"States of Rebellion": Civil War, Rural Unrest, and the Agrarian Question in the American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno, 1861–1865

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To date, only a handful of scholars, most notably C.L.R. James and Eugene Genovese, have seen slave rebellions and peasant revolts as having anything in common.[1] Fewer scholars still would be prepared to accept the assumption that slaves and peasants were agrarian working classes that shared significant characteristics. Yet, the issues of rural unrest and class formation continue to haunt the historiography of both slave and peasant societies long after James' and Genovese's studies, and have forced several historians to revise and broaden their definitions of class conflict as a means to describe the social transformations of several rural regions. In this essay, I focus on the American South as a case study of a slave society and on the Italian South, or Mezzogiorno, as a case study of a peasant society. Notwithstanding the fundamental differences between the social structures of these two regions, in both cases debates on the class character of rural workers began when leftist historians raised the possibility of applying Marxist categories to their particular historical conditions. In both cases, they were dealing with a 'south' characterized by a preeminently agricultural economy and a persistent social and political conservatism.[2] In both cases, too, the debate has moved from broad theoretical positions to the explanation of specific instances of class conflict in a rural setting—the slaves'

Acknowledgments: I wish to thank for their valuable comments Steven Hahn, Rick Halpern, and an anonymous reader for *CSSH*.

[1] See C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1938); and Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: American Negro Slave Revolts in the Making of the Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979).

[2] On the American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno, modernization, and class conflict, see Peter Kolchin, *A Sphinx on the American Land: The Nineteenth-Century South in Comparative Perspective* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 79–84; and Enrico Dal Lago, *Agrarian Elites: American Slaveholders and Southern Italian Landowners, 1815–1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

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resistance to their masters and the peasants' resistance to their landlords, respectively—and then on to a criticism of the Marxist approach to the problem.

The crux of the matter lies in whether slave resistance and peasant resistance can be analyzed as instances of class conflict. The two cases have long histories in the American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno. Arguably, these histories reached their culmination in the years 1861–1865, when both regions underwent momentous social and economic transformations in the midst of civil wars. During those years, the American Civil War and the southern Italian brigandage[3] ravaged the two countrysides, and in both areas there were significant episodes of revolt—collective slave revolt in the Confederate South, and collective peasant revolt in the Italian Mezzogiorno.

We cannot underestimate the revolutionary significance of the slaves' contribution in bringing about their own emancipation through constant acts of rebellion, and their willingness to enlist in the Union Army to fight their former masters. Their revolutionary pursuits during the Civil War built upon a long tradition of resistance. They grew out of relations of mutual solidarity and kinship networks, established within the boundaries of the slave community, which formed the bases for informal political activity. During the Civil War, this tradition of resistance and informal political activity lay behind several instances of rebellion by slaves turning into freedmen. Then, soon after Emancipation, as Steven Hahn has shown, "freed African Americans built their political communities—as enslaved African Americans had done—from many of the basic materials of everyday life," such as kinship, labor, tradition, and religion.[4]

Yet, during the Civil War, even before Emancipation reached them, African American political communities were instrumental in organizing a variety of rebellious acts and in completely disrupting the slave system in several areas of the Confederate South. Though research on these activities remains scanty, I will argue here that these instances of rebellion, though they would have been impossible without political and military help from the Union, contained within themselves the seeds of class consciousness among an African American landless peasantry in formation.[5]

On the other hand, the revolutionary significance of the brigandage in southern Italy during the 1860s showed itself in the large participation of peasants in acts of guerrilla warfare against an Italian army that mostly protected the landlords. Their aim was to destroy or requisition private property. According to Franco Della Peruta, during the 1860s rural unrest here was clearly a "large phenomenon of class struggle . . . a large scale peasant guerrilla war," expressing

[3] "Brigandage"—from "brigand" (outlaw)—is a term used to describe both general rural unrest and the particular 1860s' episodes of rural unrest in southern Italy.

[4] Steven Hahn, "The Politics of the Black Rural Labourers in the Post-Emancipation South," in Enrico Dal Lago and Rick Halpern, eds., *The American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno: Essays in Comparative History* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 114–15.

[5] See Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggle in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Harvard, 2003), 62–115.

through violence the hatred that the southern Italian rural masses felt toward both the proprietors' usurpation of common land and the Italian government's heavy taxation and draft enforcement.[6] Spontaneous episodes of rural unrest were a constant feature of the history of the Mezzogiorno, but the 1860s brigandage was different—it had characteristics of a true organized revolt focused on eradicating the very roots of peasant exploitation. At the revolt's peak in the early 1860s, mounted bands of peasants "set villages on fire, destroyed archives [whose documents legalized the landlords' usurpation of properties], killed liberal landowners, mayors, and officers of the national guard."[7]

The Italian government responded not by intervening to extirpate the social causes of the unrest but rather with systematic and ruthless repression. In contrast to the Union's support for slaves' emancipation in the American South, the peasant revolt in the Mezzogiorno was crushed from the start by the state's powerful political and military apparatus. In the latter case, I argue, the collective rebellion of the agrarian laborers against their landlords was the last in a series of attempts by the southern Italian rural masses to achieve the status of a landed peasantry.

My aim here is to employ sustained comparative analysis to illuminate the processes through which two agrarian proletariats formed during the 1860s, during the American Civil War and the southern Italian brigandage. Both were pivotal episodes in the histories and experiences of the rural working classes of the two regions. There is one fundamental difference, though, between these two case studies: by focusing on African Americans, I deliberately exclude the white farmers who formed the majority of the working class in the American South. In contrast, southern Italian peasants were not divided along racial lines, and they formed the overwhelming majority of the working class in the Italian Mezzogiorno. In the antebellum American South, though many white farmers were tenants and landless, the majority did own land. We cannot say the same for the respectable minority of four million African Americans, who, after being enslaved and racially exploited by both planters and farmers, formed after emancipation a mostly landless class. Conversely, unlike the white American farmers, only a small percentage of peasants owned land in the Italian Mezzogiorno. Instead, like emancipated African Americans, southern Italian peasants formed a legally free but mostly landless class of tenants and sharecroppers. But unlike the African Americans, they made up the majority of the population.

Another equally important difference distinguishes the two case studies: shortly after the Union's victory in the Civil War guaranteed their legal emancipation, African Americans were granted civil and political rights. Especially during the period of Congressional Reconstruction (1866–1868), African Americans were able through their alliance with Radical Republicans to influ-

[6] Franco Della Peruta, *Politica e società nell'Italia dell'Ottocento* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1999), 102.

[7] Raffaele Romanelli, *L'Italia liberale, 1860–1900* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), 33.

ence decisively the shape of southern politics with their votes and their participation in state constitutional conventions. Enfranchisement, together with the provisions of the 1867 Reconstruction Acts, paved the way for the spread of clubs and associations—the most prominent being the Union League—that were part of what Steven Hahn has called "a formal process of politicization." This process built directly on the informal political activities and networks consolidated during slavery.[8]

Conversely, most southern Italian peasants, though legally emancipated, remained disenfranchised until the Italian parliament passed the laws of 1912 and 1913 on universal male suffrage. Though, much like African American slaves, they were able to build informal political networks, their influence on local and national politics in the Mezzogiorno was important only during episodes of rural unrest. In times of crisis, such as during the 1820 and 1848 revolutions and again in 1860, southern Italian peasants staged their political protests by occupying land in the countryside and threatening general insurrection. Particularly in the last two instances, the threat they posed assumed a clear political character due to the possibility that the rebels might ally themselves with the leaders of the Democratic Party, a political movement committed to radical and republican principles, with local branches throughout the Italian peninsula. After 1862, however, this possibility gradually waned.[9]

Though in the United States the experiment of democratizing southern politics ended with the demise of Congressional Reconstruction, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution provided a basis for formal African American political activity. This had no parallel in the peasants' situation in the Mezzogiorno. This radical divergence in political paths had incalculable consequences for African American and southern Italian rural workers, particularly in terms of class formation and consciousness. Nevertheless, at the time of the American Civil War and the southern Italian brigandage, our focus here, the working classes of these two areas had much in common; both were disenfranchised and excluded from the formal political process.

At the heart of my interpretation is E. P. Thompson's idea that "class" can only be defined in relation with other classes, through action and reaction, change and conflict. According to Thompson, "when we speak of a class we are thinking of a very loosely defined body of people who share the same congeries of interests, social experiences, traditions, and value-system, who have a dis-

[8] Hahn, "Politics of Black Rural Labourers," 121. See also M. Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South: Politics and Agricultural Change during Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

[9] On these issues, see Enrico Dal Lago, "Radicalism and Nationalism: Northern 'Liberators' and Southern Laborers in the United States and Italy, 1830–1860," in Enrico Dal Lago and Rick Halpern, eds., *The American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno: Essays in Comparative History* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 197–214; and Lucy J. Riall, "Garibaldi and the South," in John A. Davis, ed., *Italy in the Nineteenth Century, 1796–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 132–53.

position to behave as a class, to define themselves in their actions and their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways."[10] I believe that both African American slaves and southern Italian peasants in the period from 1861 to 1865 fall within Thompson's definition of class; "interests, social experiences, traditions, and value-system" were the crucial factors that bound together both slaves and peasants in their struggle against exploitation and in their realization that the time was ripe for social revolution. Like C.L.R. James, Barrington Moore, Jr. has argued that comparable historical circumstances have proven repeatedly that "a large rural proletariat of landless labor is a potential source of insurrection and revolution."[11] Following these suggestions, multiple similarities between American slaves and southern Italian peasants spring to mind, especially if we recognize that in 1865 both the emancipated African American agrarian working class and the legally free southern Italian agrarian working class were mostly, though not exclusively, formed of landless laborers.

