DE-CENTRING THE SOUTH: AMERICA’S NATIONWIDE WHITE SUPREMACIST ORDER AFTER RECONSTRUCTION*

Writing in the New York Freeman on 28 May 1887, ten years after the end of Reconstruction, T. Thomas Fortune called for a national Afro-American League to fight rising racial injustice in the Southern states of the USA. Fortune castigated lynching, the suppression of black voting rights, inequities in school funding, chain gangs, the ‘tyranny’ of segregated railroads and the denial of equal rights and equal access to public and private accommodations.1 One of the period’s most prominent African American leaders, Fortune had wide experience of America’s race problem. Born a slave in Florida in 1856, Fortune lived in Delaware and Washington DC after the Civil War before returning to Florida. He then left the South for good in 1879 and moved to New York, where he edited a series of influential African American newspapers. At the Afro-American League’s first meeting Fortune called on the delegates, mostly from the Northern and Western states, to stand ‘as representatives of 8 million freedmen, who know our rights and have the courage to defend them’. Thus, African Americans beyond the South would, on behalf of their Southern counterparts, ‘face the enemy and fight inch by inch for every right he denies us’.2

Yet just over a decade later, Fortune found himself fighting racial oppression, ‘inch by inch’, much closer to home. In 1900 a race riot devastated New York city’s Tenderloin district. Following a spate of assaults, mob violence broke out late on the night of 15 August. The New York Times reported that a crowd of a thousand people ‘started to clean the streets of

* The authors would like to thank Steve Kantrowitz, Jay Sexton and Richard M. Valey for their comments on previous drafts of this article.


doi:10.1093/pastj/gtl023
Negroes . . . Every car passing up or down Eighth Avenue between the hours of 8 and 11 was stopped by the crowd and every negro on board was dragged out, hustled about, and beaten until he was able to break away. Some shouted ‘lynch the nigger’. One man tied a clothes line to a lamp-post, looking for someone to lynch. The largely Irish police force often treated black victims with contempt and encouraged the mob. Frank Moss, who collected the testimony of eighty victims, concluded that ‘it was the night sticks of the police that sent a stream of bleeding colored men to the hospital’. No records were kept of how many people were injured. But despite the fact that most black victims stayed at home, ‘afraid to trust themselves to the mercy of the crowds on the streets while on the way to a police station or hospital’, the emergency staff of three New York hospitals worked through the night to treat cracked skulls. With Moss and other New Yorkers, Fortune organized a Citizens’ Protective League, which fought, unsuccessfully, to persuade the mayor to bring rioters and complicit policemen to justice.

Fortune’s experience of racial injustice outside the South was by no means unique. In this article we contend that Southern white supremacy was constructed in conjunction with, rather than in opposition to, developments in the rest of the country after Reconstruction. In the national government, federal officials did not just acquiesce in the Southern counter-revolution but promoted a nationwide order of white supremacy. At the grass roots in the North and West, there were not only isolated instances of racism, but a systematic and effective drive to establish white supremacy that mirrored developments in the South. Considering the relatively small number of black Americans in Northern and Western cities teeming with immigrants,

4 Ibid., 17 Aug. 1900.
5 Citizens’ Protective League, Story of the Riot (New York, 1900), 8, 70. For Irish hostility to black Americans, see Noel Ignatiev, How the Irish Became White (New York, 1995).
6 Citizens’ Protective League, Story of the Riot, 2.
the prominence of specifically anti-black behaviour is remarkable.9

Scholars have long recognized a general retreat from Reconstruction’s egalitarian ideals about race across many aspects of American life during the late nineteenth century, from Supreme Court rulings upholding segregation and presidential attitudes that abdicated responsibility on the question of racial equality, to rising racism in popular and intellectual culture.10 Yet the South is treated as exceptional, a section apart. Invariably, the national downturn in race relations is presented as the backdrop to the ‘betrayal of the negro’ and the reversal of Reconstruction in the South. For example, in his pioneering study of Northern and national race relations, Rayford Logan described the years after Reconstruction, 1877–1901, as ‘the consolidation of white supremacy in the South and Northern acceptance of victory for the “Lost Cause”’.11 Scholars have stressed the significance of this ‘Northern acceptance’ of, and thus partial responsibility for, Southern white supremacy.12 But the North is portrayed as a relatively safe if less than ideal haven, to which many persecuted leaders escaped in the late nineteenth century, to be followed by hundreds of thousands of African Americans fleeing the South during the great migration from the First World War onwards.

In some respects, the South did seem distinctive in privileging white supremacy. After all, Massachusetts was hardly Mississippi. Some 90 per cent of African Americans lived in the

11 Logan, Negro in American Life and Thought, 12.
South, the vast majority recently freed from slavery. Grappling with the destruction of the master–slave relationship in rural areas was one of the central features of the postbellum South.\(^{13}\) The counter-revolution in the South after Reconstruction — culminating in the turn-of-the-century imposition of white supremacy — was as dramatic as it was ugly. By the start of the twentieth century the so-called 'Jim Crow' South was uniquely the home of constitutional disfranchisement, state-sponsored segregation, widespread spectacle lynching and black rural poverty.\(^{14}\) By contrast, some Northern and Western states passed civil rights laws during the late nineteenth century, the leading civil rights organizations of the early twentieth century were based in the North, and the national Republican Party remained ostensibly biracial throughout the period.

Nonetheless, a closer look at race relations beyond the South reveals that their trajectory followed a markedly similar pattern across the country. This nationwide scope of rising white supremacy is underscored by widespread resistance by African Americans to their deteriorating status not just in the South but throughout the North and West, and as far as possible in the national state. This was not a uniformly bleak picture. After Reconstruction, there were a number of exceptional moments of biracial politics in Northern and Western communities, and in the federal bureaucracy black Americans could expect meritocratic employment opportunities until the 1900s. However, as the recent historiography of the South has shown, there were many such moments — maybe many more — in the post-Reconstruction South too.\(^{15}\)

Quite why the nationwide character of white supremacy has been overlooked is open to several interpretations. In part,

\(^{13}\) James L. Roark, *Masters without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 1982).

\(^{14}\) 'Jim Crow' refers to a minstrelsy figure, but was one term used to denote the system of white supremacy in the South.

it is simply because little has been written on race relations beyond the South or in the national state during this period.\textsuperscript{16} Scholars who have looked beyond the South mostly seek to explain the national acceptance of the Southern retreat from Reconstruction,\textsuperscript{17} or focus on the abolitionist period,\textsuperscript{18} the origins of ghetto formation,\textsuperscript{19} the migration experience,\textsuperscript{20} the careers of African American leaders\textsuperscript{21} or the responses of elite African Americans to deteriorating race relations and migration.\textsuperscript{22}

While there have been some pioneering case studies, there has been no systematic study of the lived experience of African Americans beyond the South that is comparable with the work on the


\textsuperscript{17} To a significant degree Logan’s pioneering work falls into this category.


South itself. Systematic studies of lynching, disfranchisement, segregation and economic repression invariably focus on the South alone, or mention areas beyond the South only in passing. Considering the interest in white supremacy in the turn-of-the-century South, and in race relations in the North and West and in the national state in other periods, this lacuna in the literature is surprising.

We aim therefore to de-centre the South by exploring the system of white supremacy both locally in the North and West and in the national state. Our approach rests on four proposi-

23 The various studies cited above have not been brought together systematically in a way that compares with Woodward, Strange Career of Jim Crow, or more recently Hahn, Nation under our Feet.


