taking part in revolts and escapes to freedom in the North. During the Civil War, tens of thousands of former slaves took up arms against their former owners. Through discussion and education, African Americans began imagining new social and political possibilities and began imagining a new and different nation.

The second part of the book focuses on Radical Reconstruction. After the Civil War, African Americans transformed the older forms of black political practice. They developed grassroots organizations and reconstituted communities that struggled for local power and recognition. The Union League helped to politically organize freedmen. They educated them about their new political rights. They also helped them register to vote and provided protection against white backlash. Hahn argues that Reconstruction brought to light the paramilitary character of southern politics

The last part of the book examines such topics as the toppling of Reconstruction governments in the South, the disenfranchisement of African Americans from the political arena, and the emergence of new projects outside of politics. The grassroots emigration movement rose in the latter part of the 1800s, as African Americans hoped to find places to build stable and safe communities away from the reach and violence of whites. African Americans also turned to biracialism in politics which created alliances with white insurgents. The violence and disenfranchisement during this time period would lead to the Great Migration and Jim Crow.

Prologue Looking Out From Slavery

Prologue Looking Out From Slavery Summary

Hahn writes that his book is about extraordinary people who did extraordinary things in difficult circumstances. Focusing on the rural South, the book is about how African Americans engaged in a political struggle. It is about how the distinctive, African American politics were created in the nineteenth century.

Hahn's own interest in the topic began when he came across an account of African American labor resistance in 1868. He discovered that there were more examples of resistance and political struggle across the South in the wake of emancipation. Solidarities were created by the political mobilizations. Hahn seeks a broad understanding of politics in this book and sees this as encompassing collective struggles for social and meaningful power. The time period of the book is a time when African American men won and lost the right to vote.

Some publications on African American political struggles in the nineteenth century have tended to focus on smaller periods of time, such as the era of slavery or Jim Crow. Hahn argues that this does not allow us to see how the developments in one era influenced and shaped those in the next. He focuses on the rural South because the majority of African Americans lived in this area during this time period. The rural areas were also sights where power and culture were deployed and whose political achievements have been underestimated. He argues that while there is quite a bit of information on various aspects of African American life during these periods, there is little on African American politics. While there were a number of solidarities that formed though politics, Hahn is also mindful of overemphasizing this and ignoring the tensions and conflicts that took place within African American communities.

Hahn's work suggests several things. First, he argues that African Americans contributed to the formation of a new political nation, while they were constructing themselves into a new people. Second, in imagining this new nation, African Americans exposed the complex and contradictory relationship between labor and democracy.

Prologue Looking Out From Slavery Analysis

Hahn's prologue serves to introduce the reader to the subject matter and to situate the book within the larger scholarship. The prologue takes the general academic scholarship path by pointing out the holes in the existing literature. For Hahn, this hole is that many other scholars have focused only on particular, smaller periods. He argues that this limits us from seeing how the various periods influence and shape one another. For example, the political struggles during slavery helped to recreate and shape the political struggles during reconstruction. He also argues that little has been said about African American political struggles in the rural South.

The prologue helps to put Hahn's argument and the book into perspective. He provides a roadmap for the reader about what the book's focus is. Through this, we are aware that the book will focus on African American political struggles during the nineteenth century and that it will focus on communities in the rural South.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Of Chains and Threads

Part 1, Chapter 1 Of Chains and Threads Summary

Even before the presidential election, rumors circulated that Lincoln had won. Some slaves were convinced that freedom was eminent. Talk continued as the Civil War raged and slaves began fleeing in large numbers. Almost 150,000 African American men would eventually fight for the Union Army. For the slaves who remained in the South, the tide of change also began. Some took over their former masters' "abandoned" plantations. Others increased their acts of resistance by working more slowly and demanding more power and autonomy. Some slaveholders eventually began offering their slaves small wages or a percentage of the crop in order to keep them at work and the plantation solvent. Hahn states that it may be contradictory to talk of the slaves' politics, as they had no official standing in civil or political society. Yet, slaves did act in their own interests. They built collective solidarities, and produce leaders who would lead them into emancipation.

There was a great diversity in antebellum South slavery. About one in four slaves lived in the upper or border South, where free people of color and slave hiring were not uncommon. Slaves in the South worked on cotton plantations, sugar or rice estates, or on diversified farms. "Slavery, quite simply, was a system of extreme personal domination in which a slave had no relationship that achieved legal sanction or recognition other than with the master, or with someone specifically designated by the master" (pg. 16). Slaves were politically vulnerable and the institution undermined the solidarities of people of color.

The slave population began to reproduce itself during the middle of the eighteenth century. Due to increased slave population, a structure of kinship relations, expectations, and practices developed. By the Antebellum Period, slaves typically lived in simple, nuclear families with extensive kinship networks spreading out geographically. Although these patterns developed, family formation and kinship networks were sill unstable and fragile due to the structure of the slavery institution. On smaller plantations, less than half of the slaves lived in the standard nuclear family. Slave sales tended to be local, but the cotton boom had promoted an interregional trade, severing many families and networks. Hahn argues that the duration of these relationships may have made a smaller difference to African American political struggles than the obligations and responsibilities that these relationships produced. The obligations created bonds among slaves, both generational and spatial, that counterbalanced the isolation that slavery was meant to enforce. These obligations gave slaves support and helped them negotiate their personal trials that may have left them alone and vulnerable. Slaves had limited room to maneuver and the risks were high. Any action undertaken had to be collective, as individual actions were easier to detect and more likely to incur fast and severe punishment. Slaves working within kin groups or work gangs did not escape punishment, but they were better able to maintain and secure the gains that they did make.

By the mid-nineteenth century, slaves in some parts of the South had begun to change the slave-master relationship by shifting the expectations of time and work owed to the master and making reciprocities more common. Slaves managed to gain free time for themselves, looser standards for some agricultural tasks, and retain small shares of their wages. Paid labor was more common at harvest times, when slaveholders would offer incentives to slaves who exceeded their tasks. By the antebellum era, slaves had also gained Sundays and sometimes, parts of Saturdays for themselves as free time. During this time, they were able to rest, see kin, or worship. Some also did odd jobs for their owners or for neighboring planters and farmers, getting paid for their labor during these times. Slaveholders tolerated a range of economic activities, including raising livestock, cultivating subsistence and market garden plots, and hunting. Families often worked slave garden plots during their "free" time. The plots still, however, demanded a good deal of extra labor. Although most slaveholders prohibited the cultivation of staple crops, slaves did often gain leverage in determining what could be planted and how their efforts would be distributed. The petty production and provisioning system allowed slaves to gain some experience in the marketplace and to earn a little money. Most states, however, had provisions prohibiting anyone from trading with slaves unless permitted by their slaveholder.

Ritual gifting was another way that slaves earned goods and money and increased their leverage. Slaveholders distributed gifts at Christmas time. An aspect that has often been overlooked in the literature on slavery is exchanges between slaves. These exchanges served to redistribute goods to those in need, reinforce kinship and friendship ties, and reshape social life. Yet, it is easy to overstate the gains that slaves made. Any property accumulation was often the product of many years of effort. It was still very fragile. Most slaves accumulated very little in their lifetime.

Southern slaveholders often tried to encourage and organize communities centered on the Big House. The slaves' idea of community broke through the boundaries of individual plantations and farms. Community for slaves rested on the slave households, but the social network could become quite large and wide-ranging. In some areas, the geographical reach was more limited, but the social fabric was denser. This happened particularly in the lower South and on larger plantations where more nuclear families and extended kin networks were living in close proximity to one another. These communities, however, had fewer opportunities to be hired out. They did not experience urban life or meet with freed persons of color. "Community building took place between as well as on plantations and farms, as slaves not only formed and renewed relations with one another but also exchanged information, gossip, and rumor" (pg. 41). Slave communities reflected and shaped larger relations of power, authority, and prestige. Kinship, age, gender, and skills stood as the defining divisions within the community. Plantation elders, who wielded most of the power within the community, tended to be male. Some slave women also achieved places of honor and political power. However, this was due to their contributions to the material and cultural life of the community. They often assumed prominent roles in the areas of social and cultural reproduction, teaching children skills, and creating clothing and other necessities. Mobility, craft skills, and literacy were all crucial components in the creation of political actors.

Slaves found quasi-institutional expression in the religious congregations they created. By the antebellum period, these congregations became the means through which slaves were brought into the community. Collective norms were shaped, leaders were mobilized, and events were interpreted. Independent black churches grew out of biracial churches or were created independently. Slaves, for the most part, rejected the bases of Christian fundamentalism, but they embraced other aspects. Most often they assimilated Christianity into traditional folk beliefs. They imagined a divine intervention that would end slavery, punish slaveholders, and help them build new lives. Moses or Jesus often represented their deliverer. Although after his death, Abraham Lincoln would become a messianic figure as well. Within slave communities, sacred and secular leaders were often the same and included men as well as women. Slave congregations pulsed not only with religion, but also with collective deliberation.

Slaves' political struggles were present from the beginning of slavery in North America. They took place in a contradictory and new context within the nineteenth century. Slave revolts took place in various areas, including the great slave revolt in St. Domingue. Thousands of refugees from this revolt poured into the United States. It was not long before the lessons of these revolts and other political struggles spread. As the cotton economy spread, so did the political experiences and ideologies of the slave communities. Most slaves received information or intelligence through a "grapevine" system. They became familiar with the issues of local and national politics from the casual conversation of white neighborhood, from political speeches at campaign spots, and so on. Yet, the accessibility of political knowledge for slaves increased only as rooms for political maneuvering closed. The most important allies that slaves had during this time were the free black communities in the North. Although they often existed in a vulnerable position, these communities helped build institutions and maintained the ideology of abolitionism.

Rumors of slave insurrection ran across the South at various times. These rumors were interpreted not only by white slaveholders, but also black communities. During the fall of 1856 before the election, rumors spread about slave liberation. Whites did have cause for concern, as virtually every slave revolt was accompanied by rumors among slaves that emancipation had been decreed. Between the 1830s and the Civil War, however, the prospects for a successful revolt were slim. While slaves couldn't advance political demands and were unable to represent themselves as political actors, they did imagine a terrain of struggle, where they would be able to accomplish their goals and have powerful allies in that cause. This enabled them to create the foundations for political communities.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Of Chains and Threads Analysis

In this chapter, Hahn discusses the beginning foundations for African American political communities. Although opportunities under slavery were limited, slaves found various ways to challenge the power and authority of slaveholders and to create their own communities. While one might be tempted to think only of slave revolts or plots to revolt as resistance, Hahn shows that slaves used a variety of methods to challenge the

power structure in the South. They were able to gain "free" days to work on their own economic activities and items to trade from slaveholders. In some instances, slaves were able to hire themselves out to other planters or farmers. In other instances, slaveholders would offer money to slaves as incentives.

