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Annika Polatsek April 4, 2023

The Atlanta Connection: C. Mildred Thompson, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Reconstruction Historiography

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Abstract

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While modern historians reject it, the Dunning School continues to inform the American public's memory of Reconstruction. In the early twentieth century when white Americans used historical memory as a means of reconciliation between the North and South, the Columbia University cohort gained national recognition. Atlanta was at the center of the construction of this historical memory. C. Mildred Thompson and W.E.B. Du Bois, two historians with ties to Atlanta, both wrote monographs on Reconstruction, though vastly different in their interpretations. Du Bois presented Reconstruction as a push towards true democracy in which African Americans played a pivotal role, whereas Thompson and her Dunning School peers centered racist Lost Cause ideology, which vindicated the South's side in the Civil War as noble and worthy of a continued fight. In tracking the engagements of Thompson and Du Bois without and within the historical profession, with one another, and their respective connections to Atlanta, this thesis argues that while racist scholarship informed and continues to inform public perception, Black scholars contested it long before the emergence of revisionist historians in the 1950-60s. Du Bois defined what it meant, in Atlanta and on the nation's stage, to stand up to the hegemony of white supremacy.

This thesis examines how historians with opposite viewpoints interact with one another and how the historiography, especially relating to a politically relevant topic, changes slowly and only with great effort. The aim of this thesis is to distinguish historiographical traditions to show that a counternarrative to the Dunning School existed before and inspired so-called revisionist historians in the latter half of the twentieth century. The first chapter covers Thompson and her monograph, the second Du Bois and his monograph, and the third chapter details the effects of revisionism on the profession. Historicizing historiography reveals how scholarly consensus evolves in response to social and political changes. In telling the parallel stories and analyzing the intersecting scholarship of Thompson and Du Bois, *The Atlanta Connection: C. Mildred Thompson, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Reconstruction Historiography* illustrates the transformation of historiography and the historical profession in the twentieth century.

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Dr. Montalvo not only introduced me to the Dunning School in her Old South class but to collegiate-level history. I took my first class in the department with her in my second semester of college. In that class I learned about the concepts of historiography and methodology, dissuading me of the notion that history was a mere study of facts and dates. She led a classroom in which I felt affirmed and trusted to work through complex ideas.

Dr. Rogers has been an encouraging presence throughout my time at Emory. During my first class with him, amidst the pandemic, he took the time to meet with every member of the class individually. As I took two more classes with him, I found supporting students to be a core principle of his. He is as dedicated to the work of being a teacher as he is to the work of being a historian.

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Introduction

In a notorious 1874 political cartoon, a white-robed Ku Klux Klansman and an unmasked man with a "White League" badge shake hands. Above the heavily-armed men, the words "THE UNION AS IT WAS. THIS IS A WHITE MANS [*sic*] GOVERNMENT" are emblazoned. Below, encased in the crest, is a Black family behind whom are depictions of a lynching and a burning schoolhouse; just above them reads "WORSE THAN SLAVERY." This Thomas Nast cartoon from an 1874 issue of *Harper's Weekly* represents the violence of the demise of Reconstruction.[1] The justification for this violence was the Lost Cause myth, which vindicated the South's side in the Civil War as noble and worthy of a continued fight. This myth extended to portray Reconstruction's failure as the victory the South deserved after years of humiliation. Three decades after the cartoon was published, the Dunning School, a group of historians in the early twentieth century trained by William Archibald Dunning at Columbia University, lent historical credibility to this narrative.

Reconstruction was a pivotal episode in American history. During the period, the federal government sought to integrate southern states back into the Union and define Black people as free, enfranchised citizens. Its abrupt end in 1877, however, ushered in a false memory of Reconstruction as a period in which corrupt northerners and freed people subjugated white southerners to rub salt in the wound of an already embarrassing military defeat. Ultimately it was the acceptance of this memory as fact that facilitated a post-Reconstruction reconciliation between the North and South, though it did not go unchallenged. In this thesis, I examine the struggle over the meaning and legacy of Reconstruction through the lens of the historical

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[1] Thomas Nast, *The Union As It Was*, Illustration, *Harper's Weekly*, October 24, 1874, Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/item/2001696840/.

profession. Specifically, I compare the work of C. Mildred Thompson, a student of Dunning and historian of Reconstruction in Georgia, and W.E.B. Du Bois, a prominent Black intellectual who challenged Dunning School scholarship.

Even as Dunning School historians argued that Reconstruction was a period of corruption, Black historians conversely presented the period as a push towards true democracy in which African Americans played a pivotal role. The way in which Reconstruction has been represented historically is of great importance because of its contribution to historical memory. The arguments presented by both Black and white historians fueled and continue to fuel the opinions held by Americans regarding Reconstruction's role in American history. C. Mildred Thompson and W.E.B. Du Bois, two historians with ties to Atlanta, both wrote monographs on Reconstruction that represent two vastly different interpretations in the historiography. This thesis explores the ways in which these scholars engaged with one another, but more importantly how their personal and professional backgrounds shaped them as individuals to answer the question of how academic historians propagate or challenge historical myths.

C. (Clara) Mildred Thompson is an interesting case study because not only was she William Archibald Dunning's only female PhD student, but also a liberal, relative to others of her time, whose family moved to Georgia *after* the Civil War. Her monograph, a history of Reconstruction in Georgia published in 1915, was well-received by fellow historians as an important scholarly contribution in a discipline that prized empirical research and professionalism. She went on to work at Vassar, first as a professor and later as a dean, making her a well-known academic who corresponded with important public figures like Presidents Harry Truman and Franklin D. Roosevelt (who lived in nearby Hyde Park), Harpo Marx, and Cecil B. DeMille. Her politics, gender, and ties to both the South and North set her apart from

the stereotypical Dunning student—mostly southern white males, some of whom returned home to teach. Yet her career demonstrates that someone with those different characteristics could and did perpetuate the harmful Dunning narrative of Reconstruction, which was nationally accepted at the time. She lived in Atlanta from her birth in 1881 until she went to college at Vassar in 1899 and returned in 1948 until her death in 1975, excluding a brief stint as dean at the College of Free Europe in the 1950s. Though she spent most of her academic career outside of Georgia, her magnum opus centered around Georgia and, upon returning, she took a professorial post at the state's flagship public university.

William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois, the first Black man to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University, published the seminal *Black Reconstruction* in 1935 and had Georgia ties as well. Du Bois lived in Atlanta from 1897 to 1910 and again from 1934 to 1944, serving as a professor at Atlanta University (now known as Clark Atlanta University). He wrote and edited some of his most famous works, including *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Black Reconstruction*, in Atlanta. He contested the arguments of Thompson and her peers, citing them in the last chapter of *Black Reconstruction,* "The Propaganda of History." He also corresponded with the Roosevelts and fellow Reconstruction historians like Benjamin B. Kendrick and Howard K. Beale. Though he had many career shifts, from sociologist to journalist to historian to activist, his contribution to Reconstruction historiography is one of his most important legacies. Du Bois's scholarship was central to Reconstruction historiography and Atlanta was central to Du Bois's scholarship.

Given their shared Georgia background, the fact that Du Bois and Thompson reached such different conclusions about Reconstruction reveals the influence of racial attitudes on historical scholarship. In depicting conceptions of Reconstruction across racial lines, as the first

challenges to Reconstruction historiography were made by Black scholars, this thesis acknowledges the scholarly consensus that the Dunning School narrative of Reconstruction reflected white supremacist assumptions. The binary, however, is not always stark, as Thompson and Du Bois engaged with each other's scholarship in mutual citations and emphasized similar themes and topics, like the importance of the Freedmen's Bureau. However, each scholar's assessment of the other and their divergent interpretations of the same topic demonstrate that the conclusions drawn from primary sources were not self-evident. Despite Thompson's demonstrated familiarity with Du Bois's work, he appears as an afterthought in her monograph, as there was no expectation that she meaningfully engage with the work of a burgeoning Black scholar. Du Bois, as a critic of the Dunning School, had the burden of proof and a well-established counterargument to attack. As a result, his articles and subsequent monograph present a more robust historical argument. This revisionist interpretation was deeply personal to Du Bois, which, instead of clouding his perspective, added a much-needed force to his assessments of the Dunning School.