27 For this interpretative task, we draw on primary materials, especially with regard to lynching, urban violence and the federal bureaucracy; and on the findings of the scholarly literature which relates to race and American political development in this period.
DE-CENTRING THE SOUTH

In a series of articles on 'The Black North' for the New York Times published in late 1901, the African American scholar and civil rights advocate W. E. B. Du Bois concluded that 'the Negro problem is not the sole property of the South'. Du Bois was correct that all regions owned the 'Negro problem'. Considering the severe downturn in Southern race relations at the end of the nineteenth century, and the high level of migration within the South, it is notable quite how few black Southerners moved to other parts of the United States in this period. The great migration did not begin until the First World War era, almost a generation after the Southern rise of white supremacy. The lack of job opportunities in the North for black migrants provides one key to understanding this delayed migration, and is telling in itself. But there were a variety of disincentives to migrate. As in the South, African Americans in the North and West were deliberately and decisively marginalized at the polls, were routinely barred from much of the labour market, suffered mob violence and were often segregated.

29 This was not because African Americans were unable to move when better opportunities seemed on offer. Movement between plantations was a feature of Southern life in this period. See also Nell Irvin Painter, Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction (New York, 1992).
White supremacy in the late nineteenth-century North and West built on a long tradition. Although the Northern states were free from slavery in the antebellum era, this did not mean that they were free from racial oppression. For example, Edward Turner, a historian at the University of Michigan, in his prize-winning *The Negro in Pennsylvania* (1911), concluded that ‘the history of the relations between the negro and the white man in Pennsylvania is largely the history of increasing race prejudice’. Emancipation merely served to heighten white supremacist attitudes, and ‘occasionally some horrible act of cruelty was committed, as it would appear, merely for the sake of the sport’. White Pennsylvanians petitioned the state legislature to prevent migration of former slaves into the state. Turner’s choice of topic was enlightened, but his conclusion was telling. Reflecting the prejudices of his era, Turner blamed racial tensions on the victims: both those who were successful, for their economic threat, and those who were poor, for their susceptibility to Vice.

In American collective memory the Civil War was fought over the issue of slavery, but again this should not be mistaken for racial egalitarianism in the Free States. By 1865, at the end of the Civil War, only five states allowed black men to vote on the same basis as white men. Racially motivated mob violence occurred in most Northern states in the early years of the war, while many black soldiers and former slaves were appalled at the racism of white Union soldiers. In Philadelphia, former slave and Civil War hero Robert Smalls, fresh from stealing a Confederate ship, was ejected from a streetcar and forced to walk to the navy yard. Out West, the four thousand black Californians were barred from voting, jury service, testifying in court, homesteading or marrying across the colour line.

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30 See Litwack, *North of Slavery*.

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(cont. on p. 221)
Even at the height of Reconstruction, as radical Republicans legislated on behalf of the Southern freedman, there was only a tentative commitment to civil rights within the loyal states. African Americans in most parts of the North and West were as dependent on Reconstruction legislation as were their Southern counterparts. Nowhere was this clearer than with regard to the suffrage in the period between the Civil War and passage of the Fifteenth Amendment (1870). Despite petitions by African Americans, in all but two states in the North and West the issue of black suffrage was variously ignored, postponed or rejected by state legislatures or in state referendums. Indeed, African Americans voted in the South before they voted in most Northern states. Similarly, African Americans in the loyal states variously found themselves denied civil rights and excluded from employment. Four of the six civil rights petitions sent to Congress before the 1875 Civil Rights Act came from black groups in Northern states that had passed state civil rights laws. Out West, the Choctaw and Chicksaw Indians enacted Black Codes and embarked on a period of terror to drive out black freedmen.

Voting
African Americans outside the South, then, did not enter the post-Reconstruction era in a position of strength. After Reconstruction, despite vigorous organizing and protest, their status deteriorated. Formal disfranchisement may have been a Southern affair, but African Americans across all regions became impotent in electoral politics. Thomas Fortune complained at the end of 1885 that 'not one black man in New York State enjoys the respect or confidence of the Republican politicians ... the same is true of Boston, Providence, Philadelphia and

(n. 36 cont.)
37 Fishel, ‘Northern Prejudice and Negro Suffrage’, 19. Although Republicans dominated the Western states, petitions by blacks for the suffrage in these states were all ignored: Taylor, In Search of the Racial Frontier, 123.
38 Foner, Reconstruction, 471–2.
other Northern cities'. He could have added Chicago, where that very summer the governor received a delegation of white voters but refused to see an African American delegation. But New York may well have been the worst. Almost half a century passed between the Fifteenth Amendment and the election of the city's first black officeholder.

Some of the weakness of black politics outside the South arose because the black population was invariably too small to make an impact. Before the great migration, only 10 per cent of the nation's black population lived outside the old confederacy. The low overall numbers, though, do not tell the whole story. Concentrated in the cities, by 1910 African Americans were over 5 per cent of the population in Philadelphia, almost 10 per cent in Indianapolis, over 15 per cent in Baltimore and over 25 per cent in Washington. Rather, the black vote was systematically marginalized across the Northern states. As in the South, the marginalization of the black vote followed a series of steps, including violence, gerrymandering and diminishing influence within either party. By contrast with most of the South, this process did not culminate in constitutional disfranchisement. The lower numbers of African American voters outside the South meant that such measures were not necessary (in some Southern states, black voters were actually the majority). But by the same token, the fact that relatively small black voting populations were deliberately targeted is telling.

The Republican attitude to black voters ranged from indifference to outright opposition. In Pittsburgh, Boston and elsewhere, Republican Party leaders rejected out of hand candidates nominated by African Americans. In 1895 black newspapers in New York angrily headlined the news that one black man had even been excluded from a Republican district club where blacks

41 Fishel, 'North and the Negro', 470.
42 Ibid., 472; and see Thomas A. Guglielmo, White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890–1945 (New York, 2003).
43 Edwin R. Lewinson, Black Politics in New York City (New York, 1976), 34.
44 By 1900, over 70 per cent of black Northerners lived in cities, representing 2.5 per cent of the North's urban dwellers overall: Howard N. Rabinowitz, Race, Ethnicity, and Urbanization: Selected Essays (Columbia, Mo., 1994), 220.
45 For a clear description of this step-by-step process in the South, see Kousser, Shaping of Southern Politics.
46 Fishel, 'North and the Negro', 472.
formed one-fifth of the district.\textsuperscript{47} Towns near the Mason–Dixon Line endured electoral violence and disfranchisement.\textsuperscript{48} From 1878 Congress appointed commissioners to govern the city of Washington. The deal was ostensibly about finance, whereby the federal government would pay half of the city’s expenses, but it also deftly removed the threat of black voters.\textsuperscript{49} Even in those cities renowned for good race relations, the minimal strength of the black vote was often deliberately whittled down further. Black voters in Boston were unusually well represented politically before 1897, often holding at least one seat on the City Council. At the end of the century, however, the Council redrew voting districts to the disadvantage of black voters.\textsuperscript{50}

The lack of political influence was reflected in a concomitant lack of patronage even in Republican states and cities. To be sure, a handful of black appointments were lucrative and influential, and of course almost any job was worth having. But on the whole, patronage jobs were very much the proverbial crumbs left over from the white man’s table. Often they amounted to little more than a few janitors or doormen. In 1894 the new Republican council in Seattle appointed only one black man, as a dog-catcher — and his salary was cut in half.\textsuperscript{51} In Wilmington, Delaware, where black voters helped Republicans regain power in the 1890s, party bosses even refused to appoint black janitors, claiming that black appointees became ‘stuck up.’\textsuperscript{52}

African Americans did not withdraw from politics. In Seattle, for example, almost half of the city’s black residents were members of a political club in the 1890s. And just occasionally, black

\textsuperscript{47} Lewinson, \textit{Black Politics in New York City}, 35.


\textsuperscript{50} Kantrowitz, ‘Radical Reconstruction in the Deep North’; Schneider, \textit{Boston Confronts \textbf{Jim Crow}}, 7. Indianapolis switched to an at-large system in 1909, and no black candidates were elected until 1932; 1890 marked the high point of black political influence in Philadelphia. Emma Lou Thornbrough, \textit{Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century} (Bloomington, 2000), 28; Roger Lane, \textit{Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia, 1860–1900} (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), 76.