This chapter also shows the foundations of slave communities. These communities would be the basis for later political communities that would influence the recreation of the nation after emancipation. Religious congregations helped sustain and create leaders and helped the flow of information and debate. Kinship networks also allowed for similar developments.

Part 1, Chapter 2 The Choked Voices of a Race at Last Unloosed

Part 1, Chapter 2 The Choked Voices of a Race at Last Unloosed Summary

Conservative winds blew into the United States during the 1850s. Calls for the political inclusion of women and northern free blacks were ignored or rejected. A Nativist Movement developed as an influx of poor Irish Catholics arriving in the United States. Slaveholders struck back at the prospect of millions of free blacks in various ways. Congress voted for a stronger fugitive slave law. The *Dred Scott* case denied the rights of citizenship to all blacks. Democrats also called for the federal protection of slavery in the western territories. Yet, in spite of all of this, slaves seemed to sense different possibilities, including emancipation and a new order of life.

By 1860, both slaveholders and slaves interpreted political events in similar ways. Both groups believed that the Republican Party was hostile towards slavery and that if it gained control of the government, it would move against the institution. The outbreak of problems between the federal government and the slaveholding states increased the rumors and predictions of emancipation. As the Confederate government organized, opportunities increased for slaves to become better acquainted with each other and political events. As early as the fall of 1860, some slaves were engaging in activities viewed as threatening and rebellious, including talking about being free and marching through town singing political songs.

"The slaves' rebellion drew, as servile rebellions normally do, on well-established practices of everyday resistance to their masters' power-on the experience, wisdom, trust, and discipline gained from political skirmishes taking place over the years and, perhaps, decades" (pg. 68). Slave rebellions started with small-scale departures for Union lines. These fugitives encountered unlikely support in the upper echelons of the Union army. General Benjamin F. Butler declared slaves contraband of war and put them to work. Within days, word of this appears to have spread and the number of fugitive slaves multiplied. The contraband policy did not challenge the legal basis of slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law remained in place. Although it is tempting to view the contraband policy as a step toward the Emancipation Proclamation, Hahn argues that this is not the case. In some areas, fugitive slaves were excluded from Union lines completely. As the Union army moved further into the South and the federal government became less solicitous toward slaveholders, the volume of slave fugitives increased.

Congress finally moved in March 1862 to prohibit military personnel from surrendering slaves to owners. Four months later, all slaves were declared free once they came under the control of the federal government. The contraband camps became the first large cultural and political meeting grounds for African Americans. The camps brought blacks together in large numbers and in greater concentration than even the largest

plantations. Reformers sought to strike fatal blows to the institution of slavery. They descended on the contraband camps to teach blacks essential lessons, including reading and writing. Political information flowed from unofficial channels. However, the blacks within the camps were not passive recipients of the lessons or political discussions.

Whatever their experience, freed people shared the desire to own land and use it as a way of grounding their families and supporting their kinship networks. The most prominent example of black self-management on a plantation was at Davis Bend, the plantations owned by Confederate President Jefferson Davis and several others. The Union army invaded the area and the remaining slaveholders fled. The black inhabitants leased the land and elected their own sheriff. By 1964, there were three thousand blacks living in the community. In other parts of the South, freed blacks in the Union occupied areas and continued to work on the land they had worked on as slaves. For a short time, it appeared that they may have the chance to get legal title to some of the land. When the leasing or sale of land occurred, it granted males as the heads of household, reflecting northern gender roles.

By the middle of 1864, almost 400,000 slaves had rebelled against their owners and gained freedom within Union lines. The status quo was probably beyond the chance of resurrection regardless of the outcome of the war. For many slaves, the war also made flight difficult. Large sections of the South remained under Confederate control. Rebel troops patrolled the roads and considerable distances separated many plantations from Union lines. Even if they reached Union lines, slaves could still be denied entrance or ability to surrender to owners, among other things. Further into the South, it is possible that there were slaves who knew little if anything about the war. In many areas, Union troops acted more as a corrosive element in the institution of slavery than a rapid solution to slavery.

Slaveholders complained about sulkiness, demoralization, insolence, and insubordination on the part of their slaves. There is some evidence of cooperation between slaves and poor southern whites who had lost confidence in the Confederacy. Slaves also provided information to Union troops about Confederate troops and the presence of rebels and political sympathizers. The rebellion of slaves had turned into a revolution that challenged the institutions and practices of the South. Although blacks were initially prohibited from serving in the Union army, a shortage of Union troops and the excess of fugitive slaves proved to be irresistible. In 1862, the War Department authorized the establishment of a black regiment. By the last year of the war, well over 10 percent of the Union army was back. W.E.B. Du Bois wrote, "Emancipation had thus two ulterior objects. It was designed to make easier the replacement of unwilling Northern white soldiers with black soldiers; and it sought to put behind the war a new push toward Northern victory by the mighty impact of a great moral ideal" (pg. 92). Although African Americans showed a great deal of enthusiasm for the chance to fight in the Army, when manpower needs raced ahead of recruitment, the army pressed blacks into service.

Black recruitment did help to destroy many of the sovereignties' characteristics of slavery. However, the government gained new forms of authority with it. Military recruitment of blacks was integral to the building of a new nation-state in the United States and black soldiers played a critical role in testing and defining the political contours. The military that they signed up with showed many of the same racist characteristics as the antebellum South. Their units were segregated. They were paid far lower than their white counterparts. Some Northerners supported black recruitment because it eased the number of white causalities. Black soldiers also had a lot at stake in fighting. There were severe punishments for black soldiers and their commanding officers if the Confederate army caught them. Yet, black soldiers did not passively accept these conditions. They struggled against the brand of inferiority and some refused pay until the wage scales were equitably adjusted. Northern black troops led the challenges to discriminatory practices in the army. Slave recruits were generally less able to lead because they widely lacked the skills and experience needed to conduct politics by Northern standards. Few knew how to read or write and few had framed petitions or other political resolutions.

The wartime military provided a basic political education to fugitive slaves. They met with other former slaves, free blacks, and white commanding officers, who had often spent years in the antislavery movement. They were able to learn more about the war, Northern politics, and differing forms of authority and loyalty than they had been presented with on plantations. It also opened the door for black schooling. It was in the best interest of the army to provide some schooling for illiterate soldiers, who slowed the most routine tasks and forced more responsibilities on their commanding officers. Illiterate black soldiers were eager to learn and they flocked to the regimental schools. Yet, it was their battlefield efforts that proved the most important for black soldiers. Their consciousness of themselves and politics grew.

With the exception of Kentucky, all of the slave states underwent a self-reconstruction in the final phases of the Civil War. Republicans and other coalitions seized control of the state governments and began rewriting the state constitutions. They abolished slavery, established public schools, protected the private property of small landowners, and ended imprisonment for debt. The new regimes in the states, however, hoped to make these changes by limiting the power and political privileges of former Confederates. They did not grant rights or cultivate relationships with former slaves and free blacks. The Louisiana Constitutional Convention was one example of this. Although representatives shifted power to New Orleans and established a progressive income tax, nothing was done to define or support the freedom of the state's blacks. The issue of black suffrage would have to be taken up by blacks themselves. In January 1865, sixty-two blacks petitioned the Tennessee government to grant them suffrage. At the same time, one hundred black men established the Equal Rights League of Louisiana. Within these debates, the distinction between state and national citizenship was confronted and gendered boundaries were being delineated.

In the rural South, the impending Confederate defeat and emancipation were interpreted with metaphors of deliverance and millennialism. Rural blacks saw the

events as acts of divine intervention coming through earthly hosts. They sometimes believed that Jesus and Abraham Lincoln were the same man.

Part 1, Chapter 2 The Choked Voices of a Race at Last Unloosed Analysis

The events of the Civil War provided more opportunities for African Americans to establish political communities and interpretations of events. The contraband camps provided fugitive slaves with access to regimental schools. It also freed blacks, who had been involved in the abolition movement. It provided political information and discussion. For perhaps the first time, these individuals were able to engage in open debate on political issues with others.

Hahn argues that what had begun as a rebellion against slave owners, spread to a rebellion against the institution of slavery and then to a new vision of civil and political society. This movement was also about redefinition for freed slaves and the African American community as a whole. The rebellions that took place in the antebellum period, during the Civil War, and after, would be based on common interpretations of political events and the networks of individuals and communities. The vision for a new nation would come from the grassroots level, beginning with the very people who wished to see it.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Of Rumors and Revelations

Part 1, Chapter 3 Of Rumors and Revelations Summary

The Confederate armies surrendered in the spring of 1865. On July 4th, millions of freed people claimed access to public space previously denied to them. They held processions of black troops, hundreds of black school children, and black representatives of urban trades. They marched past the homes of former prominent white officials and through public squares. Although the ceremonies differed, they all symbolized the reconstituted nation. These same political visions and agendas would sweep through much of the urban South during the months of 1865. Mass meetings and small gatherings proclaimed a new black political presence. They called for assemblies, introduced leaders, and protested discriminatory treatment. The initiatives that developed were fed by the flow of black migrants and by the institutional networks that free people of color and slaves had been building over the years. Black churches grew in number, despite an increasingly hostile atmosphere.

The importance of leaders within the black community was apparent at the freedman's conventions that happened throughout the South during the summer and fall of 1865.

Leaders from the South joined with northern blacks, pressing to create a new political nation where blacks would be equal under the law and able to vote. Almost all of these conventions passed resolutions and sent messages and petitions to the state constitutional conventions, state legislatures, and Congress. Those leading the movement were typically men who had been free before the war, those living in urban areas in the North, those who had achieved literacy, and those practicing some urban trade. The leaders took care to evoke the language, symbolism, and tradition of the founding of the U.S. They sought balanced representation at the state level. The North Carolina Freedman's Convention may have been the most visible. It brought together well over one hundred delegates and well over two-thirds of those lived in rural areas. It sought a moderate course in demanding equal rights. The Friends of Universal Suffrage in Louisiana sought more radical reforms, including the ability for black men to vote and an opposition to the readmission of Louisiana to the Union under its racially biased constitution of 1864. Yet, the political project and goals were no different for these groups or the many other freedman's conventions in other states. They called for a nation based on a concept of citizenship that was based on birth and loyalty, servitude, or other particularities. But urban blacks alone could not carry on this project, as they were too few in number. Their aims would be further hampered by constitutional conventions in many states, which proscribed "black codes," effectively giving a separate legal and social status to blacks.