This thesis engages with the historiography of Reconstruction, memory, and the historical profession itself. The foremost monograph on Reconstruction is Eric Foner's *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*.[2] More recent work like that by Heather Cox Richardson extends the classic periodization, while others like Kidada E. Williams (whose monograph extends to World War I) and Hannah Rosen center the terrorist violence perpetrated against African Americans.[3] Understanding the current historical conversation on

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[2] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

[3] Heather Cox Richardson, T*he Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post–Civil War North, 1865–1901* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation*

Reconstruction helps to form a basis of the histories untold or obscured by past historians of the period.

The Lost Cause is central to the Dunning School's narrative of Reconstruction. The Lost Cause primarily refers to the Civil War, but it also refers to the end of "corrupt" Reconstruction as the South's eventual victory.[4] Reconstruction memory does not exist without Civil War memory, but, as historically distinct periods, the Lost Cause tropes related to each are different. Though the focus of many of these monographs is Civil War memory, I use their sections on Reconstruction memory are used to understand Lost Cause mythology as it related to that period. Therefore, the work of David Blight, Karen Cox, Charles Reagan Wilson, and W. Fitzhugh Brundage are integral to the thesis in tracing the tropes of the Lost Cause and the historical context it provides for the worldview of a white southern historian like Thompson.[5]

Scholarship on the history of history as a discipline, the professionalization of history around the turn of the twentieth century, and the profession's changes during the twentieth century are captured in works by Peter Novick, August Meier, and Elliot M. Rudwick.[6] The

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South (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Kidada E. Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

[4] Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 264.

[5] Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*, 2nd ed. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019 [2003]). Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*, 2nd ed. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009 [1980]). David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2001). W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

[6] Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, John David Smith and Vincent J. Lowery ed. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky 2013). August Meier and Elliot M. Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, *1915-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

series of essays edited by John David Smith and Vincent J. Lowery and the two biographies of W.E.B. Du Bois by David Levering Lewis provide essential context and set forth arguments about Thompson, Du Bois, and the Dunning School with which this thesis contends.[7] While many scholars have examined Du Bois's scholarship, including Eric Foner, Thomas C. Holt, and others on *Black Reconstruction* specifically, only one published essay focuses on Thompson.[8] William Harris Bragg is the authority on Thompson, having written all the available secondary source information about her, and he characterizes her as a fundamentally liberal, "scientific" historian.[9] By placing Du Bois's dissenting voice in conversation with Thompson's, this thesis

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[7] David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race,1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993). David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight For Equality and the American Century,1919-1963* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2000).

[8] Eric Foner, "*Black Reconstruction*: An Introduction," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (2013): 409-418. Rebecka Rutledge Fischer, "Democracy Remains: The Hermeneutic Historiography of Black Reconstruction," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (2013): 507-527. Thomas C. Holt, "'A Story of Extraordinary Human Beings': The Sources of Du Bois's Historical Imagination in Black Reconstruction," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (2013): 419-435.

[9] William Harris Bragg, "C. Mildred Thompson: A Liberal among the Dunningites" in *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*. Smith, John David and Lowery, J. Vincent, ed (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 281-307. Following a positively-cited description of Thompson's work as "the best book on the subject," Bragg writes, "Nevertheless, during the last years of Thompson's life, the Dunning school—and by extension Thompson herself—would be deplored more and more frequently, as the academy moved evermore leftward… Thompson had been the most conspicuous liberal of the southern authors of the Dunning school state studies, but the increasingly 'politically correct' campuses of the 1990s and beyond would have considered Thompson's views as unfashionable as her customary pince-nez: anticommunist, anti–affirmative action, traditionally patriotic, and 'completely a product of the Western cultural tradition, which provided her frame of reference and principles for action.'" Instead of placing the onus on Thompson's use of racist tropes for the downfall of her scholarship, he places it on present-day politics. Foner also denounces Bragg's skewed argument on page xi of his foreword, writing, "Most of the writers in this volume attribute the eclipse of the Dunning School to the declining legitimacy of racism and the effect on historians of the modern civil rights revolution (sometimes called the Second Reconstruction). Bragg, however, explains the evolution of historical interpretation as having been brought about not by the inadequacies of the Dunning School but by the infiltration of the academy by 'the campus student radicals of the 1960s' and the triumph of the 'politically correct'—as if the Dunning School itself had not been deeply political."

shows that during the first half of the twentieth century, the historical profession ignored the now-renowned Du Bois and favored the now-obscure Thompson. In ignoring Du Bois's contribution, historians failed to challenge white supremacist assumptions.

The central primary sources in this thesis are scholarly works produced by the representative Black and white historians in the early twentieth century—*Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America* by W.E.B. Du Bois and *Reconstruction in Georgia: Economic, Social, Political 1865-1872* by C. Mildred Thompson. Using their published scholarship as primary sources reveals how historians defended their narratives of Reconstruction in professional settings. A few central moments of professional interaction are meetings of the American Historical Association (AHA), represented by conference papers and speeches. "Truth in History," Dunning's presidential address delivered in 1913, captures the rhetorical appeal made to truth by the Dunning School as a whole. Du Bois's conference paper "Some Actual Benefits of Reconstruction" (turned into an article entitled "Reconstruction and its Benefits" published by the *American Historical Review* in 1910) encapsulates his first foray into contesting the prominent interpretation of Reconstruction, which occurred with Dunning in the room. "Mirror for Americans: A Century of Reconstruction History," John Hope Franklin's 1979 presidential address, is a reflection on how far the profession had come. Revisionist arguments made post-Du Bois by Francis B. Simkins, Howard K. Beale, and T. Harry Williams also factor into this thesis's examination of *Black Reconstruction*'s effect on the historical profession. Correspondence with fellow academics and major historical figures further serves to facilitate investigations into interactions between historians and public figures regarding Reconstruction.

The thesis, which begins in the wake of Reconstruction and ends with Franklin's AHA presidential address, is divided into three chapters. Chapter One covers the period of 1881 to the 1910s, beginning with an examination of the Lost Cause and its applications. After a brief overview of the Dunning School and Thompson's upbringing, an analysis of the rhetorical and curriculum choices of Georgia's chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy serves to create the connection between the environment in which Thompson was raised and the scholarship she later produced. The role Atlanta and Thompson's early education played in her scholarship is detailed in her first published article, "Carpet-Baggers in the United States Senate" (1914), her dissertation-turned-monograph *Reconstruction in Georgia* and its reviews (1915), and her article "The Freedmen's Bureau in Georgia in 1865-6: An Instrument of Reconstruction" (1921). The chapter ends with a discussion of popular films and novels that perpetuated historical myths of Reconstruction and the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan.

The second chapter follows Du Bois from 1897, his arrival in Atlanta, to 1935, the year that *Black Reconstruction* was published. Beginning with a brief analysis of his early scholarship and its relation to Reconstruction history, the chapter demonstrates how Du Bois's time in Atlanta led him to his first foray into the historiographical conversation on Reconstruction at the AHA's 1909 annual conference. From 1910 to the early 1930s, Du Bois lived outside Atlanta working for the NAACP as the editor of their publication *The Crisis*. Several of his editorials at *The Crisis* and his early outlining of *Black Reconstruction* serve as evidence of his continued interest in Reconstruction. The chapter culminates in his return to Atlanta in 1934 and the publication of *Black Reconstruction*. The chapter concludes with a discussion of its famous epilogue, "The Propaganda of History," in which Du Bois directly addresses the Dunning School and its harmful influence on education and the profession.

