

History 225

Re: Notes/ addendum

Building Black Communities: (See Foner, Chapters 2+3)

The meaning of freedom for blacks. Quick to materialize in black actions. Blacks did not wait around in a passive state waiting for whites/Union power to define what their new status was all about. Consistent w/ the activist record of slaves in the South when the war was in progress. We discussed this earlier(see the I. Berlin piece in the WP).

Testing of their newfound freedom seen in the massive population movements in the South immediately after the war. Some Northerners and white Southerners took this as "aimless migration" and an effort to avoid labor, etc.

Not all blacks left the plantation but a great number did. But this movement had a purpose. Many blacks on the move headed toward urban centers believing that their freedom would be free-er in the more anonymous cities and in search for employment that was differne than ag ricultural labor.

This out-migration from the countryside to the cities increased significantly the black population in the urban South. But the large numbers of blacks swelled the labor pool and rarely ended with better employment opportunities. The alrge numbers of those in search of employment simply led to their exploitation with low-paying and menial jobs.

Another factor that propelled black mobility was to search for family members separated as a result of slavery. This was a reflection of the strong family ties that did exist under slavery. Most of these desperate searches ended in disappointment. When former loved ones were found some had remarried again. . . . Those who were reunited after the war went to the Freedman's Bureau to have their slave marriages legalized under law.

Many families adopted adopted children of deceased relatives and friends rather than see these children apprenticed to whites or end up in the orphanages run by the Freedman's Bureau. By 1870 a large majority of blacks lived in two-parent families throughout the South(See Gutman's work, The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom).

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1) The "liberation" of the black female. Basically this was the shift of black females from the fields to the home. A decision that was militantly insisted upon by black men and women. Emancipation institutionalized the black family.

This was not a happy development for white Southerners who had relied heavily on black female labor in field production.

In the aftermath of emancipation blacks withdrew whole sale from white churches and formed their own churches to worship in their own way. Reasons were two: refusal; of existing white congregations to allow blacks an equal place in their churches--separate pews and white domination over the church. This mass exodus of blacks from white churches redrew the religious map of the South. Now with AME and Baptist churches springing up all over the South. The rise of the independent black church provides only one example of black institutions thriving in the new South.

In addition blacks established burial societies, Masonic lodges, fire companies, drama societies, debating clubs, temperance societies, and equal rights societies.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of the freedmen's quest for self-improvement was the unquenchable thirst for education (literacy). Some 90% of Southern blacks were illiterate by the end of the war. The legacy of slavery.

Literacy was desired in order to read the Bible. And to engage in contracts, etc. Blacks equated freedom with the ability to read and to have a firmer grip over their fates. Blacks took the initiative in scraping up what little monies were available in the black communities to build or rent a building to house a school. When funds ran out they looked to the Freedman's Bureau and help from Northern societies for funds and teachers (Gideonites)

During the year after Emancipation saw the coming together of black communities in an explosion of institution building and political and cultural fusion of former free blacks and freedmen. Reconstruction witnessed the birth of the modern black community.