The rural South was a luminal political world after the Civil War ended. The old order of social relations had been destroyed, but no new social or political systems immediately emerged. "With the old rules apparently obsolete and the new ones ill-prescribed, almost every act seemed to bear on the more general struggle over socially meaningful power: finding a different place of work or residence, reuniting with immediate family and other kin, wrestling over the terms of labor and leisure, constructing and negotiating relations within households...." (pg. 128). In the rural South, instead of petitions and calls for equality, mutually reinforcing rumors spread about either the federal government's future actions or armed black insurrection. The rumors about land confiscation and redistribution existed, although it is unclear about how widely they spread. In part, the rumors spread because thousands of slaves had been drawn to social sites during the war. The debate over politics and what would happen were impossible to control. Black Union soldiers also helped spread information and visions of the new nations as they made their way through the South. The presence of black soldiers and those who mustered out helped to advance the local organizations and communities.

Although local planters believed that outsiders were stirring up local blacks, rural freed people did not need outsiders to nurture their desire for the land they had been cultivating. Their expectations about property division were based on a complex set of goals and beliefs. Almost universally, freed people believed that some compensation for the trials of slavery should occur. By believing that the government and most often, the President, had the authority and intent to redistribute land, they rejected their former owners' claims to power. Many freed people looked to Christmas as the time when redistribution would take place and social relations would be reconstituted and rearranged. Belief in redistribution was less common in areas where farms and small plantations were common, as the slaves had been more closely tied to the white households. In these areas, the main task after the war was reuniting families and kinship groups. Some freed people began pooling their resources in hopes of buying or leasing land that had been confiscated.

By the fall of 1865, white southerners had good reason to doubt that property confiscation and redistribution would happen. However, what they did fear was that disappointed freed people would take matters into their own hands. They were also humiliated at having to show any respect to Northerners or freed people, often provoking them to acts of violence against their former slaves. The Freedman's Bureau attempted to track violent acts, but white landowners began to dismantle their means of resistance with the claims of black insurrection. Federal authorities and northerners mocked reports of freed people hiding arms or drilling in military fashion. Although exaggerated, the rumors did spotlight the early political activity of freed people and the contests for power. Whether or not freed people actually believed in land redistribution or not, the rumors did offer them maneuvering room and space.

When January arrived and redistribution had not happened, rural blacks began signing labor contracts. This was a disappointment for freed people and a relief for Southern whites. Planters in many areas agreed to enforce contracts, limit competition for laborers, prohibit the renting or selling of land to blacks, and provide for regular policing.

By waiting until January to begin signing contracts, freed people did undermine this slightly, by creating a temporary labor shortage and weakening attempts on the part of landowners to tie them down. Most freed people gave in to annual contracts. Although they pressed for higher wages, larger shares of the crops, and more control over their labor time.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Of Rumors and Revelations Analysis

Hahn continues to trace the development of African American political communities in this chapter. Leaders and others met together in conventions and gathers to press for greater equality and suffrage in the wake of the Civil War and emancipation. These meetings brought together ex-slaves from both the rural and urban South, as well as free blacks from the North. These interactions would help prepare free people for further struggles and battles for equality. Their shared expectations and visions of the future allowed them to petition and attempt to rearrange the social and political hierarchy in the South.

The rumors of land distribution allowed for some political room for freed people. They were able to delay in signing labor contracts and to further some solidarities by coming together to pool resources and plan. White landowners responded to the rumors by trying to further exclude freed people from the social and political relationships within the South.

Part 2, Chapter 4 Reconstructing the Body Politic

Part 2, Chapter 4 Reconstructing the Body Politic Summary

By March 1867, the reconstructed American republic was marked by Radicalism. Congress gave the federal government the ability to restructure the Confederate states, impose political disabilities on Southern leaders, and extend suffrage to black males. Freedmen responded by registering to vote in large numbers and overwhelmingly aligning themselves with the Republican Party. They widely resisted the threats of white Democrats, marched to the polls, and helped write new state constitutions.

David Medlock, an African American leader in Texas, helped organize a chapter of the Union League and the local Republican Party. The community that he worked to mobilize was multigenerational and had many kinship and personal networks. He was one of the few African Americans to win election to a state or county office in a majority white district.

Freed people played important roles in the early quests for land independence. Although some made plans to immigrate to Liberia, others sought ways of bettering their lives in the United States. In rebuilding their kinship networks after the war, they sought to protect and sustain loved ones. Black family networks were viewed as the best way to guarantee the freedom that would build on their past achievements and visions of the future. The relationship between labor and black families tended to involve agreements between landowners and black nuclear families, which were family-based work gangs. Kinship, thus, intersected with the reorganization of labor in the rural South. Black women, attached by kinship to able-bodied black men, did less field labor after emancipation than they did under slavery. In most cases, they sought to avoid work environments that would leave them vulnerable to the exploitation and abuse of white men. They devoted more time to their families and households. When they did enter the field, it was generally as a member of a family oriented group. Yet, rural black gender roles did not develop quickly, fall into neat categories, or gain wide acceptance.

Many of the early organizations founded by freed people were also bound together by kinship. They tended to deal with issues relating to labor and household. There were associations or companies of black laborers that met, marched, and drilled. Landowners complained about these groups. "This was a world in which social relations had always been based on the use and threat of personal violence and in which any challenge to white authority could be treated summarily. By drilling, marching, and posting sentinels, freed people reminded each other of the risks they faced while offering protection in their numbers, warning systems, and weapons of self-defense" (pg. 175). These activities also helped build solidarities and networks across plantations and farms.

Although the drilling companies tended to be all male, early collective action also included women. Communities as a whole were mobilized.

By the summer of 1867, complaints about the "armed organizations" of freed people grew in volume and scope. Groups seemed to exist all throughout the South. None was more important for the developing character of politics than the Union League. The Union League developed out of a network of organizations formed in the North during the Civil War. It was formed to rally public support for Lincoln and the war effort. It was bound by secrecy with oaths and rituals similar to the Masons. Once the war ended, the Union League continued with educational and agitation projects. Once black suffrage was guaranteed, it spread out from the urban areas into smaller towns and rural areas. Organizers sought to appraise freed people of their new rights and bring them into the Republican Party. Organizers faced violence and retaliation from white landowners. The operations and experiences within local councils depended on the training of the organizer and also on the social and political conditions in the particular areas. Some league councils organized their own drilling companies or linked with those already existing.

The Union League spread rapidly through the plantation belt, in part because of its association with the Confederate defeat, the Republican Party, and expansion of civil and political rights for African Americans. Its goal was to mobilize black support, which fed on the ideologies and customs within black communities. Meetings often involved the reading aloud of newspapers and government decrees. The League also depended on a wider base of mobilization and involvement than "membership." It built on previous struggles and had its earliest influence on labor relations.

The mass recruitment of freed men into the Union League in 1867 changed the character of the organization. The majority of Unionist whites, who initially composed the base, were more interested in punishing ex-Confederate than in empowering ex-slaves. There were sites of interracial cooperation. Among the activities of the League was attention to the implementation of the goals and prescriptions of the Reconstruction Acts. Voter registration was one of these areas. State legislatures had determined the requirements for voters. The Reconstruction Acts changed this as they enfranchised large numbers of blacks. For the most part, military district commanders took their job seriously. They carved out registration districts, found eligible registrars, and so on. But the response of these actions would have been far more limited if not for the freed people themselves. They mobilized their ranks, challenged the misinformation, and worked to educate and protect freedmen, who did not understand the process or feared the consequences of any actions they took.

The registration process helped to illuminate who the leaders were within black communities as they were chosen as registrars. The list of registrars likely excluded black men thought to be politically militant or who may have antagonized white residents. This provoked a great deal of discord as some whites protested the black registrars. But, by the early fall of 1867, black male voters made up a substantial proportions of the total electorate in all the states subject to reconstruction.

The registration of black men initiated a competition for black votes. For many, the prospect of campaigning for these votes was not alluring. Former Confederates rejected black suffrage. Cooperationists tried to attract the support and votes of black "conservatives," but it was not long before they admitted impending failure. Freedmen had not only registered to vote, but they had showed their intentions of voting Republican. Republicans had no match in mobilizing black support, as they embraced a new vision of a civil and political society. At the state Republican Party conventions in the summer of 1867, freedmen were present, sometimes in large numbers. The local Republican clubs and the Union Leagues connected the state parties to grassroots organizers and communities. Through the League and the parties, freed people met the political challenges. They sought advice from sympathetic northerners, searched for candidates to represent them at constitutional conventions, brought complaints about abuse or intimidation to agents and military officers, and planned marches to the polls. That election, constitutional conventions received overwhelming support and Republican candidates won the vast majority of available seats. However, many eligible white voters simply refused to participate in the elections.

The delegates who gathered in state capitols that year were composed of both black and white men. They inscribed into fundamental law the full civil standing of African American men. The "new class" of voters was also directly involved in the proceedings. However, African American delegates were spread unevenly throughout the state conventions. They found themselves part of complex political coalitions. Beyond the plantation belt, though, they faced differing problems, as black candidates had almost no chance of being selected as delegates. Within the plantation belt, white delegates tried to uphold the freedmen's new rights. Those who served as delegates did their best to make their presence felt. The black voices that were heard at the state constitutional conventions tended to be those who were free before the war. They were formally educated and trained in a profession. With white delegates chairing the majority of the committees, black delegates did have trouble getting proposals of interest to rural laborers to a general hearing. They tried to call for aid to black farmers. They also tried to implement a progressive tax and increase the availability of land for blacks. Black delegates did push at the boundaries of politics and political culture, which resulted in a debate on the nature of political rights. Some insisted that political rights were natural or inherent. Through the constitutional conventions, political expectations were raised as new possibilities opened up for freed people.

Part 2, Chapter 4 Reconstructing the Body Politic Analysis

Kinship networks proved important in the wake of the Civil War and emancipation. One site of this importance was in reorganizing labor. When possible, freed people tended to work with family members in small groups or in kinship based work groups. This provided a number of benefits for family members. The solidarities already present allowed the group to have a certain amount of leverage over white landowners. In

addition, by working within groups or with male family members, women had a greater amount of protection for the sexual exploitation that they had faced under slavery.

Kinship and other networks were also important as early organizations, particularly political ones, formed. Individuals learned about their enfranchisement and new rights through the Union Leagues and through the lines of communication that invariably involved kinship. Whether through the Union Leagues, local chapters of the Republican Party, and through drilling companies, freed people's involvement. This signaled a change in the new South and the social and political hierarchies.