Beginning in 1939, the third and final chapter covers the white historical profession's delayed response to *Black Reconstruction*. Thompson's participation in a roundtable, hosted by the Southern Historical Association in 1940, on Reconstruction revisionism demonstrates her continued engagement with the subject, as well as the relatively conservative reactions of white historians to Du Bois's contribution. What follows is a brief chronicle of Thompson's legacy into the late forties and Du Bois's meditation on the impact of *Black Reconstruction* based on personal correspondence extending into the sixties. The thesis culminates in the 1979 presidential address of John Hope Franklin, the first Black president of the American Historical Association, who chose to deliver his remarks on Reconstruction historiography and make a call to historians for a sufficient revisionist survey of the period.

This thesis examines how historians with opposite viewpoints interact with one another and how historiography, especially relating to a politically relevant topic, changes slowly and only with great effort. The aim of this thesis is to distinguish historiographical traditions to show that a counternarrative to the Dunning School existed before and inspired so-called revisionist historians of the latter half of the twentieth century. Historicizing historiography reveals how scholarly consensus evolves in response to social and political changes. In telling the parallel stories and analyzing the intersecting scholarship of Thompson and Du Bois, *The Atlanta Connection: C. Mildred Thompson, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Reconstruction Historiography* illustrates the transformation of historiography and the historical profession in the twentieth century.

Chapter One

"Truth in History:" Thompson, Atlanta, and the Lost Cause Myth

Following the Civil War, Atlanta, ransacked by Sherman's army, needed a myth. This grandiose tall tale was created by painting over the truth of the past with sentiment. Various entertainment forms were created, memorializing groups organized, and histories written—all to erase the progress of Reconstruction and reassert the antebellum racial hierarchy. Of all these avenues, history proved itself the one that would lend legitimacy to the fiction in question: the Lost Cause. One member of the Dunning School, C. (Clara) Mildred Thompson, who wrote *Reconstruction in Georgia: Economic, Social, Political 1865-1872* about her home state, lent scholarly legitimacy to the Georgian brand of the Lost Cause, casting, along with her peers, a dark shadow on the historical tradition.

C. Mildred Thompson had no shortage of Lost Cause propaganda to pull from in writing this history. The propaganda consisted of a set of basic premises: portraying states' rights over slavery as the main cause for the Civil War, conceiving of slavery as a benevolently paternalistic institution, and touting the heroism of Confederate soldiers.[10] White supremacy colored each of them. Edward A. Pollard, a journalist from Virginia, coined the term in his book *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* published one year after the end of the war. He deemed the cause "lost" as a call to action, particularly evident in his 1868 sequel

[10] My understanding of the Lost Cause comes from the definitions and explanations provided by Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019 [2003]), Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*, 2nd ed. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009 [1980]), David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2001), and W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

The Lost Cause Regained, which Thompson used in her history of Reconstruction.[11] He emphasized, "…the true cause fought for in the late war has not been 'lost' immeasurably or irrevocably, but is yet in a condition to be 'regained' by the South on ultimate issues of the political contest."[12] The Lost Cause was not only a cultural myth but also a political one used by the South to reconcile with the North and reestablish their power nationally. Though the South lost the Civil War, they "won" Reconstruction, which provided them with an essential victory narrative.[13] This victory narrative fueled Thompson's scholarship.

Reconstruction and its end, called Redemption became the event Thompson used to contribute to the ahistorical narrative of the Lost Cause.[14] Atlanta, Thompson's birthplace, was the shining beacon of the industrializing "New South" and a hub of the construction of Lost Cause ideology.[15] The New South, a term popularized by *Atlanta Constitution* editor Henry Grady, was essentially a marketing slogan used to convince northern investors that the South was now committed to industrialization, not slavery. In reality, the new iteration of the region was "modern feudalism in which profit-taking [was] maximized by denying all black people their rights."[16] White Atlantans needed a historical basis for the continuation of white supremacy in their politics and society. Much was lost in of the Civil War, but the end of Reconstruction was

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[11] Bibliography in C. Mildred Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia: Economic, Social, Political 1865-1872* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1915), 417.
[12] Edward A. Pollard, *The Lost Cause Regained* (New York: G.W. Carleton & Co., 1868).
[13] Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 264.
[14] In Chapter 8, "The Lost Cause and Causes Not Lost," of David Blight's *Race and Reunion* (2001), he asserts the importance of Reconstruction to the Lost Cause narrative of history. On page 264, he writes "From the beginning, Lost Cause diehards attacked Reconstruction policy nearly as much as they appealed for history true to the Confederate cause."
[15] William A. Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South: Race and Remembering in the Civil War's Aftermath* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 1.
[16] David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race,1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 113.

a point of pride, easing minds across the South in allowing southerners to believe that they could now regain their dignity. David Blight labels this pride as national, writing, "Nothing in the popular Southern and national image of Reconstruction by the turn of the century caused more spirited defense…than the role of…violence in the white South's overthrow of Reconstruction."[17] This spirited defense paved the way for Thompson to write historical scholarship that justified the end of Reconstruction without popular pushback.

Ironically, historical scholarship helped buttress the ahistorical myth. Thompson and her peers were trained by writing dissertations infused with the themes of Lost Cause ideology, which made their work relevant and palatable to readers of the time. The premier scholar on Reconstruction was Professor William Archibald Dunning (Ph.D. 1885) who was both a historian and political scientist at Columbia University, as well as an instrumental figure in the founding of the American Historical Association.[18] Dunning led Thompson and her peers, the "Dunningites," a group of Ph.D. students who were the first generation of professional, university-trained historians to study the Reconstruction era. Most students wrote a dissertation, under Dunning's direction, on Reconstruction in a southern state, and most were southerners themselves. They assumed Black inferiority and believed that granting political rights to formerly enslaved people brought about corruption and misgovernment under agencies like the Freedmen's Bureau. Current scholars acknowledge the Dunning School's deeply racist biases and its influence on historical analysis. At the same time, scholars credit these historians with

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[17] Blight *Race and Reunion*, 111.
[18] *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, John David Smith and Vincent J. Lowery ed. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky 2013), 77.

elevating historical scholarship through a new, primary source-driven methodology.[19] While their methodology may have been new, it does not deserve the praise it garners today.

Despite being an instrumental figure in the early twentieth century historical profession, Thompson has been relegated to the forgotten land of footnotes. When she is remembered, it is for her educational contributions as Dean of Vassar College and service as a delegate to the Allied Ministers of Education and United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) conferences following World War II.[20] The assumptions of Lost Cause historical memory will continue to go unchallenged if the work of Thompson and her peers are not properly interrogated. Thompson was not only Dunning's sole female student, but also the longest-living member of the cohort.[21] Her gender placed her in a unique position because it was mostly women in the South who were responsible for crafting local and state histories for the public.[22] Instead of continuing in this tradition, Thompson entered the male-dominated space of professional history, lending a sense of this local history to the master narrative of Reconstruction—something her male peers did as well in pulling from the historical traditions of their upbringings.[23] After all, focusing on local stories obscured the national picture that revealed the truth. Living into the 1970s meant that she also lived to see the rise of civil rights

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[19] Eric Foner puts forth this idea in his Foreword to the main monograph on the *Dunning School*, John David Smith and Vincent J. Lowery ed., which details the lives and respective works of each member of the Dunning School including Thompson.
[20] Evelyn A. Clark, Elizabeth M. Drouilhet, and David L. Schalk, "Vassar College Memorial Minute for C. Mildred Thompson," October 24, 1975, Subject File—Thompson, C. Mildred Thompson papers, MSS 256, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.
[21] William Bragg, "C. Mildred Thompson: A Liberal among the Dunningites" in *The Dunning School*, 281.
[22] Brundage, *Southern Past*, 15.
[23] John David Smith, "Introduction," in *The Dunning School*, 37.

and revisionist history, allowing her to expand her legacy beyond the fallen-out-of-favor Dunning School.