\textsuperscript{51} Quintard Taylor, \textit{The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle’s Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era} (Seattle, 1994), 42.

\textsuperscript{52} Hoffecker, ‘Politics of Exclusion’, 68.
voters were able to make an impact. In the black majority town of Brooklyn, Illinois, black voters gained control of local government in 1886.\footnote{Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, America’s First Black Town: Brooklyn, Illinois, 1830–1915 (Urbana, 2000), 118–23.} In Boston in the 1870s and 1880s, Ohio in the 1880s and Detroit in the 1890s, black voters exploited close elections to gain electoral victories and Republican patronage.\footnote{Kantrowitz, ‘Radical Reconstruction in the Deep North’; Percy Murray, ‘Harry C. Smith–Joseph B. Foraker Alliance: Coalition Politics in Ohio’, Jl Negro Hist., lxviii (1983), 172; Gerber, Black Ohio and the Color Line, 231–6; Katzman, Before the Ghetto, 193–200.} In 1882 black residents in the black eighth ward in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, even swung behind the Democrats after the Republican mayor refused to appoint a black policeman. Thereafter, they began to hold public offices, including the post of alderman.\footnote{Gerald G. Eggert, “‘Two Steps Forward, a Step-and-a-Half Back’: Harrisburg’s African American Community in the Nineteenth Century’, in Joe William Trotter Jr and Eric Ledell Smith (eds.), African Americans in Pennsylvania: Shifting Historical Perspectives (University Park, 1997), 244.} In general, though, the Democrats were an unpalatable alternative.

Overall, the brief moments of black electoral influence, usually during or soon after Reconstruction, were very much the exceptions that proved the rule. They were far less consequential than some of the political breakthroughs made by African Americans in the South.\footnote{See, for example, Dailey, Before Jim Crow; Lawrence C. Goodwyn, ‘Populist Dreams and Negro Rights: East Texas as a Case Study’, Amer. Hist. Rev., lxxvi (1971), 1437–49.} Meanwhile black women were marginalized in the suffrage campaign across the nation.\footnote{Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850–1920 (Bloomington, 1998), 120.}

**Jobs**

The marginalization of African Americans in politics was reflected in and reinforced by discrimination in other aspects of society. Their economic position was especially dire. Chicago’s livestock market was the largest in the world, employing some 20,000 workers. In 1890 only one worker was an African American.\footnote{Christopher Robert Reed, All the World Is Here! The Black Presence at White City (Bloomington, 2000), 14. See also Thornbrough, Negro in Indiana, 349; Cha-Jua, America’s First Black Town, 154.} Most urban black workers, male and female, worked as basic labourers or as personal or domestic servants.
In Chicago and Detroit, some two-thirds of black men and over 80 per cent of black women had such occupations. These proportions of unskilled workers were on a par with those in the South. Out West, where most African Americans were recent migrants, the proportions were even higher.  

The racial face of the market was not just the result of starting on the margins after Reconstruction. Rather, it reflected a struggle for control similar to the struggle over labour in the South. To quote Du Bois's survey of Northern race relations again, 'the candid observer easily sees that the negro's economic position in New York has not been determined simply by efficiency in open competition, but that race prejudice has played a large and decisive part'. In Illinois, at least fifty towns had unwritten ordinances prohibiting black workers from crossing city limits. African Americans in the North and West often complained about economic discrimination more than anything else. In 1899 the Indiana Afro-American Conference observed that 'The greatest enemy of the Negro is the trade unionism of the North'. Most labour unions were formally lily-white. In California, union pressure forced the expulsion of black employees from the food industry during the 1890s. Even in Boston white craftsmen took steps to bar blacks from training as their equals. The exploitation of racial divisions in the workforce by Northern employers paralleled the tactics of Southern elites in response to the threat of a biracial populist movement.

60 For the struggle over labour in the South, see Hahn, Nation under our Feet; Eric Arnesen, Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863–1923 (New York, 1991).
63 See Gaines, Uplifting the Race, 44. See also R. J. M. Blackett, Beating against the Barriers: Biographical Essays in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American History (Baton Rouge, 1986), 341; Taylor, Forging of a Black Community, 14–15.
64 Thornbrough, Negro in Indiana, 356.
65 Taylor, In Search of the Racial Frontier, 199.
Not surprisingly, therefore, the pattern of resistance to economic discrimination was similar to that in the South. Black workers used strikes and go-slow. The black unemployed sometimes turned to strike-breaking, and by the early twentieth century flocked to African American agencies such as the National Urban League.\(^{68}\) Denied access to jobs in the North and West, black workers were left with little option but to stay in the South. The great migration out of the South would not begin until the First World War, when white employers were forced to seek black workers.\(^{69}\)

Violence
Marginalized in politics and the market, African Americans beyond the South were also vulnerable to racially motivated violence. As the great anti-lynching campaigner Ida B. Wells complained, ‘lynching mania has spread throughout the North and middle West’.\(^{70}\) On the face of it, lynching was overwhelmingly a Southern problem. According to statistics compiled by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), some 2,409 of the 2,522 black Americans lynched in America during the years 1889–1918 were Southerners (see Map 1), with relatively few black Americans lynched in the Northern and Western states.\(^{71}\) But a closer look at the data shows Wells to be more accurate than she may have realized.


\(^{69}\) The First World War slowed the immigration of white European workers, while many native white workers were involved in the war effort.

\(^{70}\) Ida B. Wells-Barnett, \textit{On Lynching: Southern Horrors, A Red Record, Mob Rule in New Orleans} (repr. New York, 1969); Ida B. Wells-Barnett, ‘Lynch Law in America’, \textit{Arena}, xxiii (1900). See also S. Laing Williams, ‘Frederick Douglass at Springfield, Mo.’, \textit{African Methodist Episcopal Church Rev.}, xxiii (1906), 9: ‘How accurately did [Frederick Douglass] prophecy that in a few years lynching in the Northern States would be almost as possible as in Arkansas or Mississippi. How that baleful prophecy has been fulfilled, we can all bear sorrowful testimony’.

\(^{71}\) These years were the height of the lynching epidemic in the South. The data on lynching is drawn from the NAACP’s records, later published in NAACP, \textit{Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889–1918} (New York, 1919). The data on populations is taken from United States Bureau of the Census, \textit{Historical Statistics of the United States} (cont. on p. 227)
Relative to the size of the black population in each state,\textsuperscript{72} the probability of an African American being lynched was not uniformly higher in the Southern states than in the rest of America. As can be seen in Map 2, there is a slight decrease in the probability of lynching towards the north and north-east, but the pattern is far from the expected picture of a concentration mainly in the South (and in the Deep South in particular). In fact, this state-level analysis reveals that black Americans were most likely to be lynched in any given year in the Western states of Wyoming (ranked first) and New Mexico and Oregon (ranked second equal). Moreover, the Northern states of Nebraska (ranked 14), Missouri (15) and Iowa (17) all come out significantly ahead of a number of Southern states, including South Carolina (20), Virginia (25) and North Carolina (27).

A number of states in the far North and the West witnessed no lynchings, but in most cases they had tiny black populations (often too small even to be listed in the census). Only four states with a black population of over 5,000 did not witness a lynching of a black American, and these were confined to the extreme north-east. In these states, this was most likely due to the lack of lynchings of victims of any colour rather than lack of racist sentiment.\textsuperscript{73} Indeed, a comparison of the likelihood of white and black people being lynched in any given year (by comparing the ratio of white and black lynchings to the size of the white and black populations respectively) reveals that black people were some ten times more likely to be lynched than white people across the Western and Southern states, but they were more than forty times as likely to be lynched as white people in Northern states.

Moving from the state to the regional level, the South becomes less exceptional still. The probability of an African American being lynched in the South as a whole in any given year in this period was triple that of the North, but only one and a half times

\textsuperscript{71} cont.)