Part 2, Chapter 5 A Society Turned Bottomside Up

Part 2, Chapter 5 A Society Turned Bottomside Up Summary

In 1870, Hiram R. Revels was the senator-elect from Mississippi. He became the first African American to serve in either chamber of the U.S. Congress. In South Carolina, about 55 percent of the state legislature was filled by Republicans, including many black Republicans. In rural districts throughout the South where former slaves composed the population majority, they served as jurors, magistrates, county commissioners, tax assessors, constables, and sheriffs. During Reconstruction, black men held political office in every state of the former Confederacy. More than one hundred held offices or posts with jurisdiction over the entire state. One African American was a governor of Louisiana for a short time and more than 800 served in the state legislatures. Black officeholders tended to exist in places where black populations were densest. They also existed where state Republican governments had been the longest and where the Union League and Republican Party had provided the most education and direction to leaders and the public. This meant that most black officeholders served in the Deep South. At one point or another, black men occupied every office available at the local level, serving as coroners, jailers, clerks of court, police officers, and so on.

Wherever black men vied for an office, the stakes were high. It demanded the support and mobilization of entire communities. Effective organization had to come from groups like the Union League and Republican Party. Through these organizations, candidates could be nominated, eligible voters could be found, and some level of protection could be offered to both leaders and the rank and file. Local activists were important within these groups to chair meetings, campaign, and enable eligible black voters to register. Polling practices often left illiterate and poorer individuals vulnerable to harassment and disenfranchisement. In efforts to keep blacks from registering and voting, polls were often placed in inaccessible areas. Election supervisors asked unwarranted questions and closed polls at will. Members of opposition parties used bribes, intimidation, and violence to induce blacks not to vote. Union League officials had to plan carefully for election days, appealing for more favorable election officials and sites. They had to plan in order to get voters to the polls and make sure that they weren't subject to bribery or violence. They also had to oversee the counting of ballots. Sometimes, groups of black voters would spend the night in safe areas or in the woods, arriving at the poll sites early before opposition showed up. Wherever they lived, it was important for black voters to travel to the polling sites collectively with as many individuals as possible. While such organization served to protect black Republican voters, it also served to prod the timid and punish the disloyal. Blacks who attempted or did vote Democratic or conservative met with harsh reprisals and sanctions included violence, shunning, shaming, public humiliation, and so on. Women, as the hubs of communities, were often

well placed to influence mobilization and discipline. It was as enforcers, that black women may have made their most influential and powerful contributions to the developing political communities and culture.

The community support necessary for both black voting and black officeholders found its institutional anchors in black religious organizations. Rural congregations improvised as they often lacked the funds for church buildings and full-time ministers. They were, however, intricately interconnected to networks of kinship, work, and obligation. They offered support for congregation members suffering from sickness, death, and other hardships. They also provided unique forums for discussions and debate on any number of topics. This included both men and women. Religious organizations had the ability to mobilize community sentiment and action. They served as political organizations as well. By embracing electoral politics, no clear distinctions existed between sacred and secular. They assimilated politics into the very fiber of worship and community life. Black ministers and other leaders held a prominent place in the community, as the qualities that gave them spiritual authority, also gave them civil authority.

On the local level, blacks could hope for a significant share of county and parish offices. Usually, these were the ones holding the least authority or access to wealth of any sort. The prospects for using state power were short. However, Radical Reconstruction signaled a transfer of power at the state and local levels. There was a shift away from the former slave holding elite toward a collection of groups who had been outsiders. This included white northerners, who had moved into the South, Southern Unionists, non-slaveholders, black northerners, and black southerners (slave or free). Together, they owed their official positions to black votes. Radical Reconstruction helped develop black associational life, including mutual aid and benevolent societies.

Although a large step forward, black political achievements were fraught with tensions and hurdles. Even after struggling to have a candidate elected, communities still faced the hurdles of having candidates assume and carry out the powers of the particular office. Within the Republican Party, whites never clearly understood or supported the objectives and goals of the black members. They also were not prepared to make black equal partners in the political process. "Under the best of circumstances, white Republicans embraced the ideals of civil and political equality, pressed to see the freed people treated justly by their white employers and neighbors, came to their assistance in a variety of ways, and perhaps imagined an identity of economic and political interest between them" (pg. 251). In many areas, the Republican Party failed to attract enough white voters. When it finally did, the white voters would not support black candidates.

It was not long before black candidates began pushing for more offices and a greater influence in party politics. They looked to local political power as a way to construct a new political identity. Radical Reconstruction did not come to a quick end. The southern Republican Party became blacker with fewer whites participating. The incidence of black office holding seems to have increased in the 1870s, but the party seems to have grown weaker. Intimidation and obstruction continued for both blacks and whites who were viewed as having been elected through black votes. Where blacks gained a

substantial representation in Reconstruction legislatures, they were able to develop agendas and shape Republican Party policy. Yet, divisions among black Republicans also hampered this. Bills to protect farm and plantation laborers were sometimes cut down with the help of urban blacks or freeborn mulattoes.

Part 2, Chapter 5 A Society Turned Bottomside Up Analysis

The efforts of the Union League and Republican Party, along with local black communities, educated and registered black voters. They also encouraged and supported them in their voting efforts, allowing a number of blacks to hold local and state offices during the Reconstruction era. African Americans were elected to state legislatures, state offices, and local positions of power. This was most common in areas with a substantial black population.

This chapter also highlights some of the difficulties that African Americans faced during this period in their political aspirations. Violence and intimidation were common tactics to discourage and stop black men from registering and voting in elections. Within the Republican Party, whites often did not want to cooperate with whites and when they did, they often faced problems from Non-Republican whites. Tensions also existed among blacks within the Republican Party, illustrating the diversity that existed among African Americans at the time. There were many concerns and aspirations that did not always match, particularly between urban and rural blacks.

Part 2, Chapter 6 Of Paramilitary Politics

Part 2, Chapter 6 Of Paramilitary Politics Summary

When Congress investigated the Ku Klux Klan in the 1870s, more than a few reputed leaders argued that the organization was a "necessary" response to the Union League. They complained about the accumulation of arms, secret meetings, threatening mobilizations, and a "general flaunting of civilities" among former slaves. The reputed leaders helped construct a discourse that justified vigilantism and demonized Radical Reconstruction. African Americans understood well that democracy in the United States had been built on violence and repression. They understood that any successes they might find would depend on their ability to do battle. "Paramilitary organization had been fundamental to the social and political order of slavery; it remained fundamental to the social and political order of freedom" (pg. 266).

Union League activities did generally precede the appearance of the KKK, but the activities of the League reflected a climate full of paramilitary activity. During the summer and fall of 1865, for example, bands of whites rode through the countryside disarming freed people and making plans to call out the militia to deal with blacks. Federal measures which voided the black codes and disbanded provisional militias drove the use of organized force underground. Within this context, the KKK developed.

The KKK had variations in leadership, rituals, goals and activities that make it impossible to point to a "typical" Klan experience. It did, however, build on the traditions of enforcing racial domination and submission and on legacies of military defeat. From its beginning, the Klan attracted young, white men who had been part of the Confederate armies. In some ways, the KKK could be seen as a guerilla movement to continue the battle or avenge the consequences of surrender. The Reconstruction Klan seemed to many African Americans as a new form of the old patrol system. Observers made distinctions between those who carried out the vigilante action and those who directed it. However, the distinctions were not fixed. The Klan and other organizations like it combined elements of private armies, who were controlled by white rural bosses and "shadow" governments.

The vigilantism of the KKK provides a marker of African American political struggles and achievements. The Klan sought to subordinate former slaves and to punish blacks and whites who threatened or challenged this arrangement. The Union League tried to mobilize newly enfranchised voters and protect them through secrecy and armed self-defense. However, these actions also drew the attention and wrath of the KKK. Assaults took a variety of forms, but their purposes were to destroy the solidarities and loyalty that the League helped build. The Klan attacked and murdered local leaders and organizers, intimidated party supporters, tried to force out objectionable officeholders, and harassed black men and women who had gained a degree of personal and economic independence. Support or sympathy for local Union Leagues was enough to elicit harassment and/or corporal punishment from the Klan.

The Klan also attacked black churches and schoolhouses. Schools and churches were sites of African American empowerment and schools. In particular, were sites of interracial cooperation. Freed people looked to schooling as a way of leaving behind their past in slavery and as a means of power and self-respect. Schoolhouses were places where African Americans also learned about Reconstruction, their enfranchisement, the goals of the Republican Party, and the importance of voting. Many Klans believed that teaching school was a front for political objectives and that schoolteachers were simply trying to turn blacks against their employers.

Klan activity appears as a map to political struggle in the Reconstruction South. Its vigilantism appeared wherever a substantial black Republican action took place. Yet, Klansmen did not ride without fear of retaliation or of meeting resistance. Union Leagues and Republican clubs began in some places to mount responses to Klan activity including putting pressure on suspected leaders. In a number of places, resistance took the form of direct destruction by torching mills, barns, and houses of former slaveholders. But, the leagues and clubs were more likely to use paramilitary actions and armed self-defense. In places where the black population outnumbered the white by twofold, Klan activity was much more sporadic. Where freed people were concentrated and had begun to construct political institutions, they presented the Klan with formidable opposition. Communities with foundations of political experience and armed strength could compensate for lower population numbers. The national government also enacted the Enforcement Acts. These Acts made various kinds of political harassment and terrorized federal offenses.

Yet, even where Republicans managed the vigilantism, their weaknesses continued. They often failed more than sporadic protection for the party's leaders and voters. With federal troops diminishing in the South, local supporters had to rely on themselves. The Klan utilized attacks on state leaders and on grassroots organizers.

Klan violence existed alongside other forms of political violence and coercion. The effectiveness of the Klan's actions depended on a wider political environment that gave vigilantes latitude and allowed for political violence. The White League emerged in Louisiana and Mississippi, committed to drawing a racial line in politics. The group built on the KKK and the Knights of the White Camellia but was more closely aligned with the Democratic Party. The White League sensed that the federal government was growing reluctant to interfere in southern politics.

A full-scale white paramilitary offensive was probably averted when Democrats won control of the House of Representatives in 1874. The final, major battle of Reconstruction took place in South Carolina. Black Republicans were entrenched in the low country and vigilante violence had little success there. However, a white paramilitary of rifle and saber groups took form in the upcountry. When the governor signed a bill creating a new state militia, whites refused to serve with blacks. This effectively created a black militia. Whites counterattacked and two years later the "Ned Tennent riot" took place in Hamburg, South Carolina. The militia and paramilitary groups squared off several times over several months.