Clearly, the landless laborers who formed the agrarian working classes of the American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno were very different from the urban proletariats that have long been the privileged object of most labor history studies. Nonetheless, there are clear and important connections between the former and the latter. Among these, the most important relates to the historical phenomenon of migration. Between the late nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, masses of rural laborers from both the American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno migrated to the large, industrialized cities of the northern United States, where they effectively became part of the urban proletariat. If we take these two roughly contemporaneous migrations as a *terminus post quem* for the transformation of the agrarian working classes of the American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno into fully formed urban proletariats, then we may consider the period preceding the two historical phenomena as one of gradual proletarianization of the agricultural workforces in both regions. We can clearly locate the prehistory of this process in the 1860s, since during that decade the legal—though not economic—emancipation of the African American working class in the American South and the defeat of the peasant struggle for economic emancipation in the Italian Mezzogiorno both had the effect of creating classes of mostly landless laborers, the first step toward proletarianization.

In both regions, within the boundaries of this process of working-class formation, the crucial agents were laborers on one side and the state on the other.

[10] The quotation is in Ira Katznelson, "Working-Class Formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons," in Ira Katznelson and Aristide Zolberg, eds., *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Europe and the United States* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 18.

[11] Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 1966), 455.

The importance of the action of the state in defining, in the words of Ira Katznelson, "who gets to be a citizen, how they participate, what interests they represent, what categories of social action are recognized as legitimate," and the weight these "transactions" have on the process of working-class formation, are undeniable. Katznelson believes that these "transactions" are strictly related to "the most important contests about the grammar of liberalism," an ideology that, significantly, was dominant among the ruling classes of both the Union government in the United States and the Right governments in Italy during the 1860s.[12]

The crucial role of the state in shaping the boundaries within which the process of working-class formation could take place was particularly evident in our two case studies. Ultimately, the outcomes of the two events were very similar, since in both cases the state was instrumental in the defeat of the demands for land reform coming from below. Yet, equally important for the future of working-class formation in the two regions were the initially different attitudes of the two governments toward the revolutionary struggles of the southern rural masses. The American government's support for legal—though not economic—emancipation has conditioned all the subsequent history of the African American working class in the American South; similarly, the Italian government's decision to brutally repress the peasant revolt has conditioned all the subsequent history of the southern Italian working class. To Antonio Gramsci, the Italian state's use of "domination" through coercion, rather than "hegemony," in dealing with the masses, was a result of the rather weak power and influence of the Italian bourgeoisie.[13] Gramsci offers many suggestions for comparison between American and Italian histories. Throughout this essay, however, although my focus is on the agency of African American slaves and southern Italian peasants, I consider the different facets and roles of the state in the American South during the Civil War and in the Italian Mezzogiorno during brigandage to be all equally important for understanding the process of working-class formation in the two regions.

SLAVES AND PEASANTS IN AMERICAN AND ITALIAN HISTORIOGRAPHIES

The works by Marxist scholars such as Eugene Genovese, David Roediger, and John Ashworth, to mention but a few, are crucial to any understanding of the slave South as a society characterized by conflict between a master class and

[12] Ira Katznelson, "Working Class Formation and American Exceptionalism, Yet Again," in Rick Halpern and Jonathan Morris, eds., *American Exceptionalism? U.S. Working Class Formation in an International Context* (London: MacMillan, 1997), 52. On liberalism, see also David M. Potter, "Civil War," in C. Van Woodward, ed., *The Comparative Approach to American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 135–45.

[13] See Lucy J. Riall, *The Italian Risorgimento: State, Society, and National Unification* (London: Routledge, 1994), 31; and Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, eds., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 78–79.

an enslaved working class.[14] This conflict reached its peak with the Civil War, during which the emancipation of four million slaves brought about a social revolution in the southern countryside. Several historians, both Marxist and non-Marxist, have seen emancipation as the key moment in the formation of a free African American working class in the rural South. Notably, Eric Foner supports this view, advanced earlier by W.E.B. Du Bois, in his acclaimed studies on emancipation and Reconstruction.[15] Subsequently, the formation of peasant working classes due to slave emancipation has become the focus of much contemporary historiography working on several different regions, especially of studies by scholars related to the *Freedom Project,* which publishes documents on the African American experience during and after the Civil War. Key monographs written by Barbara J. Fields, Joseph P. Reidy, Julie Saville, and more recently John Rodrigue, have put forward the idea that African American slaves were transformed into a rural proletariat through emancipation.[16]

In absolute terms, it is true that the number of African American landowners increased significantly in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century. Yet, it is also true that, in the words of Roger Ransom, throughout the South ex-slaveholders and "landowners were able to deny black landownership of farms through a combination of social pressure or, when necessary, outright coercion."[17] Thus, even when the 1870 census reported a large number of new farm proprietors, including thousands of African Americans, "most of the new small farms were tenancies of one kind or another."[18] By the 1910 Census, according to Armistead Robinson, "of the 900,000 black farming families recorded . . . 20 percent claimed full ownership, 5 percent claimed partial ownership, and 75 percent remained sharecroppers and tenants."[19] Therefore, the term

[14] See especially Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1974); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (London: Verso, 1991); and John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic, Vol. I: Commerce and Compromise, 1820–1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[15] See Eric Foner's, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), and *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); and also W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (New York, 1935).

[16] See Barbara J. Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985); Joseph P. Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the Cotton South: Central Georgia, 1800–1880* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Labor in South Carolina, 1860–1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and John Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1862–1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).

[17] Roger L. Ransom, *Conflict and Compromise: The Political Economy of Slavery, Emancipation, and the American Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 229.

[18] Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Norton, 1978), 161.

[19] Armstead L. Robinson, "Full of Faith, Full of Hope: The African-American Experience from Emancipation to Segregation," in William R. Scott and William G. Shade, eds., *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), 152.

"landless peasantry" accurately describes the outcome of the transformation of enslaved rural workers into a class of mostly landless agricultural laborers, who were only marginally involved in a free labor market in the capitalist sense.[20] Much like their peasant counterparts in the Italian South, these freedpeople remained subject to the authority of their former masters, who continued to wield their social and economic power through their continuing ownership of the available land.

The above point has been the focus of studies written by several scholars, including Jonathan Wiener, Michael Wayne, Eric Foner, and more recently Laura Edwards. They have argued that, after the Civil War, planters retained control of the plantations and continued to exploit the freedpeople through labor obligations and contractual practices.[21] Though the transition from slavery to freedom permanently changed the nature of social relations in the southern countryside, this transition was far from complete precisely because the legal revolution of Emancipation failed to create a black landed peasantry—most African Americans remained economically dependent from their former masters.[22] Given these premises, it should not surprise us that the main struggle in the post-Civil War South was between the attempts of freedmen and their families to rise to the status of economically emancipated individuals and their former masters' efforts to frustrate these aspirations. As Steven Hahn has recently argued, American planters controlled their workforce both through unequal sharecropping agreements and usurious land-leases, and the use of private armies against the claims to rights and land of an emerging black peasantry. These were much like the tactics of landowners toward peasants in nineteenth-century southern Italy. Hahn describes the social and political conditions of the South during Reconstruction as "*latifundist,*" a term related to the southern Italian *latifondi,* or large landed estates. These estates resembled southern plantations, in that they served as the basis of the power of the regional landed elite.[23]

Like the American South, the historiography of the Italian Mezzogiorno has produced key studies by Marxist scholars, among them Emilio Sereni, Pasquale Villani, and Aurelio Lepre, all followers of Gramsci's thought.[24] They have de-

[20] See Alex Lichtenstein, "Was the Emancipated Slave a Proletarian?" *Reviews in American History* 26 (1998): 124–45.

[21] See Eric Foner, *Reconstruction;* Jonathan Wiener, *Social Origins of the New South: Alabama, 1860–1885* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Michael Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society: The Natchez District, 1860–1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); and Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

[22] For a different view, see William Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861–1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991).

[23] See Hahn, "Politics of Black Rural Labourers," 126–27.