\textsuperscript{72} Population totals were taken from the 1900 census because it is approximately the mid point of the period (also, the number of African Americans in each state is reasonably stable across the 1890, 1900 and 1910 censuses).

\textsuperscript{73} According to NAACP statistics, 702 white people were lynched in this period, the majority in the South.
MAP 1
NUMBER OF LYNCHINGS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS 1889–1918

States with no lynchings during this period

- 1–30
- 31–60
- 61–90
- > 150
The probabilities of being lynched in each state in any given year were calculated by dividing the number of lynchings in each state (1889–1918) by the state black population and number of years (30). States with no lynchings are left blank. Of these, only Mass. and NJ had a black population of 30,000 or more in the 1900 census. (In most cases the population was less than 3,000.) See also n. 72.

MAP 2
AVERAGE ANNUAL PROBABILITY OF LYNCHING FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS BY STATE 1889–1918
that of the North Central region and less than that of the West (see Map 3). This regional map confirms the picture that there was no simple North–South divide for the lynching of black Americans. If anything, the divide is West–East. Moreover, calculating the likelihood of lynching relative to the rural black population rather than the total black population — to allow for the fact that most lynchings occurred in the countryside — underscores this West–East picture (see Map 4). According to our analysis, black Americans were equally likely to be lynched in the rural North and South in any given year, with the rate in the rural North Central region slightly exceeding that of the rural South, and with the rate in the rural West double that of the rural South.

As in the South, some of these lynchings were spectacle lynchings. In 1899 Georgia's governor cited the example of Indiana when condoning Georgia's own lynching record. Shamed into action, Indiana's state legislature passed a law so that any sheriff who surrendered a prisoner would be removed from office. It had little effect. The following year, four more black men were killed in front of crowds of thousands. In the final case, the local sheriff stood in the crowd to watch the victim burn.

Lynching was only one expression of anti-black violence. By contrast with the South, most black Americans in the North lived in urban areas. In cities North and South, racial violence was far more likely to take the form of gang attacks or race riot. In many ways, riots were simply mass lynchings in an urban setting (although fatalities from race riots were not included in lynching statistics). As with spectacle lynchings, riots were often directed at recent migrants for allegedly attacking an authority figure or

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74 The four regions — North East, North Central, South, and West — are those used in the census. A regional map has the advantage of avoiding the rather patchy appearance of the state map, where a difference of a single lynching in states with tiny black populations can cause the probability of lynching to fluctuate from zero to high probability. The authors would like to thank Paul Chaisty, Daniel Goodman and Raphael Hauser for their help in preparing the maps.


76 In his landmark study *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944) the Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal reckoned that a 'riot' would be better described as a 'massacre . . . a magnified, or mass, lynching' (p. 566).
molesting a white woman.\textsuperscript{77} In cities across the nation, when gangs went ‘hunting the nigs’\textsuperscript{78}, they invaded black neighbourhoods.\textsuperscript{78} The riot in New York in 1900 was only one of any number of incidents, setting a chilling pattern for twentieth-century urban race relations.\textsuperscript{79} As in the South, African Americans met violence with numerous appeals for protection, or with violence in return. During the New York riot, a \textit{Times} reporter was taken aback at the sight of Vincent Streets, a black painter, emptying his pockets after being arrested: ‘He was a walking arsenal. First came from his pockets a huge loaded revolver, then a razor, after that a dirk knife, and finally a dozen cartridges’.\textsuperscript{80}

As in the South, it was black men who were disproportionately tried, and convicted, of interracial murder.\textsuperscript{81} And as in the South, mobs were ignored, and often supported, by local law enforcement officials. In many Northern cities, policemen were drawn from the very immigrant groups competing with black migrants for jobs and housing. During the New York riot, for example, the \textit{Times} reported that ‘The policemen, according to their own statements, are feeling vindictive against the colored people generally’.\textsuperscript{82} ‘One neatly dressed woman’, threatened by the crowd, appealed to a policeman for help. ‘“Go to h—l, d—n you” said the policeman, turning away from her’.\textsuperscript{83}

\textbf{Segregation}

In this setting, it is unsurprising that segregation and exclusion characterized Northern society, just as Jim Crow swept across the South. Yet on the face of it, civil rights laws in the North and West seemed to provide a bulwark against discrimination. Between 1884 and 1905, some seventeen Northern and Western states adopted civil rights laws, and many introduced laws requiring

\textsuperscript{77} On Southern lynchings, see Brundage, \textit{Lynching in the New South}; Tolnay and Beck, \textit{Festival of Violence}.


\textsuperscript{79} Major riots occurred in Akron, Ohio (1900), Springfield, Ill. (1908), Coatesville, Pa. (1911), East St Louis (1917), Chicago and Washington DC (1919).

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{New York Times}, 17 Aug. 1900.

\textsuperscript{81} McKanna, \textit{Homicide, Race, and Justice}, 54; Lane, \textit{Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia}, 142–3.

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{New York Times}, 17 Aug. 1900.

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Ibid.}, 16 Aug. 1900.
The probabilities of being lynched in each region in any given year were calculated by dividing the number of lynchings of black Americans in each region (1889–1918) by the regional black population and number of years (30). See also n. 72.

MAP 3
AVERAGE ANNUAL PROBABILITY OF LYNCHING FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS BY REGION 1889–1918
The probabilities of being lynched in each region in any given year were calculated by dividing the number of lynchings in each region (1889–1918) by the regional rural black population and number of years (30). See also n. 72.

MAP 4
AVERAGE ANNUAL PROBABILITY OF LYNCHING FOR RURAL AFRICAN AMERICANS BY REGION 1889–1918
integrated schools or equal provision for black education. Frequently, such laws were proposed by black legislators, or lobbied for by black voters.  

State laws failed in practice to empower African Americans as much as they promised on paper. Indeed, even on paper they were sometimes limited. In Ohio, the Equal Rights League opposed the state’s first civil rights law for failing to include equal protection in restaurants and barber’s shops or on juries. Plaintiffs were liable for all costs, and there were no set minimum fines. Across the North and West, municipal authorities found state laws easy to circumvent. In 1882 in Louisville, Kentucky, the education board ignored a federal decision to equalize facilities. Only black teachers had morality clauses written into their contracts. School segregation was the law in Arizona from statehood, but in small schools ‘a screen around the desk of a Negro child’ was considered sufficient.  

Still, having the law on the statute books did allow some leverage for protest. Indeed, in the racial atmosphere of the late nineteenth century, courts were often the most productive terrain of battle for African Americans. Considering the costs and potential obstacles, it is striking that more suits were brought in the late nineteenth century than during the antebellum and Reconstruction eras. Often, it was elite African Americans who lodged integration suits, appealing to their higher class status — rather than to universal human rights — as justification for integration. Education was the most common battleground, both through law suits and boycotts, and the most successful battleground too. Aside from education, though, black Americans were unable to exert much influence through the law.

84 Thornbrough, Negro in Indiana, 259; Dale, ‘“Social Equality Does Not Exist”’, 316, 324; Gerber, Black Ohio and the Color Line, 242–3. See also Kousser, Dead End, 9.  
85 Gerber, Black Ohio and the Color Line, 235–40.  
86 Wright, Life behind a Veil, 65–9; Eggert, ‘“Two Steps Forward, a Step-and-a-Half Back”’, 245; Gerber, Black Ohio and the Color Line, 267.  
89 According to Morgan Kousser, ‘Northern white liberals . . . and their black allies’ won 75 per cent of cases filed during 1880–1900, compared with 60 per cent during the nineteenth century overall: Kousser, Dead End, 7. See also J. Morgan Kousser, ‘Before Plessy, before Brown: The Development of the Law of Racial Integration in
From the 1890s and 1900s most elite African Americans — in the North as in the South — recognized that integration was a vain dream, and instead turned to the issue of ‘racial uplift’ to try and bolster the rise of the whole race by improving the conditions and morals of the black poor. More generally, it was increasingly clear that judges could interpret the law as they chose. Black campaigners were further hampered by their lack of voting power and economic resources. Chicago’s Commission on Race Relations found that the average civil suit payment was less than the cost of bringing the case. In many states, few cases were brought at all. Northern cities were not segregated residentially as they would be with the rise of ghettos after the great migration. But it was the lack of a developed urban transport system, not a lack of prejudice, which explains residential integration.