The collapse of Reconstruction issued a new era of state organized violence. African Americans in the countryside, however, were not defeated politically. Strong enclaves remained where blacks could exercise power and hold office in local and state settings.

Part 2, Chapter 6 Of Paramilitary Politics Analysis

In this chapter, Hahn discusses the difficulties faced by African American voters as a result of the KKK and similar groups. The Klan responded to political and economic successes by African Americans and whites deemed to be supportive of the Republican Party or freed people. They used intimidation and violence to force individuals out of office and to stop individuals from voting Republican. Other groups, like the KKK, used similar tactics for similar goals. These groups created a situation of danger and vulnerability for African Americans, particularly leaders, as they could be targeted at any time.

Yet, the chapter also shows that African Americans fought back in various ways to the presence and activities of the Klan and other groups. In some areas, because of their numbers, African American voters and leaders were safer than areas where few African Americans lived or where they lived in remoter areas. Union Leagues and Republican clubs tried to protect members, organized paramilitary groups, and retaliated for Klan actions.

Part 3, Chapter 7 The Education of Henry Adams

Part 3, Chapter 7 The Education of Henry Adams Summary

One form of political activity that is often overlooked is the emigrations sentiment that developed widely by the 1870s. Emigration movements had begun in the late eighteenth century and they won support from educated, urban free men of color in the North during antebellum. While interest waxed and waned, the foundations of the project developed. Leaders sought a site in Africa, Latin America, or the Caribbean where African Americans could enjoy freedom and a better life. The American Colonization Society, a white dominated group, settled almost eleven thousand African Americans in Liberia by the time of the Civil War.

This organization probably had the most influence on the emergence of interest in emigration again after the Civil War and freed blacks adopted the society's goals for their own purposes. Between 1865 and 1868, over two thousand blacks emigrated. Rural black communities in the South viewed emigration as one of several strategies that could create stable freed communities outside of the reach of whites. Disappointment in the Republican Party, paramilitary violence, and the collapse of some Reconstruction regimes helped to stimulate interest. This was also helped along by the growing number of African American edited, and sometimes owned, newspapers, which included articles and ads about emigration. Newspapers, handbills, and pamphlets played a prominent role in disseminating information about emigration to Southern blacks. Local organizations specifically dealing with emigration sprang up throughout the South. Finally, churches also advanced the cause by informing individuals about the movement and allowing them a space to discuss it.

Emigration activity increased after 1875, reaching its peak in 1879 and 1880. The American Colonization Society received scores of inquiry letters and applications. While scholars have often treated the Liberia and Kansas/Indiana "exodus" movements as separate, Hahn argues that the two are manifestations of a similar and widespread impulse. The Kansas exodus movement developed where emigration sentiment had already been sparked and in areas where the Colonization Council had already been organizing.

Emigration sentiment seemed to be most powerful in areas where freed people labored on plantations and had suffered reprisals for their social and political organizing efforts. Those interested in emigration generally gave a list of reasons for their interest in moving which included: threats, coercion, insecurities, limited prospects, and so on. The idea of becoming a "race" or a "people" seemed to be more modest and limited in objective. The movements tended to include groups of rural black laborers joined together by kinship, work relations, political experience, and religious belief. Groups

ranged in size, but averaged between twenty and one hundred individuals. Emigrants and potential emigrants tended to farm and for the most part, they did so as non-landowners.

Although emigrations did emanate from a powerful community-based impulse, it also reveals divisions and power relations. The most apparent divisions were age and gender. The lines of authority tended to flow from the male heads of household. Local correspondence to the American Colonization Society came predominantly from adult males. Yet, some have argued that women did have a great deal of influence. Other points of struggle revolved around national race leaders, like Frederick Douglass, who viewed the movements with skeptical eyes and argued that the emigration amounted to an abandonment of other blacks. Rifts also existed among African Americans in the South, between black leaders and the people they claimed to represent. Many black officeholders knew the hardships that freed people had suffered and were sympathetic, but they were also reluctant to endorse emigration.

While it is likely that large numbers of African Americans came into contact with the emigration movement and information, it is impossible to fully map its influence or spread. It appears that little of the interest in emigration, that emerged in cities spread to the rural areas. In part, this was due to a deeper sense of roots to place among rural blacks. "The emergence of the task system, of family provision grounds, of slave petty marketing-all of which offered measures of control, security, and experience in a new world of production and exchange-represented some of their most visible achievements, and consequently made attachments to persons and place almost inextricable" (346). In places where freed people managed to create a patchwork of land and labor arrangements and where Republican influence was strong, emigration interest was less than in other areas.

Between 1877 and 1880, 388 blacks emigrated to West Africa. There were many obstacles to emigrating, including black leaders and a hostile system of social, economic, and political relations. Some whites, fearful of losing laborers, paid workers through credit or used coercive tactics. In 1879, as hundreds of laboring families sought to leave the lower Mississippi Valley for Kansas, local landowners used intimidation, paramilitary violence and threatened steamboat captains with boycotts if they took black passengers. But these strategies were limited, as whites did not unify around them. Poorer whites often welcomed the departure of blacks whose labor they did not need or competed with. African American poverty also made emigration difficult.

To some, particularly those suffering in poverty, Kansas and Indiana seemed easier to reach. Even so, the burdens were still considerable. Those leaving their homes had to have enough resources to make the trip and sustain them once they'd arrived. Those who made the trip learned that land and employment were not easy to find.

Emigration activity was closely related to the "labor problem" in rural areas. It disturbed the political landscape. It also helped to widen and transform political activism, offering new forms of collective struggle to create social spaces for African Americans.

Part 3, Chapter 7 The Education of Henry Adams Analysis

Hahn argues in this chapter that the emigrations movements are another aspect of the developing black, political consciousness. This may seem somewhat strange on the surface, as the emigration movement sought to have African Americans leave the United States or move away from their communities in the South. The movement had little to do with electing officials or voting, and yet, it was still a political activity.

Through the emigration movement, African Americans envisioned ideal communities and societies where race would not be a defining factor. They sought areas where they could own land and create stable and free communities and lives. As it was tied to labor problems, in some places, rents were reduced and debts were cleared in an effort to get black laborers to stay. Labor contracts were renegotiated and whites promised more support for black schools in some districts.

Part 3, Chapter 8 Of Ballots and Biracialism

Part 3, Chapter 8 Of Ballots and Biracialism Summary

The Readjuster movement was one of the most successful challenges to the Democratic Party rule in the rural South during the late 1870s and early 1880s. The challenges of independents, reenergized Republicans, and third parties exposed the divisions within the Democratic Party and among white Southerners. These challenges offered African Americans some political space as the challenges depended on black votes. Democratic legislatures followed with a somewhat haphazard attack against black political power, which weakened and containing it. These attacks, Hahn argues, are a central part of the arrival of Jim Crow.

Virginia experienced some of these political challenges and negotiations. Republicans never gained a large hold within the state after the Civil War, even though popular mobilization had happened fairly rapidly. In some areas, the black majority was able to contest or carry state and national elections. Nearly seventy African Americans served in the state legislature. Because Reconstruction politics were brief, neither the Klan nor the White League really organized within the state. Virginia's unique political atmosphere, coupled with its post-emancipation economy, influenced the development of black leadership and political life. By the 1870s, a strong black press had been established and organizational efforts were underway. Groups began challenging Democratic and conservative rule. These challenges were waged most aggressively by financial and industrial interests. The Democratic Party was strained, as it had to contend with a diverse collection of Southern whites and turbulent economics. Some Democrats left the party and ran as independents while others aligned with the Greenback-Labor party. Almost without exception, those leaving the Democratic Party had to solicit black votes.

When the Readjusters gathered to organize their party in 1879, a few African Americans were present. It was not until late in the year that real cooperation with black Republicans was suggested. The Readjusters had the potential to control the state government, taking charge of both the Virginia house and senate by gaining the support of black legislators. However, African Americans in Virginia were skeptical about what the election and alliance with the Readjusters would bring them. The Readjusters tried to rally local communities, by paying the poll taxes for a great number of eligible, poor black and white voters who were sympathetic. They also canvassed towns. African Americans largely supported Readjusters. After the election, the governorship and both houses of the legislature were in Readjuster control.

For those looking for a change, the first several months were encouraging. Legislators reduced the state debt, slashed taxes on real estate while raising them on railroads and

other commercial property, chartered labor unions, and so on. Power shifted not only at the state level, but also the local level.

Similar biracial efforts occurred in other areas of the South. It generally offered African Americans a greater chance of holding office and having some measure of official power at the grassroots level. In some areas, where bases of substantial black political activity existed, an arrangement known as "fusion" occurred. "Fusion represented a concession to black numbers and organizational strength locally in the context of superior Democratic power statewide...Although many variations could be found, white Democrats and black Republicans generally agreed to support a single ticket, rather than to nominate separate ones, in which candidates from each party would receive some of the offices" (pg. 385). African Americans found some benefits in this situation. It was an alternative to paramilitary politics that had killed some of their leaders and destroyed communities. It encouraged white Democrats to seek black votes with appeals and patronage. Blacks were able to send representatives to the state legislatures and they had a role in the administration of county and local affairs. Yet, this arrangement also limited the grassroots mobilization and organization that had happened during Reconstruction. It created struggles and divisions within African American communities.

However, the great majority of African Americans in the South remained loyal to the Republican Party. If they cooperated with other parties, they were more likely to chose insurgent or independent campaigns than a Democratic one. Insurgents had the greatest hope of securing coalitions in places where Republican organizations had abandoned hope of winning elections. There, these insurgents created campaigns to draw in Republican voters, both, black and white. The prospects for this were greatest where the black minority had already built and maintained political and social institutions. Here, the black minority could find some protection for their civil and political rights, while Independents and Greenbackers could find the votes they needed to win elections.

In the plantation belt, the situation was more complex as African Americans had both more options and more dangers. In the lower South, black electoral politics assumed a defensive position. They continued to vote in large numbers, but they more than likely followed leaders into some form of biracialism "fusions." The situation in Texas was a bit different. Local Republican regimes had withstood challenges and became more firmly entrenched. Black Republicans began to mount challenges and campaigns all the while struggling with white Republicans. The Greenbacks made its strongest bid for power in 1878. The Texas Republican party joined with them, as they had few prospects at the time. Blacks formed seventy of five hundred Greenback Clubs. The Greenbackers appeared to have gained at least half of the black vote. Two years later, however, the state Greenback Convention would be overwhelmingly white, with most black voters returning to the Republican Party.