[24] See Emilio Sereni, *Il capitalismo nelle campagne (1860–1900)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1947); Pasquale Villani, *Mezzogiorno tra riforme e rivoluzione* (Bari-Rome: Laterza, 1973); and Aurelio Lepre, *Il Mezzogiorno dal feudalesimo al capitalismo* (Naples: Società Editrice Napoletana, 1979).

bated the importance of class conflict as a way of explaining social relations in the rural countryside. Southern Italian peasants had been formally emancipated in 1806, when the Napoleonic government decreed the abolition of feudalism in the continental Mezzogiorno, but the legal dismantlement of the feudal system had also paved the way for the landed bourgeoisie's acquisition of noble estates, and the landlords' enclosure of common land. Left with no means to buy land or continue to use common resources, many peasants became landless tenants, day laborers, or sharecroppers, and continued to be exploited by their former masters through usurious contractual practices. At the same time, they were hardly in a position to enjoy the full benefits of a free labor market—a situation that reminds us of the African American freedpeople's condition after the Civil War.[25]

Early Marxist studies have analyzed brigandage in the 1860s' Mezzogiorno as part of a long history of class conflict focused on the struggle between the landless peasantry and the landed proprietors over land ownership and the enclosure of common land. Marxist scholars such as Franco Molfese, Maria Grazia Cutrufelli, and Tommaso Pedio[26] have termed the confrontation between the Italian army and the brigands a "peasant war" (*guerra contadina*) and have argued that it was the largest instance of collective peasant insurrection, aimed at destroying the very reasons of class conflict through the long-sought redistribution of lands. Most recent historiography still acknowledges the importance of these early studies, but has moved away from the Marxist explanation. Some recent studies have argued that the image of a landless peasantry in revolt was part of a larger discourse of creation of "otherness" and cultural identity of the Mezzogiorno radically opposed to the one of the Italian state—a discourse in which criminal activity in its various forms loomed large.[27] Other studies have granted more importance to the contemporaneous and related struggle to restore in the South the legitimate Bourbon king who had been overthrown with the 1861 unification of Italy.[28]

Though both points are well taken, I believe that there is still much to be said

[25] See Marta Petrusewicz, "Wage Earners, but Not Proletarians: Wage Labor and Social Relations on the Nineteenth-Century Calabrian Latifondo," *Review* 10, 3 (1987): 471–503.

[26] See Franco Molfese, *Storia del brigantaggio dopo l'Unità* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964); Maria Grazia Cutrufelli, *L'Unità d'Italia: questione meridionale e nascita del sottosviluppo del Sud* (Verona: Bertani Editore, 1975); and Tommaso Pedio, *Brigantaggio e Questione Meridionale* (Bari: Edizioni Levante, 1979). See also Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (London: Abacus, 1959).

[27] See John Dickie, "A Word at War: The Italian Army and Brigandage, 1860–1870," *History Workshop Journal* 33 (1992): 1–24; and Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 156–87. See also Daniela Adorni, "Il brigantaggio," in Luciano Violante, ed., *Storia d'Italia,* Annali 12: *La criminalità* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), 283–319; and Marta Petrusewicz, "Society against the State: Peasant Brigandage in Nineteenth-Century Southern Italy," *Criminal Justice History* 8 (1987): 1–20.

[28] See especially Salvatore Lupo, "Storia del Mezzogiorno, questione meridionale, meridionalismo," *Meridiana* 32 (1998): 17–52; and Alfonso Scirocco, "Introduzione," in Alfonso Scirocco, ed., *Guida alle fonti per la storia del brigantaggio conservate negli Archivi di Stato,* Vol. I (Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1999), xiii–xxxviii.

for the Marxist explanation of the 1860s' brigandage in the Mezzogiorno. No scholar could deny that the greatest numbers of the southern Italian rural working class were landless peasants and day laborers (*braccianti*). It should come as no surprise, then, that the hunger for land, displayed in numerous previous insurrections, played a large or even determinant part in the 1860s' rural unrest. Several sources indicate this, especially those of officials and militaries who belonged to the Italian government.[29] It is clear from these sources that the conflict between the bands of landless peasants turned outlaws and the Italian troops who were the strong arm of the landed proprietors was the main factor that gave the 1860s' brigandage characteristics of a "civil war," one fought in villages and regions of large parts of the Italian South. Italian historians have used "civil war" to describe both the conflict between supporters of the deposed Bourbon king and the Italian government, and that between peasants-turned-outlaws and the Italian army in the 1860s' Mezzogiorno.[30] Yet, regardless of definitional differences, the peasants and their protest were clearly seen as the protagonists in the southern Italian "civil war." Peasants formed mounted bands that ravaged the countryside, destroying and robbing landed property and killing or kidnapping landed proprietors. They fought with guerrilla tactics, and kept half of the Italian army occupied for half a decade. Many of those who did not participate directly fed and helped the brigands, acting as *manutengoli.*[31] Different causes lay at the heart of the 1860s' southern Italian brigandage and, doubtless, it was more complex than simply a "peasant war." But peasants did play a determinant part in it, and they made it first and foremost a "civil war" with primarily social and revolutionary aims.[32]

Both the southern Italian brigandage—or rather "civil war"—and the American Civil War, which was largely fought on southern soil, aimed to transform social relations in the countryside, but neither resulted in land reform. At the heart of these two civil wars lay two very similar agrarian issues. In the American South, slaves made clear from the war's beginning that for them the issue of legal emancipation was inextricably tied to that of economic emancipation through land ownership. Nevertheless, because the bulk of the rural workforce was enslaved, the agrarian question focused first and foremost on its legal

[29] See especially Giuseppe Bourelly, *Il brigantaggio dal 1860 al 1865 nelle zone militari di Melfi e Lacedonia* (Venosa: Edizioni Osanna Venosa, 1987 [orig. 1865]); and Angelo De Witt, *Storia politico-militare del brigantaggio nelle province meridionali d'Italia* (Florence: Studio Editoriale Insubria, 1884).

[30] See especially Salvatore Lupo, "Il Grande Brigantaggio. Interpretazione e memoria di una guerra civile," in Walter Barberis, ed., *Storia d'Italia,* Annali 18: *Guerra e pace* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002).

[31] In the sources, the term *manutengoli* describes individuals who aided brigands.

[32] See Pasquale Villari, *Le lettere meridionali ed altri scritti sulla questione sociale in Italia* (Turin, 1972 [orig. 1875]). Among the recent works, see especially Tommaso Pedio, *Brigantaggio meridionale (1806–1863)* (Cavallino di Lecce: Capone, 1987), 45–140; and Roberto Martucci, *L'invenzione dell'Italia unita, 1855–1864* (Florence: Sansoni, 1999), 287–340.

emancipation.[33] In the Italian Mezzogiorno, by contrast, the rural working class had long been legally emancipated, and so the economic emancipation of peasants through land ownership was the central issue. By comparing the relationships between the roots of these agrarian questions and the 1860s' rural unrests in the two regions we can highlight important common features that other studies, focused on comparing emancipation and the end of unfree labor systems, have tended to relegate to secondary importance. One of these, I argue, is that the African American agrarian working class shared a fundamental idea with all the dispossessed peasantries of the Western world, including that of southern Italy: an intense desire to own the land on which families had worked and been exploited for generations. This contention is central to my comparative analysis, and is strongly supported by historical evidence.

It was this intense desire that led hundreds of African American families to seize abandoned southern plantations from the beginning of the Civil War. Yet, unlike what happened in the Italian Mezzogiorno, this occupation was peaceful, despite its occurring in the middle of a war. With their masters gone to fight, African American slaves took the chance to assert in a spontaneous movement their rights over what they considered as their own land. Southern Italian peasants, by contrast, fought bitterly against the landlords and instigated a guerrilla war through which they attempted to assert their rights over land that they, too, considered their own. In the American South, despite the Union's support for emancipation, there remained much potential for conflict between the now free slaves occupying former plantations and the army, which had no intention of yielding to their claims. This situation might have generated a peasant-style guerrilla war like that in southern Italy had not the Union Army disarmed black soldiers at war's end. Comparing the two cases illuminates the reasons why confrontation between the freedpeople and the Union Army did not occur, and yields a novel perspective on this still little known episode in the story of African American emancipation. A close comparative analysis of the two "civil wars" can reveal a possible explanation for the different behaviors of the African American and the southern Italian working classes regarding land occupation.

Although the behaviors of rural workers in the two regions differed in this important respect, the ultimate outcome of their actions had much in common. In both cases, the failure of the national governments and their military arms to address the crucial issues related to the agrarian questions perpetuated similar conditions of dependency: in both places, laborers remained dependent upon their landlords, and this prevented the formation of workers' movements well into the twentieth century. In the long-term, this dependency, and the fact that it was impossible to escape it, became crucial factors behind the migration of

[33] See Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African American Slaves* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Harvard, 2003), 246–70.

masses of African American and southern Italian peasants to the industrialized cities of the northern United States. There, both groups became part of the urban proletariat.

CIVIL WAR AND RURAL UNREST

The year 1861 saw the birth of two nations: the Confederate States of America and the Kingdom of Italy. The Confederate nation was born out of the movement that led eleven states to secede from the American Union in order to preserve the institution of slavery and uphold the right to self-government without external interference. The Italian nation emerged from a politico-military operation that had led to the unification of the country under the Piedmontese House of Savoy, and to the overthrow of the Bourbon dynasty in the South. The two opposite movements—for secession in America and unification in Italy—produced two new political entities aspiring to the title of "nations." But they were hardly in a position to be granted legitimacy in the international arena. For international diplomats, the only political institution recognized in America was the Union government, according to which the secession of the Confederacy was a rebellion to subdue. Likewise, the overthrow of the Bourbon dynasty, perpetrated by the Piedmontese army with no formal declaration of war, cast a long shadow over the legitimacy of the newly born Kingdom of Italy.[34]

As a result of their less than legitimate pedigrees, the two nations had to fight against the very institutions that they had dissolved. In the United States, the government led by Abraham Lincoln threw all its might into a war, the only declared aims of which in 1861 were the subjugation of the rebel Confederate states and the preservation—or rather reconstitution—of the Union. In Italy, the exiled Bourbon king Francis II encouraged and coordinated the guerrilla operations of an undeclared war against the Piedmontese occupation of the South, and aimed to restore the legitimate dynasty on the Neapolitan throne.[35] Though these wars differed in scale and nature, the parallel is nonetheless striking.[36] As the Union and the Confederacy began their epic engagement, another lesser-known "civil war" began in southern Italy between the Italian army and those wishing to restore the Bourbon kingdom.