By the end of the century, state civil rights laws had little relevance to discriminatory race relations on the ground, even in the case of education. A group of New England black men met in September 1886 ‘because the colored citizen is discriminated against in so many depressing and injurious manners not withstanding the letter of the law does not favor the same’. There was no single pattern of race relations outside the South, but the situation deteriorated even in cities with a reputation for better race relations. On 16 August 1900 another group of New England black men met in Boston. The previous day’s riot in New York confirmed their fears. ‘This condition exists in the South and is gradually working North. Murders of colored men

(n. 89 cont.)


94 Fishel, ‘North and the Negro’, 482.

95 Most individual cities had an internally incoherent variety of segregation practices. See, for example, Randall B. Woods, ‘Integration, Exclusion, or Segregation? The “Color Line” in Kansas, 1878–1900’, in Billington and Hardaway (eds.), *African Americans on the Western Frontier*, 134; Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 216.

in the South to-day, and same in New York to-morrow. That is the order of events lately'. 97 What made this local-level deterioration so significant was that it was mirrored in the polity’s national state. 98

II

WHITE SUPREMACY IN AND FROM WASHINGTON

Political sociologists have compounded the problem of over-emphasizing the South’s distinctiveness by treating the US polity either as a weak national state incapable of enforcing equality of rights of citizenship throughout its territory, 99 or more commonly as a sectional state in which the North and the South had considerable autonomy. 100 Both characterizations pay insufficient attention to the racial dimensions of government policy from the 1880s which contributed to the spread of segregation across the nation.

In the first place the post-Reconstruction decades were ones of political dynamism and change in which political parties and their representatives in national institutions such as Congress and the presidency took leading roles; and in which administrative reform enhanced the capacities of the federal bureaucracy to

99 This view arises both from comparisons with the power of the state in other countries and from consideration of the institutional complexities posed by the US separation of powers and federalism. For instance, Theda Skocpol refers to ‘America’s relatively weak, decentralized, and fragmented state structure’: Theda Skocpol, ‘Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research’, in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (eds.), Bringing the State Back In (New York, 1985), 27.
100 Thus Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens argue that extensive decentralization permitted local racial arrangements to endure, arrangements which ‘allowed the South to politically exclude blacks totally and install a system of debt peonage which met their needs for a large supply of cheap labor’: Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens and John D. Stephens, Capitalist Development and Democracy (Oxford, 1992), 129. This analysis overemphasizes the regional character of bureaucratic racialism: segregationist practices were not simply a Southern phenomenon, as they imply, but were encountered both in Northern cities and in the federal government’s own administrative institutions.
DE-CENTRING THE SOUTH 237
govern nationally. Although Congress’s bold Reconstruction experiment in expanding national power had ended by 1873, the legacy of an activist national state endured. Federal public policy flourished, driven by populist demands and reform-minded progressives. Moreover, it was not simply the case that Republicans, who were notionally committed to the idea of equality, proved ineffective in the federal government because of the ability and determination of Southern politicians to defend their preferences in Congress and the courts. White Southern Democrats had limited influence in federal institutions in this period. Between 1865 and 1912, Southerners gained only 7 out of 31 Supreme Court appointments, 2 out of 12 House speakerships and 14 out of 133 cabinet positions. Rather, in the years after Reconstruction, the main branches of government — the courts, Congress, the presidency and the bureaucracy — collectively did more to cement than to mitigate a national white supremacist order. In response, black Americans expressed anger at Republican leaders and federal officials. Federal policy reflected choices by national policy-makers about the extent to which federal authority would be used to uphold the civil rights enshrined during Reconstruction in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Not without irony, it was through citation of precisely these constitutional sources that civil rights were established nationwide from the 1960s, so their neglect in the post-Reconstruction era warrants explanation.

The Court
If any national political institution exercised its power decisively to entrench and legitimate a national system of segregated race

101 See, for example, Skowronek, Building a New American State.
104 This would not be the case until the New Deal, when Southern Democrats had a hold on the national Democrat government of Franklin Roosevelt.
relations, it was the Supreme Court acting in the momentous *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896 to permit the segregating ‘separate but equal’ policy. As the legal historian Michael Klarman recently observed, ‘without Northern acquiescence, Southern racial practices could not have become so oppressive’. But Klarman’s interpretation is probably too cautious to grasp fully the nationwide effects of the Court’s decision on racial order in the United States.

The *Plessy* decision rendered segregation constitutionally legitimate across the whole of the United States and not simply the South. In having this consequence, *Plessy* was the culmination of earlier judicial decisions and an expression of an invigorated American nativism and racism. Most notable was the Court’s judgment in the *Civil Rights Cases* of 1883 that invalidated the 1875 Civil Rights Act forbidding discrimination in public transportation. Deciding the *Civil Rights Cases*, the Court took a minimalist view of federal powers. Importantly, one rationale given for this interpretation was the antebellum practices of racial discrimination in places of public accommodation in Northern states.

Writing the Court’s majority opinion in the eight-to-one judgment, Justice Joseph Bradley not only found no protection against racial discrimination in public places in the Fourteenth Amendment but warned African Americans against further appeals to constitutional protection of equal rights, declaring, in an infamous phrase, that having assumed the ‘rank of mere citizen’ they could no longer be ‘a special favorite of the laws’. Emancipation marked a ‘stage in the progress’ equivalent to citizenship, a citizenship openly compromised and

106 Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York, 2004), 12. Curiously, this point undermines Klarman’s own claim that ‘it is unlikely that contrary rulings would have significantly alleviated the oppression of blacks’ (p. 10).


108 In the words of Justice Joseph Bradley, ‘mere discrimination on account of race or color were not regarded as badges of slavery’: *Civil Rights Cases* 109 US 3, 25 (1883).

tempered by racism and inadequate legal redress against racism. According to Bradley,

there were thousands of free colored people in this country before the abolition of slavery . . . yet no one, at that time, thought that it was any invasion of his personal status as a freeman because he was not admitted to all the privileges enjoyed by white citizens, or because he was subjected to discriminations.110

In his sole dissent, John Marshall Harlan (a former slave-owner from Kentucky) made no effort to contain his incredulity at his colleagues’ implausible interpretation of the congressional intent of the Reconstruction Amendments: ‘it is, I submit, scarcely just to say that the colored race has been the special favourite of the laws’.111 But Bradley’s views were in step with white public opinion. The influential Nation noted ‘the calm with which the country receives the word that the leading section of the celebrated Civil Rights Act of 1875 has been pronounced unconstitutional’.112

Black leaders, though, were far from calm. Henry McNeal Turner, an influential campaigner from Georgia, called the 1883 decision ‘barbarous’, one which should be ‘branded, battle-axed, sawed, cut and carved with the most bitter epithets and blistering denunciations that words can express’. It was ‘a crime more infamous in its character than was ever charged upon the devil’.113 Turner’s comments were widely read across the nation. Riots by black Texans in response to the 1883 decision had to be put down by the state militia. Black leaders were especially incensed because Republican justices, not least Bradley, supported segregation as much as Democrats did. After the 1883 decision, the African Methodist Episcopal minister Revd Robert Seymour resolved that ‘the black man has a good cause for divorce from the Republican party on the ground of desertion’.114

The 1883 cases proved to be a decisive expression of judicial approval for segregated race relations as a de jure institution. It transplanted the Court’s limited interpretation ten years

110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
114 Cox Richardson, Death of Reconstruction, 198; Gaines, Uplifting the Race, 28.
earlier, articulated in the *Slaughterhouse Cases*,\(^{115}\) of the federal government's powers, legislated in the Fourteenth Amendment. The 1883 judgment was much more significant, however, for America's racial order, because unlike the *Slaughterhouse Cases* it dealt explicitly with the rights of citizenship of African Americans. There were some exceptions to this constitutional and judicial journey to the *Plessy* decision — notably the 1884 *ex parte Yarbrough* ruling that the Fifteenth Amendment gave a national right, federally enforceable, to vote — but their infrequency confirms that *Plessy* was the culmination of, rather than an aberration from, previous judicial rulings.