Growing up in Atlanta in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Thompson must have absorbed the social and political salience of Reconstruction memory. Her family's southern roots, however, did not run as deep as those of her peers. Her mother, Alice Thompson née Wood, was born in Brooklyn, New York and her father, Robert Galbraith Thompson, immigrated from Ireland. The couple married in Knoxville, Tennessee before moving to Atlanta in 1869.[24] Born in November 1881, Thompson grew up in the neighborhood known today as Old Fourth Ward. Her mother was active in Atlanta civic life as both a member of the congregation at St. Luke's Episcopal Church and the Women's Pioneer Society, a memorial organization specifically geared towards preserving the history of antebellum Atlanta.[25]

Thompson would not go on to participate in this kind of women's work but rather rejected it in entering the realm of "objective," professional history. Some of her peers, however, with aspirations of documenting the sentimental histories of their state did follow in the footsteps of their mothers. Many joined the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), the premier organization responsible for preserving and transmitting Confederate culture and Lost Cause narratives of the Civil War and Reconstruction. The organization was made up of educated women from elite families. With the aim of preserving the traditional notions of fragile

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[24] "Mrs. R.G. Thompson Celebrates Birthday," *The Atlanta Constitution,* March 23, 1933.
[25] I located the neighborhood Thompson grew up in through her address listed in an Atlanta Constitution article and a historic map of Atlanta. "Atlanta Girl Wins Honor: Miss Mildred Thompson Led Vassar Debaters, Who Won Decision Over Wellesley College," *The Atlanta Constitution,* April 28, 1902. Griffith Morgan Hopkins, "Street Directory: Atlanta. Engraved by Oscar F. Kern, Phila. PA," Scale 1: 4400, 1878, Historic Map Collection, Rose Library Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. Information on her mother's activities found in "Mrs. R.G. Thompson Celebrates Birthday," *The Atlanta Constitution,* March 23, 1933.

femininity and masculine honor, the UDC aided white, upper-class women in generating great societal and cultural power without jeopardizing the status quo. The women of the UDC worked to carefully create circumscribed, Lost Cause-laden textbooks and curricula for children, build tangible iterations of memory in the form of monuments, and lead local philanthropy projects for Confederate veterans and poor white people. Due to the UDC's significant influence in censoring school textbooks, Reconstruction was presented to a school-age Thompson as a barbarous period, coming to an end only with the civilizing force the Ku Klux Klan and white vigilantism.[26] The UDC recognized that history could be used as propaganda to assist the group in achieving its objectives. They wrote anecdotal, emotionally charged "histories" to show what the South had lost in order to remember and reestablish the values of the "Old South."[27] Thompson and her Dunning peers were inspired by these narratives, but to lend scholarly legitimacy to them that would be nationally accepted, had to remove the emotional overlay. The bias, however, remained intact.

Thompson's paradoxical commitment to both "truthful" history and Lost Cause-informed falsehoods is elucidated by a speech made by Historian General of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and native Georgian Mildred Lewis Rutherford at the UDC's 1915 national conference in San Francisco.[28] In the speech, she detailed a handful of historical events to relay what she saw as the "omissions and commissions" of popular narratives of said events. She cast the propagandist utility of history in two different contexts: teaching history to children and using history to repair sectional fractures. Explaining the importance of myths for children, she

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[26] Brundage, *Southern Past*, 33, 46.
[27] For more on the history of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, see by Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*.
[28] Mildred Lewis Rutherford, "Historical Sins of Omission and Commission," Speech, Civic Auditorium Hall, San Francisco, CA, October 22, 1915, Library of Congress.

said, “romances have always had a powerful effect upon the youthful hearts and minds of our land.”[29] She warned the audience, with uncited statistics, that most private schools in the South use textbooks that misrepresent southern history. Consistent with the UDC goal of valorizing Confederate soldiers, she recounted an anecdote of a veteran crying to her that his grandchild came home from school parroting a textbook’s idea that slavery was immoral. Rutherford saw it as the duty of the UDC to control the educational information and entertainment presented to children, not only in the South but all over the United States.

Scholars of Georgia history that preceded Thompson were wooed by the romance of Lost Cause myths the UDC spread to children.[30] The themes from “Historical Sins of Omission and Commission” appeared in the educational reading for the Children of the Confederacy (COC). In a COC annual program pamphlet from 1916, a variety of subjects are presented for study divided up by month, including “Robert Edward Lee,” “Reconstruction Days,” “Southern Textbooks,” “English Supremacy in America,” “Northern Prisons,” and, as a bonus feature, “Negro Dialect.”[31] Far from trying to disguise the UDC philosophy of education, these COC pamphlets urged children to honor not only Confederate cause but the UDC one. The pamphlet’s question about books to be included in libraries and the characterization of Robert E. Lee as a scholar provide further evidence for the authority of academic contributions—at least those deemed acceptably “truthful”—as crucial to the Lost Cause myth. Though there is no evidence that Thompson was directly involved in COC programming as a child, the themes of its

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[29] Rutherford, "Historical Sins of Omission and Commission," 10.
[30] For more on preceding scholars and a comparison of their works and Thompson’s, see Bragg, “C. Mildred Thompson: A Liberal among the Dunningites” in *The Dunning School*, 290.
[31] “Monthly Programs: United Daughters of the Confederacy and Children of the Confederacy By Historian General, U.D.C.,” 1916, Folder 1, Box 1, United Daughters of the Confederacy Collection, MSS 765, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

programming appeared in the textbooks she read. The UDC educational themes appealed to the authority of academic historians who "proved" the "veracity" of their stories, which may have been inspirational to a young, academically-inclined Thompson.

Thompson's educational excellence gave her the opportunity to attend a prestigious northern college. An increasing number of women in Thompson's generation went to college, expanding the definitions of women's work from their mothers' generation.[32] After graduating from Girls' High School in Midtown with honors, she decided to enroll at Vassar in 1899 where she won a special fellowship and graduated with Phi Beta Kappa honors.[33] At a debate tournament during her college years, she was described as "particularly superior in the ease, grace, and perfect self-possession of her delivery, which was an important factor in the final decision" of her team winning the tournament.[34] Her history professor and mentor Lucy Maynard Salmon, the first female member of the American Historical Association's executive committee, introduced Thompson to a new kind of history and womanhood.[35] Unlike the adult women Thompson grew up around, Salmon represented the possibility of becoming a professional historian. Salmon first exposed Thompson to the methodology of historical inquiry via close reading of primary-sources. Post-graduation she spent three years teaching history to

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[32] Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*, 48.
[33] "Atlanta Girl Wins Honor: Miss Mildred Thompson Led Vassar Debaters, Who Won Decision Over Wellesley College," *The Atlanta Constitution,* April 28, 1902. Resumé of C. Mildred Thompson submitted for Volume 25 of Who's Who in America, c. 1954, Folder 2, Box 1, C. Mildred Thompson papers, MSS 256, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center. "Fellowships, Scholarships, and Prizes," *The Vassar Miscellany* 38, no. 9 (1909): 522.
[34] "Atlanta Girl Wins Honor: Miss Mildred Thompson Led Vassar Debaters, Who Won Decision Over Wellesley College," *The Atlanta Constitution,* April 28, 1902.
[35] Bragg, "C. Mildred Thompson: A Liberal among the Dunningites" in *The Dunning School*, 283. For a biography of Lucy Maynard Salmon that focuses on her teaching methods, see "Lucy Maynard Salmon," Prominent Faculty- Vassar Encyclopedia, 2004, https://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/faculty/prominent-faculty/lucy-maynard-salmon/.

middle school students in Baltimore, Maryland, before entering graduate school at Columbia University for her master's and Ph.D. in history in 1906. At Columbia, she met William Archibald Dunning.[36]

The same fall Thompson enrolled at Columbia, a bloody race riot broke out in Atlanta. The socioeconomic success of Atlanta's Black population was rising despite racial subordination, making the white population nervous—so much so that they turned to massacring hundreds of Black citizens.[37] On the evening of Saturday, September 22, white men formed a mob and descended upon Black neighborhoods, injuring and killing Black residents in addition to destroying their businesses. The exact number of deaths is unclear, but it is estimated that at least 25 Black Atlantans were killed, and hundreds were injured over the course of the four-day riot.[38] The riot was precipitated by the Georgia legislature's vote to disenfranchise Black voters and false, sensationalist claims by white newspapers that Black men throughout the city were sexually assaulting white women.[39] In order to restore law and order and ensure continued northern investment in the New South's industries, a new racial radicalism emerged. It manifested itself in the 1908 ratification of the disfranchisement amendment in Georgia's constitution, legalizing and enforcing tactics like the poll tax to bar African Americans from

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[36] "C. Mildred Thompson '1903," Distinguished Alumni- Vassar Encyclopedia, 2012, https://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/distinguished-alumni/c-mildred-thompson/.