In Virginia, the Readjusters assumed state and local power. However, the very actions and mobilizations that they had undertaken to gain power threatened the party after the elections. Black supporters presented some of the most potentially problematic areas.

They expected full and equal political standing and some right to power in the areas in which they lived. The problems intensified as white Readjusters dispensed offices and other rewards within the party, as they hoped to consolidate their power. As blacks were pushed aside, many began turning away from the electoral arena to focus on building African American institutions.

Part 3, Chapter 8 Of Ballots and Biracialism Analysis

This chapter continues Hahn's examination of African American politics in the late nineteenth century. In some areas of the South, African Americans joined with Independents and Greenbacks, moving away from the Republican Party. This offered some benefits to African Americans, particularly in areas where Republicans were having trouble being elected. By joining forces, African Americans gained a bit of breathing room politically. They also gained an opportunity, in some cases, to have some local power in places where that would not have been possible before.

Yet, the collaboration had its problems. In many cases, white Independents or Greenbackers sought black votes only in order to be elected. They may have allowed for some degree of concessions for black voters in order to keep their support, but their main alliances and concerns were not with the black communities that they represented. This led to tensions and problems. In many areas, black voters eventually moved back into the Republican Party.

Part 3, Chapter 9 The Valley and the Shadows

Part 3, Chapter 9 The Valley and the Shadows Summary

Many areas of the world suffered an economic depression in the 1870s and again in the 1890s. The United States was, in many ways, a microcosm of the larger social dynamics. Agriculture in the United States shouldered the burden of industrial development. Farmers saw declining prices and rising interest rates. Social differentiation became more pronounced. Social tensions grew. Black social and political power weakened after Reconstruction. The time from 1877 to 1901 has sometimes been referred to as the "nadir" of black life. They suffered more widespread and state-sponsored repression.

During the late 1880s, white landowners and tenant farmers began attending meetings of the Agricultural Wheel or Farmer's Alliance in large numbers. These groups claimed to stand for the interests of small farmers and drew on the political legacies of the Greenbacks. The Alliance excluded African Americans, but many black communities mobilized on their own, forming the Colored Farmers' Alliance. This spread throughout the South. At the same time, the Knights of Labor, which sought skilled and unskilled laborers of all parties, races and sexes, expanded from several larger cities into the rural South. Little is known about the local experiences of the Colored Farmers' Alliance or the Knights of Labor. We do know that their ranks included women, as well as men. They were not strictly political organizations. There was a new set of shifting social relations during the 1880s and the organizations were a part of that.

Rumors began to spread again about a possible uprising of black farm workers in some areas. Whites claimed that blacks had been meeting in secret and planning to gain their "rights" by murdering whites, striking for higher wages, and torching white property. Sugar workers had struck in 1880, with as many as ten thousand stopping work. The tensions between workers and landowners continued. White planters and law enforcement officials began turning again toward violence.

Individuals did not need to belong to either of these groups to meet violence. "It was only necessary to establish relative independence, to stand up to a landlord, to show signs of literacy, to speak one's mind, or to ignore the local racial etiquette: in short, to behave in any way that could be regarded as nonsubmissive by a white person" (pg. 425). The most characteristic form of violence during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was lynching: the mob execution of an individual accused of committing some offense. Scholars have devoted a great deal of attention to studying lynching, but there is little agreement about whether economic, social, or political factors account for its rise, character, and decline. Lynching began to increase in the mid-1880s, reaching a high point in the mid-1890s, before declining slowly. Lynchings were

most likely to occur in rural areas of the Deep South, where large and volatile black populations lived. Individuals who were lynched were often accused of murder, assault, arson, and theft, rather than rape or other sexual transgressions. Lynch mobs were both large and small, but were generally public and undisguised. The tensions of the rural economy seem to have played a part in many lynchings. "Feeding on a deep culture of social and political violence, lynch mobs sought to reestablish the boundaries that they believed were being transversed, to crush the attacks and violations they could associate with the weakening of their own leverage" (pg. 427). The rise of lynchings occurred along with the anti-labor violence, as well as the non-lethal "whitecapping" violence.

Repression from these tactics left little room for resistance, encouraging silence and submission. Yet, rural black communities did not suffer the attacks and lynchings quietly. In places where they had been able to construct a substantial community life and had some local power, lynchings were rare. In some areas, black women played central roles in the prevention of lynchings, standing guard and conspicuous in their public outrage. They often had somewhat more room than black men to test social boundaries, as they were not regarded as threats to the hierarchies of power or to the security of white women. However, there were limits and it didn't take much for black women to feel white retribution.

The struggles and violence opened the door for the greatest white insurgency of post-emancipation: the People's or Populist Party. This party was the product of both white Alliance mobilizations and increasing disenchantment with the Alliance's ability to achieve its goals. The leaders of the party, for the most part, consisted of substantial white landowners, while its mass base tended to be more modest white farm owners. The vast majority had been Democrats. They regarded their movement as a white man's movement, but in the quest to find sympathetic voters, some did turn to black votes. Their rhetoric framed blacks and whites as engaging in the same struggle for civil and political arenas, sharing the same problems, and having common stakes. But the language of biracialism did not go beyond that of the Greenbackers or other Independents. They rarely addressed issues of concern for African Americans. Black misgivings of the party were generally confirmed at the local level, where some Populists resorted to violence.

"White supremacy was no longer just a rallying cry, a goal, a discourse, or a description of relations. It had become the very edifice of southern politics" (pg. 441). African Americans were gradually removed from the southern body politic. Large planters and industrialists used their power and prestige to gain a pool of coerced black laborers through the leasing of prison convicts. Whites also began a systematic attack on African Americans in the official arena of politics. Poll taxes were initiated, registration requirements were changed, complicated voting procedures were introduced, and the state governments were given the authority over selecting election judges. The mobilizations of African Americans during the late 1880s and early 1890s sparked concern for many whites, which wanted to remove African Americans from the sphere of politics. White state convention delegates used registrars and registration to exclude blacks. In Mississippi, to qualify to vote, an individual had to live in the state for two

years. They had to register at least four months before the election, pay a poll tax of two dollars in each of the two years preceding the election, and be able to read and understand any part of the constitution. This gave the registrar the ability to exclude a wide majority of black voters and to include unqualified white voters. Other states soon adopted similar measures.

African Americans struggled to find some way of stopping these attacks on black voting. They often looked to align with white conservatives, hoping to mitigate disfranchisement. Blacks also tried to temper the course of white racism by introducing court cases and organizing to help blacks overcome the obstacles of poll taxes and constitutional understanding. Efforts were made to defeat revised constitutions and amendments. However, the battle became a further struggle as the few allies that African Americans had began to fade away. By the early twentieth century, the black electorate was a tiny minority and the Republican Party was insignificant in Southern politics. There was no longer room for blacks to respond to disenfranchisement with public militancy or defiance. Rather, they saw their survival in families and communities, turning inward for self-preservation and self-reliance. Interest in emigration revived, although it is not clear exactly how wide spread this was. Some black families and communities sought a separatist context as colonies or towns. Oklahoma was at the forefront of this movement, claiming more than twenty towns. Many also developed in the Deep South. African Americans also began migrating north and west. In the next couple of decades, the Great Migration would sweep across the South.

In the rural South, powerful attachments to land, place, and people remained despite the terror and repression that had occurred. Dense webs of black community were created and nurtured. Hahn argues that perhaps the most remarkable gain was the acquisition of land. By the early twentieth century, a growing number of African Americans owned some land. This acquisition did not follow a single course, varying with crop culture, demography, economic cycles, and so on. It did demand the cooperation and tolerance of white people however. Literacy appears vital to the quest for land ownership and ownership tended to happen within a context of family, community, and social institutional relationships. The rural South found a growth of African American civic and social lives, despite the growing financial burdens. Blacks built churches, schools, and benevolent societies. Between 1890 and 1910, African American newspapers and religious journals increased dramatically. Politics were still pursued but in different ways, sometimes coming from the voices of black women.

Part 3, Chapter 9 The Valley and the Shadows Analysis

Repression against African Americans increased during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Violence became common throughout the South in the form of "whitecapping" and more lethally, lynchings. Although scholars do not agree on why violence and repression rose and why it took on the character it did, political tensions and struggles between whites and blacks seem to have played a part in this. Whites feared that old hierarchies and powers were slowly slipping away. Violence became a way for them to reassert these hierarchies and social boundaries.

Democrats also sought ways of limiting black involvement in politics. In addition to violence, they also changed many of the rules regarding elections and voting, making it harder for African Americans to be considered eligible voters. With a larger degree of subjectivity, election judges were able to accept unqualified whites, while excluding otherwise eligible black voters. The era of Jim Crow was beginning in the South.

Epilogue Up, You Mighty Race

Epilogue Up, You Mighty Race Summary

The Great Northern Migration between 1915 and 1930 for African Americans brought a new era in black political life. Not only did this change African American lives and communities, but it changed the nation as a whole. This migration served to open up new political arenas and expanded the networks and communities that had developed during the nineteenth century in the South. Migrating African Americans carried with them their political developments and knowledge about their goals, the world, and how to mobilize.

The Great Migration is commonly understood as a product of its time: a special set of circumstances, events, and ideologies. The main factor behind it was the First World War, which created a huge labor shortage in the Northeast and Midwest. Employment beckoned for African Americans living in the South. "Like the emigrationism of the 1870s and 1880s, the Great Migration reflected collective sensibilities, social networks, organizational activism, and circuits of communication and deliberation" (pg. 467). It built on the political and social developments of the nineteenth century. The same communication networks and communities, like churches and local associations, helped pave the way.

It was also during this period that thousands of people of African descent, largely from the Caribbean, also came to the United States. Among the most important contacts that developed from this were Marcus Garvey and his organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association. He tapped the traditions of thought and goals that had been developing and tried to construct and raise a new race consciousness. He is best known as an advocate for repatriation and his ideas carried a vision of racial solidarity and identity. It is through Garveyism, that popular forms of black nationalism arose in twentieth century America.

The African American political traditions that began under slavery continued on, becoming embedded in communities, spreading out over the United States, and offering knowledge and creativity in the face of new challenges.

Epilogue Up, You Mighty Race Analysis

Hahn wraps up his book by linking the political developments of African Americans during slavery and the nineteenth century to the Great Migration and the Civil Rights Movement of the twentieth century. The political knowledge that developed during these earlier periods was nurtured and collected to be used again during the later periods. The communities and networks used in early mobilizations were also used in later mobilizations. With this chapter, Hahn illustrates why his sweeping discussion of African

American political development is a necessary alternative to research that focuses only on smaller time periods on this topic.