Slaves and peasants were of secondary concern to the two contending forces, but their actions and decisions nonetheless determined the course of the two wars. Both slaves and peasants recognized the revolutionary potential of the

[34] See James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 234–76; and Martucci, *L'invenzione dell'Italia unita,* 341–44.

[35] See Richard Carwardine, "Abraham Lincoln, the Presidency, and the Mobilization of Union Sentiment," in Susan Mary Grant and Brian Holden Reid, eds., *The American Civil War: Explorations and Reconsiderations* (London: Longman, 2000), 68–97; and Giorgio Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia moderna,* Vol. V: *Dalla rivoluzione nazionale all'Unità (1849–1860)* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964), 167–70.

[36] On this parallel, see Denis Mack Smith, *Victor Emmanuel, Cavour, and the Risorgimento* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 270.

wars, and each reacted by joining the side that they believed would help them attain their goals. From the very start of the American Civil War, slaves sympathized with the Union, knowing that its victory would be one against the slaveholders' government, and therefore against slavery. Southern Italian peasants joined the movement for the restoration of the Bourbons, believing that its victory would be one against the liberal Italian government, and therefore against the liberal landed proprietors who most oppressed them.

From the beginning of the American Civil War, slaves tried to place the issue of emancipation at the heart of the conflict. Even though the Confederacy had proclaimed slavery as its cornerstone, the slave system became increasingly disrupted when hundreds of masters went away to fight and left plantations and farms in the hands of overseers and mistresses. For many slaves, this departure of the most powerful authorities from their daily lives was a sign of changing times and new opportunities. Many took their chances and fled, especially in the areas bordering the Union such as Virginia and North Carolina, and in those areas where the Union Army made its first territorial gains, such as the Sea Islands of South Carolina which were occupied as early as November 1861. Other slaves were impressed by the Confederate army, either forced to follow their masters in the war or hired as military laborers alongside free blacks. During movements of the Confederate army, the slaves' opportunities to escape increased markedly, and many managed to cross the Union lines.[37]

However, as the Union advanced, the majority of the masters fled with their slaves and relocated in other regions, a practice they called "refugeeing." According to Emory Thomas, this practice had deeply unsettling results, mainly because it destroyed African American communities and the authority of masters was diminished in their flights.[38] Though slaves rarely succeeded in resisting their forced removal, they took every opportunity to run away before they reached the interior of the Confederate territory. As refugee slaves arrived in the interior, spreading news of events, more slaves fled, spreading fears of a possible general insurrection.[39] As the war continued, episodes of resistance did multiply, but mass insurrection never materialized. Only a few plots were discovered in Mississippi, Arkansas, and South Carolina, where most of the conspirators were executed before anything could develop.[40]

Most slaves lived deep inside Confederate territory, and had few chances to

[37] See David Turley, "Slavery and Emancipation: The African American Experience during the Civil War," in Susan Mary Grant and Brian Holden Reid, eds., *The American Civil War: Explorations and Reconsiderations* (London: Longman, 2000), 265–86.

[38] See Emory Thomas, *The Confederate Nation, 1861–1865* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 240–41.

[39] See Ira Berlin, et al., *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 56–57.

[40] See Vincent Harding, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1981), 229–30; and Winthrop Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Conspiracy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

escape; as the war progressed, they turned increasingly against their masters and overseers in what was their largest collective show of resistance. As Peter Kolchin has written, throughout the Confederacy slaves "worked less, questioned more, and increasingly took to running away, not only singly or in pairs, as had been common before the war, but in large groups as well."[41] Typical was the case of the slaves on James Henry Hammond's plantation at Silver Bluff, South Carolina, who became increasingly restless and less willing to submit to their master's paternalistic control. By 1863, the situation had rapidly precipitated and Hammond wrote on 30 August in his secret diary: "Negroes . . . stealing right and left . . . Frank my plough driver escaped today and run away."[42] By resisting in any way they could the ever-diminishing authority of their masters, mistresses, and overseers, slaves showed that they appreciated the full extent of the revolutionary meaning of the war. At the same time, this resistance, combined with the flights of increasing numbers of slaves to Union lines, forced the issue of slave emancipation to the forefront of the Union government's agenda.[43]

From the outset, it was clear that the slaves' definition of freedom included economic independence, while that of the Union government did not. Early in the war, where Union forces appeared and the masters fled, slaves often occupied abandoned plantations and farms, thereby asserting their right to the land on which they had worked. In Louisiana's New Orleans district, occupied by the Union since 1862, slaves were paid for their work; yet, in 1863, Union military commander Nathaniel P. Banks issued orders forbidding them to leave the plantations, and he used the army to restore discipline under a system that Eric Foner has termed "compulsory free labor." In South Carolina's Sea Islands, slaves were given wages for the completion of daily tasks under a system of free plantation labor. Both labor systems revived the former plantation economy, albeit with wages, and neither offered much possibility that slaves would acquire land or become landowners.[44]

Nonetheless, wherever the slave system was disrupted, slaves showed that they saw their freedom not as an abstract legal concept or a simple transition to wage labor, but rather as an economic and social emancipation. This was a step that Union officers were clearly not prepared to allow. As early as 1862, in the Sea Islands, absent proprietors were dispossessed under the Direct Tax Act.[45] Then, in the last months of 1863, Lincoln instructed that some of the confis-

[41] Peter Kolchin, "Slavery and Freedom in the Civil War South," in James McPherson and William J. Cooper, Jr., eds., *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 245.

[42] Carol Bleser, ed., *Secret and Sacred: The Diaries of James Henry Hammond, a Southern Slaveholder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 297.

[43] See especially Berlin, et al., *Slaves No More;* and Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979).

[44] See Foner, *Reconstruction,* 51–58; and Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (New York: Vintage, 1967).

[45] Berlin, et al., *Slaves No More,* 153.

cated estates be reserved for sale in twenty-acre plots to African American families. But this was hardly enough to guarantee a living to the island's families. Voicing the disappointment of his fellow African Americans, a local church elder called "Uncle Smart" told a Philadelphia teacher in 1864, "tell Linkum dat we wants land—dis bery land dat is rich wid de sweat ob we face and de blood ob we back."[46] Responding to the African Americans' frustration, General Rufus Saxton, Methodist minister Mansfield French, and Tax Commissioner Abraham Smith "lobbied the Lincoln administration to permit the freedpeople to enter preemption claims" on forty-acre tracts of land.[47] Unfortunately, opposition from the Tax Commission led to the undoing of the preemption, and by March 1864 only 110 families had acquired land under the terms of Lincoln's initial instructions. Direct Tax Commissions similar to that on the Sea Islands were appointed throughout Union-occupied territory in the South. However, Lincoln's less-than-enthusiastic and often contradictory attitudes toward the issue of African American landownership allowed slaves little chance of becoming proprietors.[48]

Similarly, in the Mezzogiorno, the events that led to the unification of Italy showed that the economic emancipation of the peasantry was not on the agenda of the Piedmontese-based Italian government. Largely for this reason, rural disturbances began in the South even before the Kingdom of Italy had been proclaimed. Early in 1860, Garibaldi had overthrown Bourbon power throughout the South and had been hailed as liberator by the peasants who had fought by his side in the conviction that they would be compensated with land redistribution. However, Garibaldi's dictatorship in the Mezzogiorno showed no intention of proceeding in that direction. Indeed, the process of Unification was the result of an alliance between his forces and southern Italy's liberal landowners. The latter opposed the Bourbons' reactionary politics, yet desired the freedom to exploit the peasantry. Soon after Garibaldi had successfully completed his expedition, a plebiscite held in the former territory of the Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies sanctioned the people's wish to join the Piedmontese monarchy. In the continental Mezzogiorno, the plebiscite recorded more than 1,000,000 in favor of the annexation and only a few thousands against it, and this result had much to do with irregular procedures and pressures by liberal politicians and their allies upon the local population. Not surprisingly, by the summer of 1860 uprisings were spreading throughout the southern regions of Apulia and Basilicata, directed against the liberal landowners, or *galantuomini,* and in favor of the restoration of the Bourbons. Similar unrest continued throughout the autumn, when the Piedmontese forces crushed the rebels.[49]

[46] Quotation from Saville, *Work of Reconstruction,* 40.

[47] Berlin, et al., *Slaves No More,* 155.

[48] See Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction;* and Michael Perman, *Emancipation and Reconstruction, 1862–1879* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1987), 10–11.