[37] For more on the Atlanta Race Riot, see Clifford Kuhn and Gregory Mixon, "Atlanta Race Massacre of 1906," New Georgia Encyclopedia, last modified Nov 14, 2022. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/atlanta-race-massacre-of-1906/.

[38] Serena McCracken, "Riot or Massacre: How One Word Changes Perspective," Atlanta History Center Blog, December 28, 2022, https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/blog/riot-or-massacre-how-one-word-changes-perspective/.

[39] Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the South*, 180-182.

voting, particularly in general elections.[40] Reconstruction may have ended, but its history continued to inform Georgia politics.

At Columbia University Thompson began to weave the Lost Cause myth she absorbed during her childhood in Atlanta into her own historical scholarship. The Dunning School narrative of Reconstruction generally followed the main tenets of the Lost Cause. Following the Civil War, the power-hungry radical wing of the Republican party took control of Reconstruction with the aim of humiliating southerners. These Republicans resisted President Andrew Johnson and barred southerners from gaining political representation at the federal level. Through these actions they were able to enact military rule over the South, in a zero-sum analysis, "disfranchising whites and enfranchising the freedmen."[41] Thompson employs this template almost to a T, glossing over slavery's role in the war, painting the military rule of Georgia as tyrannical, and pitying white people in the face of emancipation. "The institution of slavery," she writes, "provided a method of adjustment whereby the negro passed from barbarism to some measure of civilization." Reconstruction, on the other hand, "extended and intensified…racial antagonism a hundredfold."[42] In other words, Thompson furthered the idea that slavery was stable and Reconstruction unnecessarily chaotic.

The bias present in the denigration of Reconstruction and the insertion of the sentimentalist Lost Cause myth was smoothed over by the Dunning School's rhetorical appeal to truth. This appeal extended their influence outside academia. According to Reconstruction historian Eric Foner, "nearly all white Americans embraced the Dunning version of

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[40] Dewey W. Grantham, "Georgia Politics and the Disfranchisement of the Negro," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1948): 20.
[41] John David Smith, "Introduction," *The Dunning School*, 2.
[42] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 399.

[Reconstruction] history."[43] Peter Novick supports Foner's assertion, writing, "This [Dunning] view became a staple of popular fiction (often assigned in history classes) such as Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman*, translated by D.W. Griffith into the epic *Birth of a Nation*."[44] Rhetoric was so much a part of the Dunningite view that it could be easily translated into entertainment. In his 1913 presidential address to the American Historical Association, Dunning made a biblical illusion to the question asked by Pontius Pilate, "What is Truth?"[45] Dunning argued against an economically deterministic interpretation of history, but in doing so, justified the use of historical inquiry as a means of propagating myths. He posited that "the course of human history is determined no more by what is true than by what men believe to be true" and that the "deeds of men have been affected more by the beliefs in what was false than by the knowledge of what was true."[46] Herein lies the rub of the Dunning School methodology of history: they employed primary sources in an unprecedented way but did so in an intellectually dishonest fashion, using them as confirmation bias of the Lost Cause myth.[47]

Thompson brought together the Lost Cause and Dunning interpretation of truth and history to her analysis of Reconstruction in Georgia. She wrote her first article in 1914, defended and published her dissertation a year later, along with a subsequent article six years after the monograph, all of which revealed the polemical influence of the Lost Cause myth. In her 1914 article, "Carpet-Baggers in the United States Senate," Thompson espouses the classic

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[43]Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), xxii–xxiii quoted in John David Smith, "Introduction" in *Dunning School*.
[44] Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 230.
[45] William A. Dunning, "Truth in History," *The American Historical Review* 19, no. 2 (1914): 217–29.
[46] Dunning, "Truth in History," 220, 224.
[47] Foner, Foreword to *Dunning School*, John David Smith and Vincent J. Lowery ed.,xi

Lost Cause trope of northerners in the postwar era as opportunistic politicians disinterested in fairly representing the South. She describes some of the Reconstruction senators as "quite respectable and able men; several were thoroughly dishonest and corrupt, and the majority were mere non-entities."[48] She profiles individual senators, many who she labels as "negrophiles of the North," as voting for the Fifteenth Amendment out of political opportunism.[49] "It naturally behooved those whose senatorial existence depended on the votes of their black constituents to raise their voices in behalf of the rights of the negro."[50] Casting enfranchisement as a moral issue would open the possibility of critics casting the recent political decisions in Georgia as immoral. Therefore, writing this kind of history in the years following the passage of the Georgia disfranchisement amendment has political ramifications. To obscure the immorality of disenfranchisement, white Georgians made freed people and northerners out to be collaborating villains. Henry Grady said in a speech from as early as 1887, "Never did robbers find followers more to their mind than the emancipated slaves of reconstruction days."[51] Making themselves out to be victims, white southerners tried to forge their position gatekeepers of the moral high ground.

Thompson, following suit, emphasizes how Reconstruction degraded the local and national government by portraying the Senate as for sale. She selectively employs moralism in her judgement that the "general moral tone of Congress during Grant's administration was

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[48] C. Mildred Thompson, "Carpet-Baggers in the United States Senate," in *Studies in Southern History and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914), 162.
[49] Thompson, "Carpet-Baggers in the United States Senate," 165.
[50] Thompson, "Carpet-Baggers in the United States Senate," 166.
[51] Henry Grady, "The 'Solid South,'" November 24, 1887, in *The Complete Orations and Speeches of Henry W. Grady*, Edwin DuBois Shurter ed. (New York: Hinds, Noble, and Eldredge, 1910), 74.

excessively low."[52] Thompson clearly pulls from what William Link describes as white Atlanta's Reconstruction attitude of "blame for destruction," which they, "placed on white northerners and black southerners."[53] It was both white northerners and Black southerners that would, in the Lost Cause view, have to pay for the wrongs they committed during both the Civil War and Reconstruction. Part of the payment of the white northerners came in the form of portraying them historically as immoral and self-interested, as opposed to morally engaged protectors of constitutional rights.

In her dissertation-turned-monograph, Thompson spends a majority of the four hundred pages detailing how the economy of Georgia changed during Reconstruction due to major war damage and the addition of freed people to the labor pool. Specifically, when discussing the economic lens of Reconstruction, she uses professional methodology in the form of social science-style graphs and quantitative sources like census records. In the "social and cultural" interpretations of Reconstruction, however, the primary source material she uses—made up mostly of local histories, scrapbooks, letters, and travelogues—is scant and anecdotal, at best, which she "contextualizes" with racist overtones.[54] In one instance of explaining the activities of freed people directly following emancipation, she asserts that freed people wandered without direction. Her evidence for this assertion comes from a conversation between Black people, in a part of Georgia "where slavery was…little burdensome," and northern journalist Sidney Andrews, taken from his travelogue; instead of interrogating the source, she presents it at its face (racist) value.[55] Further, she makes unsubstantiated claims based on racist tropes, writing, "The

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[52] Thompson, "Carpet-Baggers in the United States Senate," 175.
[53] Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the South*, 5.
[54] See Bibliography in Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia,* 402-418.
[55] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia,* 44-45.

lure of the city was strong to the blacks, appealing to their social natures, to their inherent love for a crowd."[56] She promotes both the Lost Cause and New South ideologies, writing of the actions of the Union army under Sherman forcing Georgians "to cower and murmur peace in less exacting terms" and the importance of "trade and commerce" in uplifting Atlanta.[57] Thompson's Atlanta connections were essential to her scholarship, as made clear in the preface to her book, in which she thanks several librarians, history-inclined society women who followed the traditional route she did not, and the University of Georgia professor Robert Preston Brooks, who would go on to review the monograph twice.[58]