Characters

Henry Adams

Adams was born a slave in rural Georgia in 1843. He and his family would later move to Northwest Louisiana, where they would stay until emancipation in 1865. He joined the Army in 1866. He served in three units and was promoted to the level of quartermaster-sergeant. During this time, he learned how to read and write.

Adams was among a group of former soldiers who formed a secret committee to look into the condition of blacks in the South. He helped freed people negotiate contracts with employers and settle accounts. When the White League began in 1874, Adams and others organized a Colonization Council, believing that it was impossible for blacks to live among whites. They petitioned President Grant to send them to Liberia if another suitable place could not be found. They formed the Negro Union Cooperative Aid Association. He worked with individuals and groups who wished to emigrate to Liberia or to move to Kansas. He was last heard from in 1884. He was still engaged in the Liberia project.

Marcus Garvey

An African Jamaican, Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). He came to New York in 1916 and his movement proved to be a powerful one. He is best known as an advocate of African repatriation. He rejected the idea of black accommodation with whites, arguing that only blacks would claim their own nation, if they were able to prosper and achieve the rights they sought unsuccessfully in the United States.

This movement appears to have taken hold in both the urban North and in the rural South. By the mid 1920s, half of the UNIA divisions were in southern states. His publication, *Negro World*, helped the movement spread across the United States. The movement appears to have taken greatest hold in areas where emigration ideologies had already been popular.

Garveyism became the foundation for black nationalism in the United States during the twentieth century. The ideology stressed the centrality of race, the importance of black self-determinism, and the dangers of looking for alliances outside the black community. Africa was assigned a special place and the ideology generally embraced a version of Pan-Africanism. It also exemplified the "organizing tendencies" that had developed during slavery and early emancipation.

Hiram R. Revels

A freeborn mulatto from North Carolina, Revels became the first African American to serve in either chamber of Congress. He was an ordained African Methodist and Episcopal Church minister. He had worked with the Freedman's Bureau and served as an alderman in Natchez before being elected. Hostile Democrats tried to prevent his qualification for office by arguing that he had not been a citizen for nine years as required by the Constitution. They failed and Revels became a member of the U.S. Senate in 1870.

President Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln was elected President in 1860 and served in this office during the American Civil War. During his time in office, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed African Americans from slavery. After his death, Lincoln would take on a messianic symbolism for many African Americans who viewed him as their savior from slavery.

President Andrew Johnson

Johnson became the President of the United States after Lincoln's assignation. During his administration, he oversaw the restoration of rebel-owned estates and plantations, despite freed people's demands for land redistribution. Johnson issued the Amnesty Proclamation, which pardoned most former rebels, restored property, and sent ambiguous signals on the issue of black suffrage. He recommended that the southern states resume their positions in the national legislature as soon as the Thirteenth Amendment had been ratified.

Frederick Douglass

Douglass was a former Maryland slave who would become one of the more prominent African American leaders. He learned to read as a slave and worked to instruct other slaves. Working with the Abolitionist Movement, Douglass gave many speeches that were distributed widely.

General Benjamin F. Butler

In May 1861, Butler and his men occupied Fortress Monroe in southeast Virginia. He declared fugitive slaves "contrabands of war" and used them behind the Union lines. This allowed fugitive slaves a degree of safety behind the Union lines and as word spread, more and more African Americans gathered.

Objects/Places

Ku Klux Klan

An organization that erupted in the South. It began in 1866 in Tennessee. The KKK consisted of a variety of secret vigilante actions and paramilitary outfits. Similar groups emerged throughout the South, as well as The Knights of the White Camellia and The White Brotherhood. Hahn argues that in many cases the Klan came to be the general label for any vigilante band that operated in disguise and secrecy.

Klans were found in white and black majority districts. They were organized by a variety of individuals and were sometimes local. Sometimes they were hooked into larger networks. Hahn argues that there was a great deal of differences from one group to the next. It was generally attractive to young, white men who had served in the Confederate army and was widely viewed as a new version of the old slave patrol system.

The Ku Klux Klan sought to enforce the subordination of former slaves and to punish anyone, black or white, who challenged the racial hierarchies. Black political leaders were attacked and killed. Members of the Republican Party were often coerced and intimidated. Klan members also harassed and attacked blacks who had gained a measure of economic or personal independence. Whites who helped or collaborated with blacks were also targets. The Klan also set out to destroy the Union League.

Klan attacks and actions were varied. They used intimidation, paraded in disguises with weapons, displayed firearms, invaded farms, and threatened "vengeance." They killed and tortured many individuals. They also attacked and destroyed black churches and schoolhouses. Yet, these actions did not go uncontested. The Union Leagues and the Republican Party mounted responses in some places.

The Emigration Movement

Many African Americans sought to emigrate to other countries and/or to western territories in order to escape the repression and violence in the United States and the South. They were helped by organizations such as the Colonization Council and the American Colonization Society. The movement grew rapidly after 1875, reaching its peak in 1879 and 1880 before declining.

The two main destinations for those emigrating were Liberia and Kansas/Indiana in the United States. Generally, emigration was a collective undertaking with the group size ranging from a handful to several hundred. Overwhelmingly, those who sought to emigrate were farmed as tenants, sharecroppers, and wage hands, almost always landless. An estimated 20,000 to 25,000 blacks migrated to Kansas between 1879 and 1880 alone.

Union League

The Union League spread throughout the South during Reconstruction, with many African Americans joining the political organization. It emerged out of a network of organizations that had started in the North in 1862 and 1863 to rally support for the Lincoln Administration. The league was bound by secrecy and required oaths and rituals. It was committed to "protect, strengthen, and defend all loyal men without regard to sect, condition, or race" (pg. 177). Union League organizers traveled throughout the South after the War, informing African Americans of their new rights and setting up new chapters. Meetings in some areas consisted of the reading aloud of newspapers, pamphlets, and government decrees, which helped inform individuals who could not read or write.

The League may have had its widest influence in the area of labor. Leaders and organizers tried to help individuals negotiate contracts and keep them informed of their rights as citizens and laborers. The League also helped to implement the provisions of the Reconstruction Acts. Leaders mobilized their ranks, registered new voters, helped identify black registrars, challenged the misinformation from hostile whites, and worked to educate and protect freedmen.

Colonization Council

Founded in part by Henry Adams in 1874, the Colonization Council sought a site where African Americans could emigrate to and live in freedom without the challenges by whites that they faced in the South. The Council looked in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The organization generally displayed an antagonism toward the white-dominated populations and led American Colonization Society.

American Colonization Society

The American Colonization Society was a white, dominated organization that was focused on helping African Americans emigrate. By the outbreak of the Civil War, they had settled almost eleven thousand African Americans in Liberia. After emancipation, the organization again received applications for passage to Liberia. Between 1965 and 1968, over two thousand more blacks would emigrate.

The White League

Developing in Louisiana and Mississippi in 1874, the White League was committed to the "White-Line" movement and to drawing the racial line in politics and society. The organization was built on the foundations of the KKK and was often little more than a local Democratic club, using paramilitary actions.

The Readjuster Movement

During the late 1870s and early 1880s, this political movement was the most successful example of a challenge to the Democratic Party rule. Independents, third parties, and revitalized Republicans sought office against Democrats. In order to mount challenges, these groups had to court black votes, giving African Americans a bit of political space. Democrats mounted haphazard attacks, which can be seen as the advent of Jim Crow. The party organized in 1879 in Richmond, VA.

Agricultural Wheel or Farmers' Alliance

These were organizations that developed in the late 1880s to help white landowners and tenant farmers. They claimed to stand for small producers and drew on the legacies of the Greenbackers. The organizations pressed for monetary inflation and cooperative alternatives to the competitive marketplace. By 1889, over half a million agriculturalists were members. This would grow to over a million. The Alliance excluded African Americans and required the Wheel to do the same when the two merged in 1889.

Colored Farmers' Alliance

An organization similar to the Farmers' Alliance, the Colored Farmers' Alliance was created as a parallel development for black farmers and producers. Founded in Texas in 1886, it soon spread to other southern states. Little is known about the local experiences of the organization, but they did include women as well as men and its objective was to find homes for African Americans.

The People's or Populist Party

This party was the greatest white insurgency of the post-emancipation period. It developed in the late 1880s and early 1890s. The leaders of the party were generally white landowners, who saw themselves weakened by low crop prices and high shipping rates. Its mass base was more modest, white farmers and tenants. Many of its members had been Democrats. The party called for free coinage of silver, the abolition of national banks, and government ownership of railroads and telegraphs. The group had to lobby for black votes, although it regarded itself as a white movement.

Themes

Resistance

Hahn's work, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, is in many ways concerned with African American resistance to white repression and violence within the political arena. Although slaves are sometimes thought to have been completely powerless under the institution of slavery, Hahn shows that this is not entirely true. While they certainly experienced a great deal of repression, violence, and vulnerability over their lives, they also were sometimes able to resist their owners and the institution of slavery in various ways. They built communities in their locations, cared for one another, and collaborated in some circumstances against their owners or others. They were able to negotiate for paid labor, most often on their off days or at harvest time.

Once the Civil War broke out, slaves continued to resist by helping Union soldiers, keeping rumors of rebellion alive, and by taking over abandoned plantations. Many slaves fled for Union lines where they joined other fugitive slaves and freed people. There, many learned to read and write, preparing them for future resistance and political activism. Some African Americans fought as a part of the Union Army and some fought for equal pay for their actions.

After the war, African Americans continued their political development, helping to reconstruct ideologies of citizenship and the character of the United States. Black men registered to vote in large numbers, often in the face of extreme violence and intimidation. They ran for office, negotiated with third parties, and created political organizations to keep their communities informed and active. They used their ties and knowledge to negotiate labor contracts with white landowners, striking for better wages or conditions at times. They fought for political decisions that would benefit them in their work or social conditions.

The resistance techniques and knowledge that African Americans acquired and used under slavery and afterward, helped later developments in the twentieth century. The same networks that were used to help African Americans learn to read and write, register to vote, and negotiate with others for better labor or social conditions, would again be used during the Civil Rights Movement.

Repression

If *A Nation Under Our Feet* illustrates African American resistance during the nineteenth century, it also shows the repression used by whites in an attempt to keep African Americans subordinate and vulnerable. The institution of slavery, with some individuals owning other individuals, created a world where enslaved individuals had no legal standing in either civil or political arenas. They could be bought and sold, whipped or

killed. Slaves had no legal recognition under the law and as such, they were vulnerable to the whims and decisions of their owners.