[49] See Carlo Tullio Altan, "Brigandage after Unification: Class Struggle or Conflict between Civilizations?" in Omar Calabrese, ed., *Modern Italy: Images and History of a National Identity,*

However, it was the surrender of the Bourbon King Francis II at Gaeta in February 1861 that marked the beginning of the southern Italian "civil war." The increased taxation brought by the new Kingdom of Italy, proclaimed in March, together with the demobilization of the Bourbon army and the forced conscription in the Italian army, forced many peasants to flee to the mountains and resist the policy of the Italian government. Officer Giuseppe Bourelly wrote that, "the poor peasant [who was] exploited, unhappy, miserable, left without a tie to his native land, without affections, or feelings of gratitude for his landlord, was only waiting for a chance to rebel . . . brigandage was his best chance."[50] Many peasants joined the guerrilla warfare that Francis II waged against the Italian kingdom from exile. Southern Italian peasants coordinated their actions by forming bands of varying size that operated in different regions and actively collaborated with Francis II's representatives. According to Carlo Tullio Altan, "the largest [bands] might consist of from about fifty men to upwards of a hundred and were organized on military lines, commanded by leaders having legitimist and pro-Bourbon sympathies."[51]

The bands moved on horseback and used guerrilla tactics against the regular Italian troops. The most famous mounted band was commanded by the legendary leader Carmine Donatelli, nicknamed "Crocco." He was a skilled *capobanda* (band-chief) and a charismatic guerrilla leader, and in his memoirs Crocco tells of the misery of peasant life and the exploitation and oppression suffered by his family at the hands of the landowners. He became an outlaw and fought for Garibaldi, hoping for amnesty. But when Italian officers were sent to convict him, he joined the movement for the restoration of the Bourbons, though he retained few illusions. He wrote, "I saw how many injustices were committed, and the use of the whip, the cane, the swift executions, and the terrible punishments." Soon after, Crocco abandoned the Bourbon cause and led his peasant followers into a guerrilla warfare that they would have fought for their own sake. In his own words, "the exploited poor answered: 'also our time has come,' and so it was that in many villages there started murders and depredations: the fruits of the civil war."[52]

Crocco and his followers had by August 1861 become an army of more than 1,500 men. They were far from isolated in their ideas about the true meaning of the revolt against the Italian government. From the outset, the peasants who participated in the struggle showed that they had their own agenda.[53] As the southern Italian "civil war" progressed and, at the beginning of 1862, it became

Vol. I: *From Unification to the New Century* (Milan: Electa, 1982), 110–11. See also Cutrufelli, *L'Unità d'Italia;* and Alfonso Scirocco, *Il Mezzogiorno nella crisi dell'Unificazione (1860–1861)* (Naples: Societa Editrice Napoletana, 1981).

[50] Bourelly, *Il brigantaggio,* 74.

[51] See Tullio Altan, "Brigandage after Unification," 102.

[52] The quotations from Crocco's memoirs are in Cutrufelli, *L'unità d'Italia,* 218, 241, 259.

[53] John A. Davis, *Conflict and Control: Law and Order in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (London: MacMillan, 1988), 174.

clear that Francis II had failed in his attempt to restore the Bourbon kingdom, the demand for land became the essence of the peasant struggles against both the Italian government and the liberal landowners of the Mezzogiorno. According to Franco Molfese, from late 1861 onwards, the bands "destroyed properties, set *masserie* [estates] on fire, slaughtered the landowners' livestock . . . [and] targeted especially the liberal proprietors."[54] Thousands of peasants, headed by *capibanda,* engaged the regular Italian troops in frequent armed conflict and forced the Italian government to send to the Mezzogiorno an army that by 1862 had become 50,000-strong. Writing in August 1861, Prime Minister Massimo D'Azeglio was frank in his remarks concerning the character of popular insurrection of the southern Italian "civil war": "we need sixty battalions to hold southern Italy down, and even they seem inadequate. What with brigands and non-brigands, it is notorious that nobody wants us there. . . . Our principles and our policy must be wrong. We must get the Neapolitans to tell us once and for all whether they want us there or not."[55]

D'Azeglio's recommendations had come far too late. By this time, the Mezzogiorno's civil war had become a guerrilla war waged by southern Italian peasants to force the government to recognize their right to the lands usurped by liberal landowners. The Italian government had other designs, and launched a full-scale repression against the peasant guerrilla fighters. They had lost even the legitimacy of the fight for the restoration of the Bourbon king, and the government branded them "brigands" and pursued them as outlaws.[56]

CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE AGRARIAN QUESTION

In both the American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno, class struggle reached its peak in 1863. By late 1862, the pressure brought upon the American government by the slaves' continuous acts of resistance and the prolonged carnage of war had led to a radical change in Lincoln's policy. There was a shift in the purpose of the war—from a fight for the Union to a war against slavery itself. The Emancipation Proclamation, effective on 1 January 1863, seemed to fulfill the revolutionary aims of African American slaves and gave thousands of their men the opportunity to enlist in the Union army and fight against their former masters. Yet, the agrarian question remained unresolved. Throughout 1864 and 1865, the last two years of the war, the Union government's often contradictory policy contributed to false expectations of land redistribution among the freedpeople. That they went unfulfilled anticipated the frustrations of the Reconstruction period.

Likewise in Italy, by late 1862 the pressure brought upon the army by the

[54] Franco Molfese, "Il brigantaggio meridionale," in B. Anglani, et al., *Storia della società italiana: Lo stato unitario e il suo difficile debutto* (Milan: Teti Editore, 1981), 84.

[55] Massimo D'Azeglio to C. Matteucci, 2 Aug. 1861, quoted in Denis Mack Smith, *The Making of Italy, 1796–1866* (London: MacMillan, 1988), 367.

[56] See Pedio, *Brigantaggio meridionale,* 45–96.

prolonged peasant guerrilla warfare in the Mezzogiorno, and the fear that the latter might be used by democratic leaders to provoke a political revolution, had produced a radical change in government policy. First, a state of siege was declared in 1862, and then the 1863 Pica Law authorized the suspension of civil liberties and the military rule of large areas of the Italian South. These actions showed that the Italian government was prepared to implement every possible means to frustrate the peasants' revolutionary aim of eliminating the power of the liberal proprietors who had expropriated the land. Thanks to the Pica Law's extraordinary measures, the army succeeded in crushing the rebellious peasant bands by implementing a regime of military terror during the period 1863–1865. Subsequent resistance was at most rather sporadic, even though most peasants continued to be landless and exploited by their landlords.

In America, by late 1862 the revolution begun by the slaves' acts of resistance was showing its effects. The Confederate government was exhausted from the prolonged battle, and the rising number of slaves fleeing to Union-occupied territory began to undermine the South's internal order. According to James Oakes "slaves did not organize guerrilla bands or slink into the homes of their former masters and slit their throats," and yet "slave resistance had not only political but revolutionary significance."[57] The resistance the slaves engaged in during the Civil War was indeed revolutionary. It was their largest collective rebellion to date and the logical outcome of two centuries of class struggle in the American South. Yet, slaves had another equally important goal, one they held in common with other, nominally free, agrarian working classes such as the southern Italian peasantry: the desire for landownership. The revolutionary aspirations of southern slaves could have been completely fulfilled only if, after implementing their legal emancipation, the Union government had provided for the redistribution of slaveholders' land. Only this would have allowed the freedpeople to attain the status of a free landed peasantry, as had the post-revolutionary peasants of France and other countries.[58]

The Union government clearly had aims other than transforming slaves into peasants. While it helped slaves to achieve their revolutionary aim of freeing themselves and fighting against their masters, and provided for their legal emancipation and their enlistment in the Union army, it did not bring about the land redistribution the slaves considered inextricably linked to the very meaning of emancipation. Instead, as Thomas Holt has noted, Republican leaders actively worked to prevent freedpeople from withdrawing onto small plots of land and becoming subsistence farmers, as had happened in emancipated Jamaica a few decades earlier.[59] In this sense, the Union government in 1863 acted as an

[57] James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 183–84.

[58] See Steven Hahn, "Extravagant Expectations of Freedom: Rumour, Political Struggle, and the Christmas Scare of 1865 in the American South," *Past and Present* 157 (1997), 134–35; and Foner, *Nothing but Freedom,* 8–38.

[59] See Thomas C. Holt, "Essence of the Contract: The Articulation of Race, Gender, and Polit-

agent of a limited, controlled revolution in the American South. This revolution from above succeeded in liberating the agrarian working class from the shackles of legally unfree labor, but in the process it created a class of landless peasants similar to the southern Italian one.[60]

To be sure, the Union's route toward emancipation was elaborate, and it was largely determined by questions over the legal status and the use of the growing numbers of runaway slaves in Union camps. In August 1861, Congress passed the First Confiscation Act, which called for the seizure of all rebel property, including slaves. By this time, runaway slaves arriving in Union camps were declared "contrabands of war," a term first applied by General Benjamin Butler in Virginia. In July 1862, the Second Confiscation Act clarified that all the fugitive slaves owned by Confederate masters were free and could be enlisted in the army or in the navy. Finally, in September 1862, Lincoln drafted the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, and its final version was issued on 1 January 1863. Lincoln justified the Proclamation as a war measure, and it only freed the slaves in areas under Confederate control, but it did provide legal backing for their revolutionary struggle. Despite being cloaked in conservative terms, the Proclamation enhanced the revolutionary role of African American agency in the defeat of the Confederacy.[61]

After the Proclamation, thousands of ex-slaves enlisted in the Union army to fight against Confederate slaveholders and bring the entire slave system to an end. By war's end, more than 100,000 African Americans had served and made decisive contributions to Union victories. Though only a fraction of the 4,000,000 slaves served as soldiers, their very existence was seen by the master class as a dire threat. Right after the end of the war, "to men and women who had owned slaves, armed black men in positions of authority embodied the world turned upside down."[62] At the same time, wherever they came into contact with freedpeople, African American soldiers prompted them to reject the authority of their former masters. One Mississippi planter complained in October 1865 that, "the Negro soldiery here are constantly telling our negroes that for the next year the government will give them lands, provisions, stock and all things necessary to carry on business themselves. . . . The consequence is they are becoming careless, impudent and more and more, for they are told by the soldiers that they are as good as whites."[63]

The social revolution brought about by emancipation and the enlistment of

ical Economy in British Emancipation Policy, 1836–1866," in Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

[60] See Enrico Dal Lago and Rick Halpern, "Two Case-Studies in Comparative History: The American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno," in Enrico Dal Lago and Rick Halpern, eds., *The American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno: Essays in Comparative History* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 10–11.