Though most of Thompson's monograph concerns Reconstruction, she begins with the Lost Cause narrative of the Civil War. In the first chapter, entitled "Introduction—Georgia in the War," Thompson uses census figures, letters, newspapers from both the North and South, and congressional records to establish Sherman's invasion of Atlanta as the beginning of the end for the Confederacy, economically, militarily, and socially. In an unsourced statement, Thompson declares, "Practical unanimity of opinion testifies that the slaves continued faithful during the years of war, causing no disturbance until 1864, and then only in the path of Sherman's invasion, when droves of them wandered away from the plantations to follow the soldiers."[59] Thompson corroborates the Lost Cause idea of previously loyal enslaved people as mindless pawns manipulated by the Union army to rebel against the Confederacy, as opposed to as agents in their own right rebelling against centuries of mistreatment. She also casts the Confederate surrender

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[56] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia,* 44.
[57] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia,* 36, 118.
[58] R.P. Brooks, review of *Reconstruction in Georgia, Economic, Social, Political, 1865-1872*, by C. Mildred Thompson, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 3, no. 1 (1916): 113–15. R.P. Brooks, "Miss C. Mildred Thompson's 'Reconstruction in Georgia': A Georgia Woman's Work," *The Atlanta Constitution,* July 17, 1915, 6.
[59] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 16-17.

in the light of fear and exhaustion following Sherman's March to the Sea. "It was no wonder many began to cower and murmur peace in less exacting terms. The capture of Atlanta by the Federal army had a strongly depressing effect in the state and reunion talk was less disguised."[60] In her words, far from admitting the defeat of their ideals, the Confederacy surrendered out of necessity.

Thompson's overall assessment of Reconstruction reflected the Dunning-era tropes of freed people as lazy, troublesome, and suffering without the structure provided by slavery. In her second chapter, "Transition from Slavery to Freedom," Thompson identifies two revolutionary waves at the dawn of Reconstruction: abolition in 1865 and political enfranchisement in 1867. The racist pontifications of the "measured, objective" Thompson are particularly clear in her description of what freedom meant to formerly enslaved people, citing as evidence her fellow Dunningite who wrote of Reconstruction in Alabama, Walter L. Fleming.[61] "To the negro freedom meant all that slavery had not been," she writes. "Slavery signified work, generally in the field, labor under constant supervision, restriction in habitat, and subjection to patrol. Therefore, if freedom meant anything at all it must be idleness, roving from place to place, flocking into towns, and doing generally as pleasure dictated." Her analysis reflected the anxiety white southerners had regarding emancipation; in their minds, it allowed Black people to

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[60] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 36.

[61] Here I cite the characterization of Thompson by William Harris Bragg, former professor at Georgia College and current independent scholar who has written the only secondary source material available on Thompson, in addition to the introduction to the current print version of *Reconstruction in Georgia* published by Mercer University Press. The direct quote comes from Bragg, "C. Mildred Thompson: A Liberal among the Dunningites" in *The Dunning School,* Smith, John David and Lowery, J. Vincent ed., 291. For more on Bragg's interpretation of Thompson and her work, see William Harris Bragg, "C. Mildred Thompson," New Georgia Encyclopedia, last modified Aug 15, 2013, https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/c-mildred-thompson-1881-1975/.

exhibit uncontrollable and concerning behavior, made more unpredictable by their freedom of movement. Thompson emphasized "vagrancy and loafing" as "natural reactions" and claimed that freed people had no drive to work because of the promise of "forty acres and a mule" from the federal government.[62] For Thompson and many other Lost Cause devotees, slavery was more "humane" than freedom because of the control it exerted over Black people.

The racist overtones of Thompson's monograph continue with the Dunning School understanding of rights as a zero-sum game: Black people gaining rights meant that the rights of white people were infringed upon. As a result of this understanding, white southerners went on the offensive, enforcing white superiority rhetorically through explicitly racist language. Thompson uses the term "darky" and labels Black people as "fickle," "weak, childish, irresponsible people" with a "childlike ignorance of money."[63] While using derogatory terms and ad hominem attacks to depict Black people as inferior, she also ascribes them "the upper hand" under Republican Reconstruction.[64] She writes, "To the blacks was extended the helping hand of Northern sympathy and the aid of a national bureau; but the poverty of his own father and this impotence of the state let the white child abide in ignorance."[65] White victimhood, especially that of women and children, was key to building sympathy for the Lost Cause myth. In her scholarship, Thompson clearly furthered it.

In a strange attempt at objectivity, Thompson, unlike her Columbia peers, ambivalently presents the reputation of the Freedmen's Bureau she later wrote about in her 1921 article for the *Georgia Historical Quarterly*. She writes, "The bad repute of the Freedmen's Bureau was due

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[62] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 43.
[63] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 45, 77, 130, 291.
[64] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 69.
[65] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 127.

more directly to the political activities of its agents in 1867 and 1868, when they manipulated the helpless black voters for their own aggrandizement."[66] Thompson, like many other southerners, ironically saw agents of the Freedmen's Bureau as propagandists who taught Black people who previously had no animosity toward white people to hate them. Thompson, however, creates a distinction without a difference in separating the agents from the organization, writing, "But in conditions as they were, even with the large bulk of evil influence justly charged against some of its agents, the…Bureau was, on the whole, an important constructive force."[67] Thompson attempts to have it both ways in the interest of scientific objectivity by essentially stating that the individuals that made up the entity were bad, though the entity itself was not. It is this statement that forms the basis of the end of her article "The Freedmen's Bureau in Georgia in 1865-6: An Instrument of Reconstruction."[68] She first presented the paper in 1920 at the fourth annual conference of the Georgia Historical Association three years after she began her tenure as associate professor at Vassar.[69] Ironically, she calls for historians to look back at the "intense emotional" event of Reconstruction with "scientific generality."[70] The article examines the Bureau in the same way as her monograph, putting in short form a history of the Bureau that makes its mythical corruption more evident to readers than sporadic mentions in a four-hundred page book.

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[66] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 64.
[67] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 67.
[68] C. Mildred Thompson, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Georgia in 1865-6: An Instrument of Reconstruction," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (1921): 40–49.
[69] Resumé of C. Mildred Thompson submitted for Volume 25 of Who's Who in America, c. 1954, Folder 2, Box 1, C. Mildred Thompson papers, MSS 256, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.
[70] Thompson, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Georgia in 1865-6," 40.

Thompson seems to imply the necessity of some sort of organizing force like the Bureau, writing of "after-war problems of labor unrest, of relief of the destitute and disabled, of political discontent."[71] Even so, she saw those in need in the post-war context as poor white people. She sees the Freedmen's Bureau as pointless based on the idea that freed people were unworthy of freedom evidenced in part by the "fact" that they did not understand what to do with said freedom. While arguing that poor white people needed aid from the government, Thompson used what would become the racist welfare trope of claiming that aid from the federal government to Black people overstepped and released them from the responsibility of work. "In so far as the Bureau was an agent of charity, it tended to increase the evils of poverty it aimed to remedy. As freedmen who had abandoned the plough in the field for the charms of city life found it possible to subsist in idleness upon the bounty of the government, more and more of the former slaves were impelled to do likewise."[72] She ends the article by citing her own monograph: "…the writer reinforces the judgement which she reached several years ago…that the Freedmen's Bureau was a constructive force of large significance in the economic and social adjustment during the immediate transition from slavery to freedom."[73] At face value, this quote seems to valorize the work of the Freedmen's Bureau, but taking a closer look at the judgements in her monograph reveals that Thompson believed the Bureau to be an agent of Republican misrule.