Thus Supreme Court decisions after Reconstruction pre-dated and spurred on the establishment of segregation and disfranchisement in the South. At the local and state levels in the North, segregation did not depend on legal justifications, and de facto segregation endured and dilated. Moreover, laws proscribing segregation were rarely enforced with much effect.\(^{116}\)

### Congress, the Republican Party and the Lodge Force Bill

Scholars have long recognized that Congress failed to counter the rise of lynching and the imposition of segregation and disfranchisement in the South. But democracy was not betrayed just because Northern politicians were too weak, too weary or too worried about other things to interfere. Rather, congressional behaviour was marked by several decades of deliberate action — and deliberate inaction — in response to the rising tide of white supremacy across the country. Congress pulled back from the issue of securing racial equality early in Reconstruction, largely ignored the issue during the 1880s, failed to pass the Lodge Bill of 1891 that would have increased federal power to secure African American voting rights, and weakened black voting thereafter.

On the face of it, Republican politicians stood apart from Democrat racism.\(^{117}\) A Republican-dominated Congress passed the Reconstruction Amendments, and Republican congressmen

\(^{115}\) *The Slaughterhouse Cases* 16 Wall, [83 US] 36 (1873).

\(^{116}\) For differing accounts of this issue, see Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights*, 27; Kousser, *Dead End*; Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*.

\(^{117}\) Some of the fiercest defenders of white supremacy were Democrats representing Northern states.
did not indulge in the race-baiting that typified Southern politics at the end of the century. Before disfranchisement, black voters remained the core supporters of the Southern Republican Party. Republican Congresses acted as a restraining force on the Democrat takeover of the South. Between 1880 and 1901, Republican Congresses seated twenty-six times Southern Republicans or Populist congressional candidates who had been defeated through fraud. Most importantly, the Senate came within one vote of passing the Lodge Bill.

Yet Republicans were also complicit. The retreat from Reconstruction occurred on the Republicans' watch. Between 1868 and 1912, the Republican Party controlled the Senate for forty years and the House for twenty-six. Democrats had full control of Congress for four years only. On votes concerning the rights of black Americans, only Republicans proved willing to step across the aisle. The Reconstruction Amendments had been a momentous advancement of black rights, although narrower than the more radical Republicans had hoped for. But after Reconstruction, Congress was unwilling to take responsibility for protecting these rights. With hindsight, the Fifteenth Amendment marked the high point of congressional intervention, and arguably Congress retreated from Reconstruction at greater speed than Southern states, where biracial politics continued until late in the century. In 1870 the Republican *New York Times* reported that 'a feeling prevails that the work of the Republican Party . . . ends with the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment'. This feeling was soon followed by action. Congressional Republicans decided, crucially, against removing Reconstruction from the oversight of the Court, in the full knowledge that the Court was likely to circumscribe federal protection for black Southerners.

From this moment on it was clear that Republican commitment to rights of citizenship had waned. During the 1880s, the issue of protecting the suffrage dropped off Republican Party platforms, only to re-emerge briefly in 1890 in a 'perfunctory

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118 Kousser, *Shaping of Southern Politics*, 263.
Republican concern to retain Southern black votes was offset by the loss of support from white voters elsewhere who disapproved of the Republican defence of black voting. Lack of Republican interest translated into a lack of regulatory interest. Between 1871 and 1893, only 5.3 per cent of expenditure for federal election officers was spent on former Confederate states. Although the Department of Justice mounted nearly 5,000 criminal indictments in the South between 1870 and 1894 under the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, only a quarter came after the end of Reconstruction in 1877, and the vast majority of these occurred before 1884.

Most importantly, Congress failed to respond to Southern disfranchisement. Because the Lodge Bill failed so narrowly, and because of the emotive rhetoric in favour of equal rights deployed by some of the bill’s supporters, it is possible to draw a contrast between Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans. Yet the failure to pass the bill during the Republican-dominated Congress of 1889–91 is telling. It would have been in the Republicans’ self-interest. Strategists calculated that thirty seats out of 123 in the former slave states had been ‘stolen’ during the elections of 1888, enough, if retained, to have swung that election decisively to the Republicans. Above all, Republican Speaker Thomas ‘Czar’ Reed famously forced an end to the minority party’s ability to obstruct House business. During this 51st Congress, the Republicans passed such wide-ranging measures as the McKinley Tariff Act, the Dependent Pension Act and the Land Revision Act, but the Lodge Bill ‘was the one element of their legislative package that Republicans failed to enact’. Congress did not even pass the Blair Education Bill which would have supported African American schooling. After congressional repeal of the election laws during 1893–5, the Republican Party abandoned black voters completely.

123 Bensel, Political Economy of American Industrialization, 171.
126 Schneider, Boston Confronts Jim Crow, 31.
In part this desertion was due to practical political calculations. Some Republicans reckoned that the promotion of the Lodge Bill had led to the Democrat sweep in Congress in 1893. After the critical realignment of 1896, when Republicans gained new voters in the West, they no longer needed to protect their party in the South. But this desertion also reflected the increasing impotence of black voters throughout the nation to stem white supremacy. After Reconstruction, both parties in the North and South had made some appeal for the black vote. But with the disfranchisement and marginalization of black voters across the nation, black voters had no leverage on either party. Increasingly few black delegates attended the national Republican convention, and George White from North Carolina, the last black congressman, left Congress in 1901. No black person would be elected to Congress for another thirty years.

Black spokesmen were less concerned with the causes than the effects of their isolation. As one black Charlestonian wrote to Henry Lodge, ‘the failure to pass [your] Election bill has knocked us completely out in this state’. In his farewell speech, White denounced the unchecked ‘race hatred . . . and prejudicial and unjust public sentiment’ that prevented black Americans from enjoying their rights of ‘manhood and womanhood’. Despite their emotional ties to the party of Lincoln, and the importance of patronage, black leaders condemned the Republican Party soon after Reconstruction, and well before Southern disfranchisement. In 1883 T. Thomas Fortune reckoned that the ‘Republican party . . . eliminated the black man from its politics’. By the end of the century, some black leaders, including Fortune, had turned away from the Republican Party.

129 Richard Bensel argued that the desertion of Southern black voters by the Republicans stemmed from their ‘unwillingness to disturb the now pacified southern periphery and thus destroy the stable economic environment for northern investment and commerce’: Bensel, Sectionalism and American Political Development, 77.
130 Schneider, Boston Confronts Jim Crow, 32.
131 Congressional Record, 56th Congress, 2nd Session, xxxiv/2 (Washington DC, 1901), 1637–8.
132 Beatty, Revolution Gone Backward, 59.
The significance of Republican complicity was not just to exclude black voters in the South but to permit the diffusion of segregation in national institutions throughout the United States. The Republican Party enjoyed fourteen consecutive years of unified government after 1896. Yet Republican Congresses did not even seek to end segregation in areas under congressional jurisdiction, such as the Senate restaurant. By choosing not so to act (for example, by not enforcing section two of the Fourteenth Amendment, which reduces the congressional representation for any state which deprives some of its voters of the right to vote on racial grounds), the party fanned Southern exclusions and gave added legitimacy to mistreatment and racism in the North and West.