[61] See Berlin, et al., *Slaves No More,* 3–76.

[62] Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie Rowlands, eds., *Freedom's Soldiers: The Black Military Experience in the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 164.

[63] Quotation from Berlin, Reidy, and Rowlands, eds., *Freedom's Soldiers,* 164.

African American soldiers could not have found a better expression in writing. Not only had slaves gained their freedom, they had managed through their active participation in the war to gain their right to stand on an equal footing with white soldiers in the struggle against their former masters. On one hand, emancipation and the subsequent battles fought in the Civil War by battalions of ex-slaves against Confederate slaveholders represented the culmination of a long history of class struggle in the American South.[64] On the other, by seeking freedom through repeated acts of resistance and enlisting in the Union army, slaves showed the seeds of class-consciousness in the sense described by E. P. Thompson.

Yet, slaves were not content with the simple achievement of legal emancipation; much like European peasants after the abolition of feudalism, they considered their freedom meaningless unless it was accompanied by provisions securing their economic independence. As Ira Berlin has written, the slaves' desire was "to secure not just any land but *their* land, meaning specifically the land that they and their forebears had worked and in the process made part of themselves."[65] This desire reached a dramatic climax just after the Civil War and led to open confrontation between the freedpeople and the Union army. In a speech delivered in Virginia in 1866, freedman Bayley Wyatt explained the rationale behind the freedpeople's resistance to the government's occupation of land, stating that "our wives, our children, our husbands has been sold over and over again to purchase the lands we now locate upon; for that reason we has [*sic*] a divine right to the land."[66]

To be sure, the issues of seizure of slaveholders' property and its redistribution among ex-slaves were at the forefront of the arguments advanced by both Abolitionists and radical Republicans from the early phases of the war, while Lincoln opposed widespread confiscation.[67] Still, in January 1865, after reaching the coast of Georgia in his famous March to the Sea, General Sherman issued his *Special Field Order 15,* which "authorized families of former slaves to occupy as much as forty acres each in the reserved district [the coast between Charleston and Florida], for which they would receive 'possessory title.'"[68] By war's end, 20,000 ex-slaves had occupied 100,000 acres, taking Sherman's instructions as a legal confirmation of their right to own land. With Lincoln's consent, a Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands was created in March 1865. Among other tasks, it had responsibility for the redistribution of

[64] See especially James T. Glatthaar, "Black Glory: The African American Role in Union Victory," in Gabor Boritt, ed., *Why the Confederacy Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 135–78; and Berlin et al., *Slaves No More,* 76–145.

[65] Berlin, *Generations of Captivity,* 270.

[66] Quotation from Robinson, "Full of Faith, Full of Hope," 145.

[67] See Eric Foner, "Thaddeus Stevens, Confiscation, and Reconstruction," in E. Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[68] Berlin, et al., *Slaves No More,* 176.

10 million acres of abandoned southern farmland in forty-acre plots to both southern whites and African Americans who had been loyal to the Union.[69]

Unfortunately, the assassination of Lincoln in April 1865 and the presidency of southern Democrat Andrew Johnson led to a reversal of policy. Almost immediately, Johnson blocked the Bureau's plan, granted presidential pardons to thousands of ex-slaveholders, and placed a three-year limit on the occupation of the land opened for settlement by Sherman's *Special Field Order 15*. After Johnson's amnesty proclamation of 29 May 1865, which restored federal property to southern white landowners, predictably, in several areas of the South the freedpeople resisted the federal authorities' attempts to dispossess them. In coastal South Carolina, where they had been given land to cultivate from the early years of the Civil War, they put up a particularly staunch resistance. In the Sea Island of Edisto, in October of the same year, repeated attempts by the leader of the Freedmen's Bureau, General Oliver O. Howard, to resolve the crisis peacefully failed in face of the freedpeople's unconditional refusal to leave the place to the white planters.[70] According to northern journalist Sidney Andrews, by then, further attempts to force the freedpeople from the islands would have resulted in bloodshed. Significantly, according to rice planter John Berkeley Grimball, a white landowner of an island near Edisto could not reach his property because "the Negroes on that island were armed and have announced their purpose to allow no white man on it." However, the American government and the Union army had few scruples about turning to military force to evict the numerous African American families that resisted dispossession.[71]

Rumors continued to circulate among freedpeople about a general redistribution of land on Christmas 1865; this, in turn, gave origin to widespread fears among whites of a general insurrection of former slaves. These fears were deep-seated and had a long history behind them, and provocative rumors were spread by white supremacists to organize all sorts of repressive activities. But behind these fears lay a measure of truth. According to Vincent Harding, the freedpeople "not only were . . . passing resolutions and in some places physically guarding their new settlements against former white owners," but also "they were ready to defend themselves: one report to President Johnson near the end of the year stated that 'in one way or another they have procured great numbers of army muskets and revolvers.'"[72] Especially on the Sea Islands and in neighboring areas, returning African American veterans had helped to organize

[69] See Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long,* 400–1.

[70] See William McFeeley, *Yankee Stepfather: General O. O. Howard and the Freedmen* (New York: Norton, 1968), 140–44; and Saville, *Work of Reconstruction,* 72–101.

[71] John Berkeley Grimball to his wife, 15 Nov. 1865, quoted in Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina during Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 82. See also Harding, *There is a River,* 318–20.

[72] Harding, *There is a River,* 322.

"committees" and form drilling companies to resist federal attempts to dispossess their families. Military activity would have played a large part in a general insurrection.[73] As a consequence, and also as a preventive measure against possible insurrection, white violence hit African American communities throughout the South, and white militias crushed the freedpeople's resistance to dispossession "often with the active or passive cooperation of the U.S. Army and the Freedmen's Bureau."[74] Much as the Italian army had suppressed the brigands in the Mezzogiorno, the Union army, the former agent of revolution, now used military force against the freedpeople's display of resistance. In both cases, land reform was prevented by the strong arm of the government allied with the landowners.

In the end, the deadline of Christmas 1865 passed, the redistribution of land did not occur, and nothing else happened; the insurrection failed to materialize for reasons that are still the cause of speculation among historians.[75] Comparison with the southern Italian case offers important insights as to the possible reasons why African Americans did not resist their dispossession with a guerrilla-style revolt, as southern Italian peasants did. Had such an insurrection taken place, a scenario similar to the Mezzogiorno's might well have occurred and another rather less glorious "civil war" would have occupied the Union army for months or years, forcing the federal government to implement measures as repressive as the ones proclaimed by Italy's political leaders. A clue to why this did not happen lies in the behavior of Major Martin Delaney, a free African American who was born in the South and raised in the North. As a member of the "Black Committee" that recruited African American soldiers for the Union army, Delaney understood perfectly well the revolutionary meaning of the campaign. In 1865, after he became an agent of the Freedmen's Bureau on St. Helena, the Sea Islands' population expected Delaney to use his military experience and leadership abilities to head the freedpeople's revolutionary struggle over landownership. Yet, Delaney remained loyal to the Union army, "permitting himself, in the words of Vincent Harding, "to be pitted against the potential revolution."[76]

What Delaney's example suggests is that, even if there was clear potential for a general African American insurrection in 1865, men like Delaney, who might have led a revolution, took an accommodationist stance. A possible explanation could be that, even though the freedpeople's desire for land was immense, they may have thought that the African American cause had achieved already a great deal with emancipation and that even more could be achieved by avoiding a head-on confrontation with the federal government, regardless of

[73] See Hahn, "Politics of Black Rural Laborers," 119–20.

[74] Harding, *There is a River,* 323.

[75] See Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet,* 146–59; and Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long,* 425–30.

[76] Harding, *There is a River,* 321.

its shortcomings. The example of the southern Italian peasants, who remained disenfranchised, shows that they suffered a systematic repression carried out by both military and governmental authorities as a consequence of the "brigands' war." By contrast, in the aftermath of the Civil War, African American men for a time gained full civil and political rights with the passing of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, gains they would no doubt have been denied had they engaged in a bloody insurrection.

Much as in the American South, in 1862 the conditions were ripe for social revolution in the Mezzogiorno. From the beginning of the year, the peasant guerrilla warfare had increased in intensity and become endemic in several regions. In the region of Capitanata alone, Member of Parliament Carlo De Cesare received reports of more than 800 mounted brigands who roamed freely in the countryside, destroying *masserie* and landed properties.[77] The brigands could count on the help of large sections of the population, among whom the majority were peasants who voiced their protest against the government's support for the liberal landlords and the usurpation of common land. Also, even though officially defeated, the legitimist forces continued to act from behind the scenes; several pro-Bourbon noblemen and bourgeois landowners helped the brigands hoping to bring to an end the hated Piedmontese occupation of the South.[78] The different reasons for frustration and disillusionment with the results of Italian unification converged in the most acute phase of the southern Italian "civil war," the so-called "great brigandage," which lasted until 1865. As a result of its unprecedented scale and intensity, it contributed to an impression that social revolution was imminent in the Mezzogiorno.[79]

By far the most important political force that could have transformed this general frustration and disillusionment into an organized movement for revolutionary change were the democrats. Followers of Giuseppe Mazzini and Carlo Pisacane had been defeated by the moderate liberal forces in the process of unification of the country when Garibaldi had allowed King Victor Emmanuel II and the Piedmontese army to take control of the South. Piero Bevilacqua writes that, "the democratic elites . . . [were] in the Mezzogiorno the only forces with some legitimate tie with the popular strata [and] were defeated by the moderate political solution with which the unification of Italy was accomplished."[80] The result had been that radical programs such as the constitution of a republic and the long-sought land redistribution among the peasant masses had been impossible to realize. The victory of the moderate liberal forces had brought with

[77] See Molfese, "Il brigantaggio meridionale," 84–85.