The actual epitome of misrule was the Ku Klux Klan, which Thompson presents as the defender of the white South. As Mildred Lewis Rutherford put it, "The North said the Freedmen's Bureau was necessary to protect the negro. The South said the Ku Klux Klan was

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[71] Thompson, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Georgia in 1865-6," 40.
[72] Thompson, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Georgia in 1865-6," 43.
[73] Thompson, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Georgia in 1865-6," 49.

necessary to protect the white woman."[74] Thompson puts her justification in political rather than gendered terms, writing, "By becoming a voter, [the Black man] was a source of danger to the whites of all classes."[75] She then goes on to contradict herself in downplaying the KKK as a social self-defense organization and obscuring its political aims that would become integral to maintaining order in the Jim Crow South following Reconstruction. David Blight establishes the crucial role of the KKK in Lost Cause ideology: "In Southern lore, in formal history, and eventually in popular culture, the Klan, as the saviors of Southern society, racial order, and white womanhood, attained a heroic image in American memory, a place from which the organization could be dislodged only during the latter half of the twentieth century."[76]

The undeniable purpose of the KKK was to disfranchise Black people in the critical elections of the 1870s.[77] Yet, Thompson designates disfranchisement as fundamentally social rather than political. "Some cases were reported of negroes being whipped and intimidated to prevent their voting," she argues. "But even this was more social than political in purpose."[78] In making this designation, she ignores her own evidence, which clearly shows the political nature of the KKK. She cites an *Atlanta Constitution* editorial from April 23, 1870: "'Wanted—Ku Klux Outrages. Wanted, a liberal supply of Ku Klux outrages in Georgia. They must be as ferocious and blood-thirsty as possible… They must be supplied during the next ten days, to influence the Georgia Bill in the House.'"[79] Overall, she describes reports of KKK activity as overblown, making the scapegoat for the real source of disorder, naturally, the Freedmen's

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[74] Rutherford, "Historical Sins of Omission and Commission," 29.
[75] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 361.
[76] Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 111.
[77] Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 122.
[78] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 363.
[79] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 268.

Bureau. In her conclusion, Thompson doubles down on her apologist presentation of the KKK: "It was, as I say, an organization purely for self-defense. It had no more politics in it that the organization of the Masons. I have never heard the idea of politics suggested in connection with it."[80] Racial violence during Reconstruction was a coordinated political response to Black emancipation, citizenship, and enfranchisement. In three sentences, Thompson presents a vague and subjective image of the KKK that directly refutes its objectively political purpose.

This image of the KKK lasted well into the late twentieth century. The Lost Cause continued to thrive in the social, cultural, and political milieu of the Jim Crow South, along with the support of a reborn KKK.[81] The theme of sentimentalized "truth" informed the most influential film of the time, *Birth of a Nation*, released the same year as Thompson's monograph.[82] The director, D.W. Griffith, a southerner himself, in an interview included in a current version of the film, uses the same biblical allusion used by Dunning to discuss the Lost Cause notion of truth. He says, "But as Pontius Pilate said, "What is the truth?" when asked by the interviewer, actor Walter Huston, whether he saw his film as an accurate representation of the time.[83] The staying power of the film and the Lost Cause myth can be summed up by Griffith's description of his inspiration for the film: "When I was a child, I used to get under the table and listen to my father and his friends talk about the battles [during the Civil War] they'd been through and their struggles. Those things impress you deeply."[84] For southerners, white

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[80] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 391.
[81] For more on the rebirth of the KKK in the twentieth century, see Thomas R. Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2011).
[82] *The Birth of a Nation*, directed by D.W. Griffith, 1915, distributed by Kino Lorber, accessed via Kanopy https://www.kanopy.com/en/emory/video/114595, 3 hr., 24 min.
[83] *The Birth of a Nation*, 00:05:22.
[84] *The Birth of a Nation*, 00:04:34.

and Black alike, the Civil War and Reconstruction were deeply personal, but it was the whitewashed version of history that betrayed the truth while trying to appeal to its authority.

Thompson's monograph won over authorities in the field. Even as a woman in a male-dominated environment, her male peers afforded her with respect and included her in their scholarly networks. The Chair of Department of History at the University of Georgia, R.P. Brooks reviewed the book in two major academic journals as well as the *Atlanta Constitution*.[85] Brooks, who had advised Thompson from afar during the writing of her monograph, praised her in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* for "amplifying and enriching the narrative by the incorporation of much new material..."[86] Writing for a local Atlanta audience in the *Atlanta Constitution*, he did not question her racist assessments but concurred that during Reconstruction, "the negro was ignorant, shiftless, and helpless." In a far more dispassionate review, J.H.T. McPherson, another Professor of History at the University of Georgia, similarly regarded Thompson's work as impartial.[87] McPherson also made note of her contradictory treatment of the Freedmen's Bureau. With such positive reviews, Thompson secured the approval of the professional historians in her state.

The only scholar to push back against Thompson was Carter G. Woodson, the father of Black history, in a review for *The Journal of Negro History*, which he founded in the same year after receiving his Ph.D. from Harvard University.[88] Though he deems it "readable and

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[85] R.P. Brooks, review of *Reconstruction in Georgia, Economic, Social, Political, 1865-1872* by C. Mildred Thompson, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 3, no. 1 (1916): 113–15. R.P. Brooks, "Miss C. Mildred Thompson's 'Reconstruction in Georgia': A Georgia Woman's Work," *The Atlanta Constitution,* July 17, 1915, 6.
[86] Brooks, review of *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 114.
[87] J.H.T. McPherson, review of *Reconstruction in Georgia, Economic, Social, Political, 1865-1872*, by C. Mildred Thompson, *The American Historical Review* 21, no. 1 (1915): 162–64.
[88] Carter G. Woodson, review of *Reconstruction in Georgia, Economic, Social, Political, 1865-1872*, by C. Mildred Thompson, *The Journal of Negro History* 1, no. 3 (1916): 343–44.

interesting," he also writes that "one would expect a more unbiased treatment" from a monograph so rich in primary source material.[89] That same primary source material was used by the Dunning School as "proof" of their objectivity. Despite this major limitation, Woodson generously adds "the author has endeavored to write with restraint and care."[90] He laments that "Little is said, however, about the evils arising from the attitude of Southern white men…," a gap later filled by Du Bois, and ends the review wondering whether "We must yet wait another century before we shall find ourselves far enough removed from…Reconstruction to set forth in an unbiased way."[91]

While isolated at the time, Woodson's scholarly challenge to Thompson and the Dunning School were significant. Like Woodson, another contemporary of Thompson, W.E.B. Du Bois laid the framework for a radically different appraisal of Reconstruction and role of Black people in this chapter of American history. His appraisal also proved important at the time, as the New South teetered on the precarious ideological ground of white supremacy. William Link asserts that "the New South was not born out of consensus and uniformity, but out of a struggle for power through identity."[92] No idea went uncontested, and the power grasped onto so desperately by white elites was threatened by the emergence of a Black counterculture in Atlanta. The counterculture constructed a counternarrative complete with its own novelists, business leaders, historians, and memorial groups and focused on a "pragmatic," or political and economic, approach to civil rights long before the proper movement began.[93]

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[89] Woodson, review of *Reconstruction in Georgia, Economic, Social, Political*, 1865-1872, 343.
[90] Woodson, 344.
[91] Woodson, 344.
[92] Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the South*, 6.
[93] For more on the beginnings of "pragmatic civil rights," see Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2.

Du Bois stood as the main dissenting voice against the Dunning School narrative of Reconstruction through the publication of various articles and, most notably, his monograph *Black Reconstruction*. According to David Blight, "No writer offered a more artful challenge to the hegemony of Lost Cause ideology, or to the reunion wrapped in the retrospective make-believe world of faithful slaves and the mysticism of Blue-Gray fraternalism, than W.E.B. Du Bois."[94] His monograph went on to inspire a generation of revisionist historians of Reconstruction later in the century to effectively question and deconstruct the Lost Cause myth as an ahistorical argument. Perhaps surprisingly, Thompson cites two of Du Bois's early works from 1901 and 1910, both of which he wrote in Atlanta, in the bibliography of *Reconstruction in Georgia*.[95] Less surprisingly, she does not engage directly with Du Bois's work, instead filing his work away under the headings "Contemporary Northern Accounts" and "Special Histories, Articles, and Pamphlets." She labels the first article she cites as a "Valuable monograph by an eminent colored scholar."[96]

By using his works as bibliographic afterthoughts, Thompson denies the scholarly importance of Du Bois in the historiographic debate surrounding Reconstruction. Due to the prominence and prejudices of the Dunning School to which she belonged, she engaged only in the white, mainstream historiographical conversation. As a result, *Reconstruction in Georgia* did not reflect the truth of Reconstruction, but rather validated the Lost Cause myth.