The Presidency
Time and again black spokesmen hoped to find an ally in the White House. The writer and early NAACP leader James Weldon Johnson even wrote one of Theodore Roosevelt's campaign theme tunes, 'You're All Right Teddy'. After all, every president save one between 1877 and 1913 represented the party of Lincoln. Yet time and again black spokesmen complained about presidential attitudes and actions. Furious at Benjamin Harrison's removal of patronage for many black Southerners, one resident of St John's County, Florida, warned in 1890, 'The negro [will] have nothing to do in the future with the White Louse'.

A closer look at these complaints across the period reveals that black spokesmen did not simply blame presidents for failing to restrain Southern Jim Crow. Rather, they blamed successive presidents for helping to create the problem of white supremacy throughout the nation. These complaints were justified. By the time America joined the First World War, successive presidents had connived in the reversal of Southern Reconstruction, deliberately sidelined black Republican leaders and virtually with-

133 Valelly, Two Reconstructions.
drawn all patronage from African Americans throughout the country.¹³⁷

After Reconstruction, Republican presidents signalled ambivalence, at best, about interfering in the South. Indeed, even before the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, Ulysses Grant (in office 1869–77) made the widely publicized observation that 'the whole public are tired out with these annual autumnal outbreaks in the South . . . [and] are ready now to condemn any interference on the part of the Government'.¹³⁸ Though the first post-Reconstruction presidents had some credentials as advocates of black citizenship (and Chester Arthur (1881–5) was moved to tears when the black Fisk choir sang at the White House), it was not reflected in practice. Rutherford Hayes (1877–81) told a biracial audience in Atlanta that ‘your rights and interests would be safer if this great mass of intelligent white men were let alone by the general Government’.¹³⁹ James Garfield (1881) admitted in private that he ‘never could get in love with [the] creatures’, and Arthur effectively abandoned the Southern black vote.¹⁴⁰

In 1885 Grover Cleveland was elected the first Democrat president since the Civil War. But his behaviour was hardly out of step with that of his Republican counterparts of the era. Indeed, he appointed more Northern black men to minor offices than had his predecessors, and Republicans even rejected his black nominee to Recorder of Deeds in Washington DC on partisan grounds.¹⁴¹ The Washington Bee, an African American newspaper, said Republican leaders had driven a ‘political stiletto into the hearts of thousands of Negroes’.¹⁴²

At the turn of the century, presidents again made rhetorical gestures of support for black Americans. Benjamin Harrison (1889–93) called on Congress to pass the Lodge Bill. Theodore Roosevelt (1901–9) called for a ‘square deal for black and white alike’, famously hosted black leader Booker T. Washington for

dinner in the White House and sought his advice on patronage appointments thereafter. At his inaugural, William Taft (1909–13) said 'personally, I have not the slightest race prejudice or feeling'.\(^{143}\) Yet their agendas actively discriminated against black Americans. Harrison supported the promotion of lily-white Republicans, and he did not deliver the Lodge Bill, despite Republican majorities in Congress. Roosevelt’s relationship with Washington was simply a prominent case of selective preferment — successive presidents advanced the careers and influence of black leaders who fitted their view of what a black man ought to be and do. In any case, Roosevelt decreased the amount of patronage for black men, attributed lynching to the rapist tendencies of black men, published his views that black soldiers were cowardly and pointedly discharged over 160 black soldiers without honour after a shooting incident in Brownsville, Texas.\(^{144}\) Taft virtually ended patronage for African Americans altogether.

**The Federal Government**

The way in which segregated race relations spread in the federal bureaucracy differs from the narratives recounted for the other institutions of the national state. A key reform, the Pendleton Act of 1883, seemed to express the radical promise of Reconstruction since it established the principle of meritocratic standards for admission to the civil service. It was not until the 1910s that segregation became firmly rooted. The intervening years could be seen as the unthinking acceptance of Southern practices and values in Washington. But such an account would underestimate how segregation became a standard aspect of the civil service. Rather, the pattern shows the slower pace of reform in the bureaucracy than was possible in other areas of the state.\(^{145}\)

As in the denial of voting and economic rights to African Americans in the North, so the dissemination of segregated race relations in the federal government’s agencies and departments was not an inevitable process. Rather segregation was a

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policy initiated in federal government departments by senior officials encouraged by cabinet members. This segregationist turn is doubly significant: not only did it introduce and perpetuate racial inequalities in the bureaucracy, but it eroded the potential for equal treatment which was a legacy of Reconstruction. Looking at the debates around the Pendleton Act in comparison with other areas of the national state, one clearly sees that the original intention was to build a bureaucracy based on equality of opportunity in recruitment.

Indeed, black Americans could realistically identify the federal civil service as a source of employment through to 1912. But segregated race relations were increasingly observable during the Roosevelt and Taft presidencies, and the trend intensified from 1913. Woodrow Wilson appointed outspoken segregationists to cabinet posts, many of whom proceeded to segregate their departmental employees. Segregation was discussed at the cabinet in April 1913, when the postmaster general reported the difficulties for white men in integrated departments: ‘it is very unpleasant for them to work in a car with negroes where it is almost impossible to have different drinking vessels and different towels, or places to wash’. As a consequence, he was ‘anxious to segregate white and negro employees in the departments of Government’. These cabinet-level initiatives were complemented by the newly majoritarian Democrats in the House of Representatives. In May 1914, the Civil Service Commission required applicants to attach a photograph to their application forms, leading to a decline in black appointments. The requirement remained in place until 1940.

Segregation shaped promotion prospects and set limits on how African Americans could respond. Protesting against these limitations endangered their employment — and this absence of protest was paradoxically then cited as supporting evidence by the segregationists. All that civil rights organizations could do was

147 Quoted in The Cabinet Diaries of Josephus Daniels, 1913–1921, ed. E. D. Cronon (Lincoln, Nebr., 1963), 32.
monitor discrimination. An NAACP investigation at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing early in the Wilson administration found that ‘colored clerks are segregated in work by being placed at separate tables and in separate sections of rooms whenever possible’. Furthermore, ‘colored girls no longer use the lunch rooms which for nine years they have been using in common with white girls’.

It might be assumed that Wilson’s Southern origins, and his Southern-dominated cabinet, explain segregation in the civil service. But the story is more complex. One correspondent of the NAACP concluded that segregated race relations were begun ‘on the initiative of subordinate chiefs who would like to have done it long ago’. These subordinate chiefs received no discouragement from their superiors, and the chief executive himself concurred in the new policy. Such a Southern-centred explanation also fails to explain why those introducing segregation mostly denied that this was what they were doing, a caveat with which few Southern racists would have bothered. So whereas in the South segregation was celebrated by its promoters, in the federal government it was presented in apologetic terms. Wilson’s Treasury Secretary and son-in-law William McAdoo wrote to the editor of the African American World, ‘separate toilets . . . assigned to the blacks are just as good as those assigned to the whites . . . I do not know that this can properly be called segregation’.

The very fact that the federal government introduced segregation without an electoral or economic motive reveals the extent to which white supremacy had become an ideological conviction at the highest levels of the national state.

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151 Letter from John Palmer Gavit to Oswald Garrison Villard, 1 Oct. 1913, ibid., 350.

152 Letter from Secretary McAdoo to F. I. Cobb, editor of the World, 26 Nov. 1914, in Papers of Woodrow Wilson, ed. Arthur S. Link, xxix (Princeton, 1979), 261 (emphasis original); letter from William Gibbs McAdoo to Oswald Garrison Villard, 27 Oct. 1913, ibid., xxviii, 453.
The course of the ‘negro question’ after the Civil War followed a similar trajectory across all regions and aspects of the United States. The status of black Americans improved under Reconstruction, and then deteriorated towards a low point by the end of the century. This does not mean that the trajectory of race relations over time was uniform throughout the United States. In the federal bureaucracy, for example, the retreat from Reconstruction was almost inevitably slower than in local politics. White supremacy also translated into action in different ways. However, variations in the imposition of white supremacy did not follow a simple sectional divide, with ‘radical racism’ confined to the South. The sections themselves were far from internally homogeneous, as the data on lynching shows. Above all, it was by no means the case that Southern states were the first to impose the various aspects of white supremacy. Indeed, African Americans in many parts of the South were relatively powerful politically in the first years after Reconstruction. Overall, whether black Americans were ultimately oppressed with a shout or a whisper, for political or for economic reasons, the effect was markedly similar.