Even after slavery ended, however, repression and violence, in various forms, continued. Many wealthy white landowners in the South did not want to see African American men voting or even registering to vote. In efforts to stop this, they used intimidation, threats, and violence. Hahn writes that in many cases, African Americans traveled to polling sites in groups or under the cover of darkness to avoid this. At the same time, landowners and other employers sought contracts with African Americans that would keep them vulnerable and in debt to their employers. Low wages for the workers meant higher profits for the employers.

Eventually, the legacies and traditions of violence and repression would coalesce into its most visible form during this time period, the Ku Klux Klan. Along with the KKK, a number of other similar organizations erupted in the South. These groups intimidated black voters and leaders, coerced Republican Party supporters, forced out officeholders and election registrars, and abused and harassed African American men, women, and children. They killed local leaders and organizers. Whites who were viewed as helping blacks were often also targeted.

As the end of the nineteenth century neared, lynch mobs attacked and killed numerous individuals of African descent. "Feeding on a deep culture of social and political violence, lynch mobs sought to reestablish the boundaries that they believed were being transversed..." (pg. 427). In addition to acts of outright violence, state legislators and others sought to limit the ability of African Americans to participate in public affairs. Democrats created new restrictions on voting, with which they hoped to exclude African American voters. These tactics would eventually lead to the Jim Crow Era, where African Americans were legally designated as second class citizens.

Community

Throughout the work, Hahn illustrates over and over the importance and centrality of the community in African American political development. Through communities, individuals were cared for, educated, and protected.

Under slavery, slaves built kinship relations and networks that ultimately helped with survival and laid the foundations for further political development. Their struggles to create and maintain bonds among themselves were the most basic, but the most profound, of political acts during this time period. The obligations and relationships that formed had the potential to counterbalance the "individuating dependencies" of the institution of slavery.

After Emancipation, communities and kinship networks became important sites of political education and development. Through their ties with one another, African Americans taught each other about their new political and social rights, voting practices,

and how to read and write. Communities began places of political discussion and alliances.

Some communities during the nineteenth century banded together in attempts to emigrate to places like Liberia. Emigration was one strategy of recreating freed communities on a stable and safe foundation, away from the repression and violence of whites. The movement spread throughout the South and whether or not groups actually emigrated, it did often give African Americans a bit more space in negotiating with their employers, who did not want to lose their cheap sources of labor.

Style

Point of View

In *A Nation Under Our Feet*, Steven Hahn uses a third person omnipotent point of view throughout the work. As much of the work takes place in the nineteenth century and covers a large geographical area, this allows the author to move from place to place and from time to time quickly and in a coherent manner. The third person point of view also allows the author to present his analysis in an authoritative and integrated way. His arguments about African American political development during this time period becomes "fact," as opposed to suggestion or theory through the third person.

Hahn also incorporates the words, thoughts, and ideas of individuals and organizations from this time period. Relying on archival, historical material such as newspaper accounts, pamphlets, and other writing, he presents quoted material throughout the book to back up his argument and provide a first person, interpretive account of the events that he examines.

Setting

The setting of *A Nation Under Our Feet* is largely the rural South during the nineteenth century in the United States. Within this time frame, Hahn discusses events, organizations, and individuals from various parts of the United States, while focusing on the South. He moves from events in Virginia to Texas and the states in between to capture the development of African American political development during this time period. He includes events and developments in urban areas of the South, but focuses most of his research on the rural areas.

He argues in the beginning of the book that although smaller pieces of this time frame have been studied, little attention has been paid to how these events and leaders built upon one another throughout the 1800s. He begins by examining political development and ideologies among African Americans during slavery and continues through emancipation, reconstruction, and into the early twentieth century.

Language and Meaning

Hahn uses accessible language through the book. He does not use strong or vulgar language and there are no overt descriptions of violence. As he is targeting an academic audience for the most part, making use of more complicated and complex ideas, it may be more difficult for younger readers to follow.

Given the complexity of his topic, the work is perhaps most easily read by those who have some familiarity with the time periods and topics that Hahn discusses. He does not provide a great deal of background information on events like the Civil War,

reconstruction, or Jim Crow, assuming that the reader will have some knowledge of these events and others of the time period.

The book uses primarily description throughout. Occasionally, Hahn includes a quote from an individual or contemporary source that illuminates the discussion. He also includes examples of events from time to time that speak to his larger argument.

Structure

A Nation Under Our Feet consists of three parts with three chapters in each part of the book, along with a preface and an epilogue. The work also includes an appendix, notes, acknowledgments, and an index. The book is organized chronologically and ends with events in the early twentieth century.

Hahn uses a number of archival sources, including first person accounts, period writing, government documents, and newspaper data. These data sources allow Hahn to piece together a history of African American political development during this time period from many different angles.

Quotes

"This is a book about...how African Americans in the rural South conducted politics and engaged in political struggle as slaves and as freed people, about how they constituted themselves as political actors in a society that tried to refuse them that part, and thus about how they gave powerful direction to America's revolutionary experience of disunion, emancipation, and nation-building." Prologue, pg. 1

"To speak of the slaves' politics may seem a contradiction in terms, for the slaves had no standing in the official arenas of either civil or political society...And yet the slaves did express and act according to their individual wills, fashion collective norms and aspirations, contest the authority of their owners on many fronts, build institutions to mobilize their resources and sensibilities, produce leaders who wielded significant influence, and, in ways we have still to appreciate fully, press on the official arenas of politics at the local, state, and national levels." Chapter 1, pg. 15

"Exchanges among slaves could, therefore, serve to redistribute goods and labor to those in need, reinforce ties of kinship and friendship, and reconfigure the boundaries of social life." Chapter 1, pg. 31

"But by invoking the will and authority of a presidential candidacy, a political party, or a governmental body in support of their own aspirations, whether attached to rumors of conspiracy or not, the slaves were practicing the politics of those traditionally denied admission to a society's official arenas." Chapter 1, pg. 60

"As the Confederacy organized and mobilized to defend its newly proclaimed independence and the foundation of slavery to which it rested, new opportunities were opened for slaves to become better acquainted with each other and with the course of political events." Chapter 2, pg. 67

"Marked by conditions that should have deterred all but the hardiest and most determined of souls, the contraband camps and colonies nonetheless became more than mere collecting points for slaves who had rebelled against the authority of their masters. They also became the first great cultural and political meeting grounds that the war produced." Chapter 2, pg. 73

"Black soldiers, especially those recruited early amid optimistic expectations, struggled against these many badges of inferiority, and their greatest success came in establishing something of a juridical basis of equality in the ranks." Chapter 2, pg. 95

"The political initiatives that erupted in the urban South were fed both by the flow of black migrants during and immediately after the war and by the institutional networks that free people of color and slaves had built there over the course of many years." Chapter 3, pg. 119

"Because so few individuals in the former Confederate states could claim secure standing in official political society, much of the day-to-day life there became politicized. With the old rules apparently obsolete and the new ones ill-prescribed, almost every act seemed to bear on the more general struggle over socially meaningful power: finding a different place of work or residence, reuniting immediate family and other kin, wrestling over the terms of labor and leisure, constructing and negotiating relations within households, hunting or fishing for subsistence, exercising control over children and others regarded as dependents, and taking complaints to a federal official." Chapter 3, pg. 128

"But as rumors of federal land redistribution further inflated the freed people's expectations and assertiveness, white landowners not only charged that a black insurrection brewed; they also began to use the alleged threat of insurrection to dismantle the freed people's means of resistance and to legitimate their own efforts to readjust the balances of local power." Chapter 3, pg. 148

"The Union League spread rapidly through the plantation belt because of its association with the military defeat of the Confederacy, the abolition of slavery, the Republican party, and the expansion of civil and political rights for African Americans." Chapter 4, pg. 182

"The Reconstruction Acts radically altered the traditions and presumptions both because they enfranchised large numbers of former slaves against the wishes of their former owners, and because they disfranchised some white southerners for their participation in the rebellion." Chapter 4, pg. 191

"During Reconstruction, black men held political office in every state of the former Confederacy." Chapter 5, pg. 219

"The community support necessary to conduct electoral politics found its institutional anchors not in the clubs and committees attached to the Republican party, but in black religious congregations." Chapter 5, pg. 230

"Where African Americans attained substantial representation in Reconstruction legislatures, moreover, they could develop an agenda, shape Republican party policy, and help advance contests for power at the local level." Chapter 5, pg. 260

"Loosely constituted as it may have been, the Ku Klux Klan (and allied organizations) almost everywhere built on traditions of enforcing domination and submission, on grids of kinship and political patronage, and on generational legacies of military defeat." Chapter 6, pg. 268

"The Klan's effectiveness depended on a wider political climate that gave latitude to local vigilantes and allowed for explosions of very public violence." Chapter 6, pg. 288

"For growing numbers of rural blacks, therefore, interest in emigration arose as one of several strategies designed to create or reconstitute freed communities on a stable foundation-and at arm's length from whites." Chapter 7, pg. 322

"There were, of course, a great many obstacles to emigration, and the most formidable were imposed not by hesitant or hostile black leaders, but by the very system of social and political relations that black laborers sought to escape." Chapter 7, pg. 355

"It was not necessary to strike for higher wages or belong to organizations such as the Knights of Labor and the Colored Farmers' Alliance for an African American-and principally an African-American man-to run the risk of slaughter in the rural South of the later 1880s and 1890s. It was only necessary to establish relative independence, to stand up to a landlord, to show the signs of literacy, to speak one's mind, or to ignore the local racial etiquette: in short, to behave in any way that could be regarded as nonsubmissive by a white person." Chapter 9, pg. 425

"Feeding on a deep culture of social and political violence, lynch mobs sought to reestablish the boundaries that they believed were being transversed, to crush the attacks and violations they could associate with the weakening of their own leverage." Chapter 9, pg. 427

Topics for Discussion

Discuss some of the ways in which slaves were able to resist their owners under slavery. What consequences did these actions have potentially?

Discuss the role of communities and kinship networks in African American political development in the nineteenth century. Why were these relationships so important?

What is "biracialism?" Did this benefit African Americans and/or whites?

How did Democrats accomplish black disenfranchisement at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? What made this possible?

What was the Union League? How does it relate to the Republican Party? What effect did it have on African Americans during the nineteenth century?

What was the Emigrations Movement? Why was this movement appealing to many African Americans? What consequences did it have for white southerners?

During the nineteenth century, whites used a number of tactics to discourage African Americans from voting and from challenging the racial hierarchies in the South. Describe some of these strategies. Which were most successful in preventing these things? Why?