[78] See Matteo Liberatore, "Del brigantaggio nel Regno di Napoli," (16 June 1864), in Giovanni Turco, ed., *Brigantaggio legittima difesa del Sud: gli articoli della "Civiltà Cattolica" (1861–1870)* (Naples: Editoriale Il Giglio, 2000), 135.

[79] See Molfese, *Storia del brigantaggio,* 173. See also Lupo, "Storia del Mezzogiorno," 35–36.

[80] Piero Bevilacqua, *Breve storia dell'Italia meridionale dall'Ottocento a oggi* (Rome: Donzelli, 1997, 2d ed.), 34.

it a Right majority in parliament and a succession of prime ministers without the skills and knowledge of the country needed to seriously contribute to its benefit. Immediately after unification, democrats were still strong: while they led a strong opposition in parliament, the most radical elements among them continued to plot to change the course of unification and transform Italy into a republic in which social justice would finally be achieved.[81] Like abolitionists and radical Republicans in the United States, democrats had a much more complete view of the process of nation-building, a process that they believed had to pass through the resolution of important social issues, the most pressing of which were the agrarian question and the distribution of land among the poverty-stricken peasantry.

In August of 1862, Garibaldi was still the heart and soul of the democratic movement. When he decided to remake his famous expedition across the South and recruit volunteers to reach Rome and capture it from the Pope, there was a real possibility that the majority of the southern population would rise in arms and follow him together with the democratic leadership of the country. In the words of Alfredo Capone, "the brigandage gave origin, throughout the territory of the southern provinces, to numerous and spread epicenters of armed insurrection, which threatened to provoke a general civil war whenever they found an efficient political leadership such as the one that the democrats were able to assume and exercise, if they had the chance."[82] In other words, if the democrats had managed to take over the leadership of the peasant guerrilla movement, as the legitimist pro-Bourbon forces had previously done for a short time, the consequence would have been the transformation of the class struggle which had caused the "civil war" in the Mezzogiorno into a massive social and political conflict whose stake was the very existence of Italy.

The Deputy Prefect of Nicastro, a small southern village on Garibaldi's way, remarked in August 1862 that, "if Garibaldi's volunteers managed to reach the continent, a general and simultaneous [mass] movement would occur here and it would be very difficult to arrest it."[83] In the case of a victory of the democratic forces and of the peasant guerrilla movement over the liberal Italian government—a victory perhaps followed by a secession of the Mezzogiorno from the rest of the country—radical measures of social and economic significance would likely have been applied. Among these would have been the projected redistribution to landless peasants of a large part of the lands belonging to former feudal estates. In 1862, then, the potential for the completion of the social

[81] See Alfonso Capone, *Destra e Sinistra da Cavour a Crispi* (Turin: UTET, 1981), 55–57; and Alfonso Scirocco, *Il Mezzogiorno nell'Italia unita (1861–1865)* (Naples: Società Editrice Napoletana, 1979).

[82] Alfonso Capone, "L'età liberale," in Giuseppe Galasso and Rosario Romeo, eds., *Storia del Mezzogiorno,* Vol. XII (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1991), 105.

[83] Quotation in Capone, "L'età liberale," 105.

revolution started by the guerrilla warfare pursued by southern Italian peasants was all too real.[84]

As it happened, Garibaldi's march was halted in Calabria by the Italian army. While the democrats enjoyed little success in convincing the southern masses to join them, disorganization and internecine divisions within the movement allowed local authorities to crush the rebellion before it really began. Nonetheless, the episode served as a pretext for the Italian government to declare a state of siege, which lasted until the end of 1862 and created the conditions for a military dictatorship in the South. Exceptional measures were taken, clearly intended to prevent any chance of possible social revolution, but government officers justified them as due to the emergency arising from the general recrudescence of brigandage in conjunction with Garibaldi's expedition. Using the military as its strong arm, the government ordered the army to repress peasant rebellion wherever it existed, and to make ample use of martial law. Despite this, at the beginning of 1863, peasant guerrilla activities were stronger than ever, prompting the new Chief of Police Silvio Spaventa to recommend to Prime Minister Marco Minghetti new legislation that would have given extraordinary powers to the military tribunals to judge both brigands and the *manutengoli* who aided them.

In August 1863, the Parliament passed the infamous Pica Law, according to which military tribunals were charged with judging and executing all the members of brigand bands and their accomplices who resisted the Italian army. Eight military tribunals were set up in the majority of the provinces of the continental Mezzogiorno, "encircling"—in the words of Roberto Martucci—"the provinces of the former Bourbon kingdom into a repressive web of draconian measures."[85] According to Martucci, "in practice these tribunals ended up being true military commissions which were charged with the task of formalizing the judgment over preordained brigands' executions."[86] Commenting on the Italian government's implementation of even harsher repressive measures and protesting against the suspension of civil liberties in the Mezzogiorno, the October—November 1863 issue of the Jesuit review *La civiltà cattolica* reported that, "the military [remedy] consists in the state of siege, with which all the provinces infested by the brigandage will have to comply. This is already put in practice, and three-quarters of the Kingdom of Naples live, at the very moment in which we write, in a state of suspension not only of constitutional, but also of civil liberties."[87]

[84] See Molfese, "Il brigantaggio meridionale," 86–87; Martucci, *L'invenzione dell'Italia unita,* 322–28; and Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia moderna,* Vol. V, 179–91.

[85] Martucci, *L'invenzione dell'Italia unita,* 336.

[86] Roberto Martucci, *Emergenza e tutela dell'ordine pubblico nell'Italia liberale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1980), 110.

[87] Quotation from Martucci, *L'invenzione dell'Italia unita,* 337.

Between 1863 and 1864, the military tribunals held 3,600 trials and judged more than 10,000 people who had been charged of brigand behavior; at least 6,000 of the 10,000 people judged were peasants, a clear indication that the agrarian working class was at the heart of the struggle. According to Franco Molfese, there is little doubt that class struggle was the central motive behind the "great brigandage": "it should be enough to prove it the fact that almost all the *capibanda,* their seconds-in-command, the casualties, and the large majority of the tens of thousands of convicted [individuals] belonged to the 'peasant class' (that is the poorer part of the peasantry, with little or no land)."[88] Together with them, a large part of the population that belonged to the landed peasantry, several small proprietors, and some noble and bourgeois landowners also gave a decisive contribution to the persistence of the guerrilla warfare acting as *manutengoli.*

At the beginning of the same year, 1863, in which the Pica Law was passed, a parliamentary commission traveled through all the areas of the Mezzogiorno that were infested by brigandage. Led by Left Member of Parliament Giuseppe Massari, the commission produced a report that perceptively analyzed and identified the causes of the peasant revolt that was taking place in most of the southern provinces. According to the *Massari Commission's Report,* brigandage was stronger where peasants were poorer; in certain regions of Apulia, where peasant insurgences were endemic, the commission noted that all of the land was in the hands of a few proprietors, while the peasants were reduced to starvation. The commission recommended the formation of a class of small proprietors in those areas of the South where landless peasants were in the majority and where there was the possibility of redistribution of government lands.[89]

In the parliamentary debate that followed the presentation of the *Massari Report,* one member of the commission, Left MP Stefano Castagnola, remarked that "those people have true hunger for land . . . if you could make proprietors out of those brutish peasants (*caffoni*) . . . who, for a combination of factors, support the brigands . . . from that day you would consider the question of the brigandage resolved."[90] Despite the parliamentary debate and the Massari Commission's clear recommendations, no corrective measure was taken toward creating a class of small peasant landowners. Instead, later that year, with the passing of the Pica Law, the government increased the repressive measures and resolved to make widespread use of the army. The intent was to both diffuse the peasants' rage at the failure to resolve the agrarian question, and to crush once and for all peasant resistance in the Mezzogiorno.

By February 1864, 116,000 soldiers were engaged in military operations against the brigands in the Mezzogiorno, almost half of the entire Italian armed

[88] Molfese, "Il brigantaggio meridionale," 95.

[89] See Pedio, *Il brigantaggio meridionale,* 131–33; and Martucci, *L'invenzione dell'Italia unita,* 328–33.