Recognition of this nationwide character of white supremacy necessitates a second look at both the causes and the consequences of rising nationwide white supremacy after Reconstruction, and a reassessment of various aspects of race relations in the early twentieth century.

In the first place, this acknowledgement suggests that the South alone is an inappropriate framework for studies of many aspects of race relations in this period. The timing and nature of white supremacy in practice was determined by such variables as demographics, economics, class, occupation, gender, urban or rural location, and even the tone of skin colour. Many of these variables were pan-American. Any scholar seeking to investigate the rise of white supremacy in this period, therefore, would be advised to


154 On the idea of radical racism in the South, see Williamson, Crucible of Race.
look at comparative, connective and contrasting developments across the country as a whole. The struggles of the light-skinned black elite in Boston and Atlanta were similar, as were those of domestic workers in New Orleans and New York, those of miners in Alabama and Washington State, and those of black Republicans seeking patronage or redress in the courts across the country. Studying the nation also allows the testing of explanations for the rise of the white supremacy previously based on the Southern example. For instance, the gendered appeal to white manhood, honour and control of the household is not made as explicitly in the Northern context.  

The systematic imposition of white supremacy beyond the South after Reconstruction had significant, but mixed, consequences for race relations in the North and West and in the national state in the early twentieth century. The exclusion of black workers from major sectors of the Northern and Western economy during a period of industrialization set a pattern of racial exclusion and oppression at the workplace. American gross national product quadrupled between 1870 and 1900 but the economic status of African Americans deteriorated. In Philadelphia, for example, some 15 per cent of black men worked in skilled trades in 1870. By 1910, it was only 1 per cent.  

This pattern also helps to explain why black migrants to the North fared particularly badly in comparison with immigrant groups. They alone carried with them the stigma of blackness, a stigma reinforced by their role as strike-breakers. Forced into ‘dirty’ jobs or domestic service, black workers (as in the South) became associated with lowly status. By contrast, European immigrants were able to enter the melting pot and ‘become white’ (and often this whiteness was asserted in opposition to blackness).  

155 On the connection between gender and white supremacy in the South, see Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*.  
In local and state politics, on the other hand, the downturn in race relations was not disastrous in the longer term. Because African Americans were relatively few in number outside the South and were concentrated in urban pockets, the black vote was marginalized without recourse to state constitutional disfranchisement.\(^\text{158}\) It is quite possible that if migration had happened soon after Reconstruction, disfranchisement would have spread throughout the United States.\(^\text{159}\) Nonetheless, one unintended consequence of Reconstruction was the right of African Americans to vote outside the South. By the time of the major migrations of the twentieth century, further disfranchisement of any group was off the national agenda, and by this stage black workers had some resources with which to defend their citizenship rights. African American voting power in Northern cities (and after the Second World War in the West) would have major implications not just for race relations outside the South, but also for race relations in the national state, and thus, in turn, in the South.

In the national state, the rise of white supremacy had particularly damaging consequences for African Americans. The rise of \textit{de jure} segregated race relations coincided with the turn of the century's embrace of reformed government and bureaucratic expansion designed to produce the organizational capacity to extend positively the federal government's role in American society. This was a fatal consequence. Activism by the national state became associated with the enforcement of segregation and racism instead of their erosion. This pattern had two, inter-connected, expressions. First, during the 1910s and 1920s federal government policy fostered segregationist practices where they had not previously existed or had been muted.\(^\text{160}\) Second, these

\(^{158}\) See Orren and Skowronek, \textit{Search for American Political Development}.

\(^{159}\) There was a widespread attack on the right to vote in the late nineteenth century across the country. See Sven Beckert, 'Democracy in the Age of Capital: Contesting Suffrage Rights in Gilded Age New York', in Meg Jacobs, William J. Novak and Julian E. Zelizer (eds.), \textit{The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History} (Princeton, 2003).

\(^{160}\) Statistical data about black American employment in the US federal government collected by the NAACP in 1928 showed a decline in the number of African Americans and their increasing confinement to junior positions between the mid 1910s and the date of the study. 'Memorandum from Walter White to the Conference of Executives NAACP', 17 Oct. 1928: Library of Congress, Papers of the NAACP, Group I, box C403, file: 'Segregation — Federal Service 1928'. For a

\((\text{cont. on p. 252})\)
racially biased forms of government activism were the framework upon which the significant bureaucratic expansion associated with the New Deal and Second World War was imposed.\textsuperscript{161} 

Appreciation of the nationwide character of white supremacy prompts a reassessment of some aspects of civil rights protest at the turn of the century. Take the example of black leadership. Historians have long debated whether Booker T. Washington, who famously called on black Southerners 'to cast down your buckets where you are', was a prudent accommodationist or a self-serving race traitor.\textsuperscript{162} Whatever his motivation, Washington's contention that most African Americans had a 'better chance in the South than in the North' may have been valid. Meanwhile, the context of Northern racism suggests that the NAACP was quite a radical organization at its founding in 1909, even though its initial activities were moderate and often focused on the North, by contrast with later civil rights protest. The NAACP was, after all, founded in response to a race riot in Illinois in 1908, and Du Bois named the association’s magazine (the most important race publication of the early twentieth century) \textit{The Crisis}.\textsuperscript{163} 

Acceptance of the nationwide character of white supremacy also allows a reassessment of African American protest after this period. For example, compared with the heady interracial protest of the civil rights movement, the attempts at biracial organizing during the New Deal and the Second World War seem sporadic and faltering. But in contrast to the bitter history of race relations in the late nineteenth-century workforce, in Northern states in particular, even these scattered attempts at

\textsuperscript{n. 160 cont.} sceptical view of these trends, see Samuel Krislov, \textit{The Negro in Federal Employment: The Quest for Equal Opportunity} (Minneapolis, 1967).


\textsuperscript{162} For a recent critique of Washington as race traitor, see Kelly, 'Sentinels for New South Industry'. For a defence of Washington, see Adam Fairclough, \textit{Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890–2000} (New York, 2004).

\textsuperscript{163} Support for black nationalist Marcus Garvey, commonly associated with Harlem and the urban north, actually spread across the South, North and West of America. See Mary Gambrell Rolinson, 'The Garvey Movement in the Rural South' (Univ. of Georgia Ph.D. thesis, 2002).
biracialism show the significance of the challenge that the labour movement was to pose to American white supremacy. In the national state, it helps to explain the enthusiasm of black workers and leaders for the New Deal. Even though Roosevelt’s administration was often discriminatory (which in turn prompted further protest), it was a major advance on the white supremacist outlook of the federal government.

Finally, the prevalence of white supremacy beyond the South at the end of the nineteenth century provides a crucial context for the interpretation of Northern race relations during the first half of the twentieth century and beyond. For example, at the grass roots, it helps to explain the years of racial violence after the First World War. In the so-called red summer of 1919, at least twenty-five major riots broke out, mostly in Northern cities. Historians have explained this unprecedented wave of violence in the urban North in terms of economic, residential and labour tensions triggered by the great migration and post-war economic volatility. But the post-Reconstruction history of Northern race relations shows that such tensions did not reverse a more harmonious age, but were interpreted within the framework of an often violent white supremacist order. These and later riots, ghettoization, the fight against bussing and countless other examples of twentieth-century supremacist behaviour in the North and West were building on a longer tradition. In national memory, the Jim Crow era may somewhat conveniently belong to the South, but it should belong to America.

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