[90] Parliamentary Acts, Camera dei Deputati, Discussions, 31 July 1863, 815.

forces.[91] To adapt the army to the needs related to the defeat of the guerrilla activities, the government created new corps of mounted National Guard (*Guardia nazionale mobile*). At the same time, the military officers implemented tactics that recall Sherman's concept of "total war", with the destruction of villages and civilians' houses and the imprisonment, if not the summary execution, of a number of people suspected either of being brigands or of supporting them.[92] Under the conditions set by the Pica Law—which remained in effect until December 1865—the army made ample use of its extraordinary powers, with disregard for the most elementary civil rights and despite the constant protests voiced by the foreign public opinion. By the end of 1865, the so-called "great brigandage" was over; the peasant insurgence had been mostly defeated and the most dangerous mounted bands had been annihilated. This result had cost an appallingly large toll in human lives. The official statistics report that 5,212 individuals—brigands and *manutengoli*—were either killed in military operations or executed. The total number of civilians who died over the four years, though difficult to estimate, was likely much higher.[93]

DEPENDENCY AND EMIGRATION

Having compared the accomodationist stance of the African American freedpeople and the armed revolt staged by southern Italian peasants in regard to land redistribution, we can now better understand why the agrarian question was not solved in either region. This common failure, in turn, led in both regions to the perpetuation of the conditions of dependency of the agrarian working class on the landowners. Left with no means to guarantee their economic emancipation, African American freedpeople and southern Italian peasants remained subject to the authority of the landlords who exploited them through abusive sharecropping agreements and usurious practices, and made widespread use of violence to keep them working in the fields.

In the short-term, the perpetuation of conditions of dependency prevented the two landless peasantries from organizing protest movements, or providing leadership for class struggle in the countrysides. In the longer term, it prompted a large wave of migration from the two Souths toward more industrialized regions of the world. Interestingly, while African Americans migrated exclusively to the northern United States, southern Italians migrated both to the northern United States and to other countries such as Canada and Argentina. The timing of the two migratory movements was also different: southern Italians left their country in the largest numbers from the last two decades of the nineteenth century until World War I. During this same period, African Americans migrated primarily within the American South; their first Great Migration to northern cities did not begin until near the end of World War I.

[91] See Molfese, "Il brigantaggio meridionale," 86–87.
[92] See Martucci, *L'invenzione dell'Italia unita,* 287–96, 301–3.
[93] See Molfese, *Storia del brigantaggio,* 419.

In the United States, the question of land confiscation and redistribution in the South resurfaced again after the Civil War, during the period of Congressional Reconstruction, when radical Republicans dominated national politics. Thaddeus Stevens and George Julian argued in Congress that "confiscation was a logical part of emancipation," and that it was the only way to destroy the land monopoly of the planter class, but they met with little or no support and confiscation never became a part of the Reconstruction Acts of 1867.[94] The failure of Radical Reconstruction to address the problem of land reform was accompanied by a resurgence of systems of unfree labor under which the landless African American peasantry suffered extremely exploitative conditions. Through the system of sharecropping and the widespread use of coercion, planters managed to retain control of the African American workforce. And yet, as Steven Hahn has pointed out, the freedpeople "widely rejected and contested the authority of their former owners in face of formidable obstacles."[95]

Among the most striking evidence of their resistance to the planters' authority was a withdrawal of African American women from the fields during the early years of Reconstruction. In 1866 and 1867 women played a crucial role in the expansion of domestic production, especially in areas such as the South Carolina low country.[96] Women, therefore, took the opportunity to tend the domestic plots or engage in other activities outside agriculture. Both southern landowners and federal officials complained that African American women refused to work in the fields and simply attributed the phenomenon to their idle nature. Planters went so far as to appeal to the Freedmen's Bureau to force wives to enter into labor contracts, so that they would return to the fields. As Steven Hahn has noted, what both southern landowners and federal officials "failed or refused to see was a process of reorganization and renegotiation designed to limit the discretionary power of employers, better protect family members, and redeploy the labor force to the advantage of free households."[97]

Initially, sharecropping worked as a compromise between the freedmen's desire to control their own work and the planters' need to recruit a cheap agricultural workforce.[98] African American sharecroppers owned neither the land nor the instruments to work it, and they were thus in an extremely vulnerable economic position in times of economic crises. As cotton prices fell and labor demands intensified, many found themselves in a cycle of debt that eventually led to peonage.[99] Much as southern Italian landowners forced peasants to work

[94] Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865–1877* (New York: Vintage, 1965), 126.
[95] Hahn, "Politics of Black Rural Laborers," 113.
[96] Saville, *Work of Reconstruction,* 131.
[97] Hahn, "Politics of the Black Rural Laborers," 117. See also Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1985), 59–60.
[98] See Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 2d ed.).
[99] See especially Wiener, *Social Origins;* and Jay R. Mandle, *Not Slave, Not Free: The African American Experience since the Civil War* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992).

more to repay debts incurred through usurious land leases, southern planters kept African American sharecroppers under their heel. Only with the advent of New Deal agrarian reforms in the South in the 1930s, and the rapid mechanization of agriculture during and after World War II, were the ties of obligation and servitude between African American peasants and their landlords severed. In the words of Alex Lichtenstein, "the African American peasantry that emerged from Reconstruction was at last scattered and constituted as a modern working class" on its way to proletarianization.[100]

However, between the 1860s and the 1930s, with the recrudescence of the white landlords' power and the rise of segregation, many African American peasants chose to head North, where life in the industrialized cities promised more opportunities for freedom. Roughly 1.5 million African Americans migrated from the South between 1917 and 1930. They ended up living in the newly formed ghettoes of the northern cities and became a consistent part of the urban working class in the North. While many men found jobs in rising mass production industries such as meatpacking, the majority of both men and women were employed in domestic service.[101]

Southern Italian peasants followed a largely similar trajectory. The single most important difference was that in Italy possibilities for resolution of the agrarian question, such as that offered in America by the period of Radical Reconstruction, were never present. As a consequence, land redistribution among southern peasants was hardly an issue for post-1865 Italian governments. To be sure, after the defeat of the peasant guerrillas in the South, the Italian government did pursue a policy of draining substantial capital from agriculture for conversion into industrial investments. According to Bruno Bongiovanni, however, "the period of development that began in 1866–1867 and lasted until the general recession of 1873–1874 did not produce appreciable benefits for the masses in the South." Especially after the adoption of the grist tax, which provoked widespread riots throughout the Mezzogiorno, the southern Italian working class felt as if "the economic pressure was a sort of economic state of siege continuing the politico-military state of siege of the early years of the [Italian] kingdom."[102]

Together with economic pressures, peasants continued to experience various forms of exploitation. The defeat of the "great brigandage," though followed by a minor wave of brigands' activities until 1870, allowed the landlords to continue to employ usurious practices and unequal agricultural arrangements under the protection of the government. This was especially so after the elections

[100] Lichtenstein, "Was the Emancipated Slave," 137.

[101] See Carole C. Marks, "In Search of the Promised Land: Black Migration and Urbanization, 1900–1940," in William R. Scott and William G. Shade, eds., *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), 182–85.

[102] Bruno Bongiovanni, "The Question of the South," in Calabrese, ed., *Modern Italy,* 96. See also Guido Pescosolido, "Arretratezza e sviluppo," in Giovanni Sabbatucci and Vittorio Vidotto, eds., *Storia d'Italia, Vol. II: Il nuovo stato e la società civile, 1861–1886* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1995), 161–71.

of 1876 and the rise of a Left majority which represented a considerable part of the southern landowning interests in the Italian parliament. All the while, the landlords made widespread use of coercion and violence to keep the peasants in place. As a result, according to John Cohen and Giovanni Federico, "as late as [World War I], the population census classified more than half of the rural population [of Italy] as landless labourers (*braccianti*)," with especially high numbers in the Mezzogiorno.[103] The inability of the majority of the southern Italian peasantry to be economically emancipated without their owning land, in turn, caused the continuation of its dependency on the landlords' power. It simultaneously hindered the possibilities for collective action by the agrarian working class in the Mezzogiorno.[104]

Not until the period after the Second World War, when the question of land redistribution in the South surfaced again in Italian national politics, did the peasants manage to translate their need to actively continue their class struggle with the landlords into an organized protest movement. At that time, thousands occupied the *latifondi* with the help of the trade unions.[105] By then, however, large numbers of peasants had already left the Mezzogiorno in search of freedom and economic independence,[106] much as African Americans had departed the American South. According to Piero Bevilacqua, "between 1876 and 1914 well over 5,400,000 people left the Mezzogiorno"; many came from the same regions that had been the epicenter of brigandage in the 1860s such as Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, and Calabria.[107] Over 3.5 million southern Italians—more than twice the number of African Americans who took part in the Great Migration—ended up in the northern U.S. cities. There, they faced discrimination and were forced to cluster in particular urban areas, though to a lesser degree than their African-American counterparts. Still, both African-American and Italian migrants constituted a substantial part of the industrial working class employed by the factories of the northern United States.[108]

[103] John Cohen and Giovanni Federico, *The Growth of the Italian Economy, 1820–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 36.

[104] See Romanelli, *L'Italia liberale,* 182–97; and Adrian Lyttelton, "Landlords, Peasants, and the Limits of Liberalism," in John A. Davis, ed., *Gramsci and Italy's Passive Revolution* (London: MacMillan, 1979), 125–27.

[105] See Bevilacqua, *Breve storia,* 95–97.

[106] See Molfese, *Storia del brigantaggio,* 410.

[107] Bevilacqua, *Breve storia,* 60.

[108] See Donna Gabaccia, "Two Great Migrations: American and Italian Southerners in Comparative Perspective," in Enrico Dal Lago and Rick Halpern, eds., *The American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno: Essays in Comparative History* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 215–32.