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[94] Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 251.
[95] The two articles by W.E.B. Du Bois that Thompson cites on pages 405 and 415, respectively, of her bibliography are "The Negro Landholder of Georgia," *Bulletin of the U.S. Department of Labor* 6, no. 35 (1901): 647-777 and "Reconstruction and its Benefits," *The American Historical Review* 15, no. 3 (1910): 475-95.
[96] Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, 405.

Chapter Two

Revising History: Du Bois's Journey From Atlanta to *Black Reconstruction*

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was no stranger to trailblazing. He was the only African American to hold a Ph.D. in history until Carter G. Woodson earned his in 1912—also from Harvard University.[97] Throughout the early twentieth century, Du Bois returned to history—mostly that of Reconstruction—to confront the racism that facilitated sectional reconciliation into the twentieth century. History, he found as he oscillated between careers as a social scientist and activist, remained his most powerful tool in getting white America to acknowledge the ways in which giving up on the past task of Reconstruction had created a discriminatory, violent, and segregated present for Black Americans. As would be a theme in his revisionist scholarship, Du Bois started the tradition and stood alone as its beacon for many years before others started to recognize the salience of his contribution.

Though Du Bois was neither born nor raised in Atlanta, his scholarly interests came to fruition there, beginning with his professorial appointment in 1897. "My real life work was begun at Atlanta for 13 years, from my 29th to my 42nd birthday," he wrote in his autobiography. "They were years of great spiritual upturning, of the making and unmaking of ideals, of hard work and hard play."[98] Recruited to head the sociology department at Atlanta University, Du Bois committed to "study the facts, any and all facts, concerning the American Negro and his plight, and by measurement and comparison and research, work up to any valid generalizations which [he] could."[99] Science, in its stark objectivity, was a tool Du Bois clung to

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[97] August Meier and Elliot M. Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, *1915-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 74-75.
[98] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life From the Last Decade of Its First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 135.
[99] Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois*, 130.

as a way to combat the subjective pseudo-science of nineteenth-century eugenics that continued to color scholarly conversations about Black people in the early twentieth century. In their own scholarship, historians like William A. Dunning and C. Mildred Thompson appealed to truth rhetorically but ignored it practically. Truth for Du Bois was a principle as much as it was a practice. He writes, "My long-term remedy was Truth: carefully gathered scientific proof that neither color nor race determined the limits of a man's capacity..."[100] According to biographer David Levering Lewis, Du Bois gained this interest in capital-T Truth from his time at Harvard University, from which he received both his master's degree and Ph.D. He was taken by both history and philosophy; the latter informed his commitment to truth while the former ignited his intellectual passion, as he was introduced to the close-reading method of primary sources and the rigorous German historiographic tradition.[101] History was also the subject in which he was most encouraged, as a professor advocated for his master's thesis to be presented at the 1891 American Historical Association Conference, an important arena in which he would appear twenty years later.[102] Atlanta University attracted him because it was an institution of higher education steeped in the pedagogical tradition to which he was committed and it allowed him to execute his intellectual passion of the long-ignored study of African American life.

Few places offered a better glimpse into African American life than Atlanta. In Du Bois's mind, the city took on an at once a romantic and brutally realistic image. In his softer description, he writes, "The hundred hills of Atlanta are not all crowned with factories...It is a restful group—one never looks for more…there I hear from day to day the low hum of restful

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[100] Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois*, 145.
[101] David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race,1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 86-92, 112.
[102] Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 113.

life."[103] Even so, much of Atlanta remained off-limits to him as a Black man in the Jim Crow South. "I stayed upon the campus as much as possible…I did not enter parks or museums."[104] He was unable to vote in the white primary, initially adopted in 1898 by the Democratic Party of Georgia and made exclusively white in 1900 to keep Black representatives and voters alike out of state government.[105] While segregation and disfranchisement limited his engagement in the city's social and political life, Du Bois learned from his time in Atlanta that his scholarship could not exist locked away in the ivory tower of academia. The fight for equality depended on simultaneously using his scholarly authority and branching out of the scholarly realm. Social outreach and uplift of Black people, goals since his Harvard days, became part and parcel of his modus operandi in Atlanta. Jim Crow laws made segregation commonplace and difficult to tackle because of its omnipresence. Therefore, Black leaders in Atlanta began with improving existing conditions available within the boundaries of Jim Crow before attacking the system itself.[106] Du Bois participated by collaborating with Black Georgian leaders like John Hope to ensure Black schools received proper funding and fight for equal conditions in Jim Crow cars.[107] Du Bois was unable to ignore the importance of engaging in the political landscape of Atlanta as he researched tirelessly.

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[103] Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois*, 134.
[104] Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois*, 149.
[105] Numan V. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1983): 149.
[106] Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 18-19.
[107] Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois*, 139-140. For correspondence between Hope and Du Bois concerning Black leadership, see Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to John Hope, January 22, 1910. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Publishing in mainstream periodicals and journals allowed Du Bois to reach a white audience, satiating his desire for both academic and sociopolitical eminence. Additionally, he spearheaded the so-called Atlanta Conferences, which occurred annually from 1897 to 1914. Each year, Du Bois chose a theme about which students and scholars in the Atlanta University Studies research program wrote monographs to be presented at the conference. Part of the reason for Du Bois's hiring was to run the conferences to build a foundation of scholarship on Black Americans, which laid the groundwork for the field of African American Studies.[108] The Atlanta program was interdisciplinary in nature, requiring historical inquiry in addition to the presiding sociological tone.

This blending of history and sociology is reflected in his published works at the turn of the century. In 1901, he wrote two articles related to Reconstruction, one of which was "The Freedmen's Bureau" for the *Atlantic Monthly*.[109] Unlike Dunning historians who wrote of the Freedmen's Bureau in a vacuum, Du Bois begins with the context of the Civil War and traces its effects on freed people during Reconstruction. He describes the limbo experienced by freed people and slaves alike during the Civil War, writing, "Masses of Negroes stood idle, or, if they worked spasmodically, were never sure of pay; and if perchance they received pay, squandered the new thing thoughtlessly."[110] Beginning with the Civil War allows Du Bois to contextualize

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[108] For more on Du Bois and the Atlanta University Studies, see Elliott M. Rudwick, "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Atlanta University Studies on the Negro," *The Journal of Negro Studies* 26, no. 4 (1957): 466-476. Atlanta University President Horace Bumstead and Trustee George Bradford started the conferences, which Du Bois was hired to lead in addition to his professorial appointment. They were created in imitation of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Conferences, whose audience was teachers and farmers, as opposed to the academic audience of the Atlanta Conferences.

[109] W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Freedmen's Bureau," *The Atlantic Monthly* 87, no. 519 (1901): 354-365.

[110] Du Bois, "The Freedmen's Bureau," 355.

"one of the great landmarks of political and social progress" as responding to a problem that began before the war ended.[111] He recalls its passage in Congress, proving the Freedmen's Bureau's establishment was far from a unilateral decision made by Radical Republicans. He chronicles both the positives and negatives of the organization. Despite great budgetary and personnel setbacks, he maintains, "…it relieved a vast amount of physical suffering; it transported 7000 fugitives from congested centres [*sic*] back to the farm; and, best of all, it inaugurated the crusade of the New England schoolma'am."[112] While the Dunningites characterize the Bureau as a corrupt organization, Du Bois opts for the following metaphor to describe the wrong actions of a few tainting the view of the entire group: "…it was the one fly that helped to spoil the ointment."[113] This metaphor allows for the possibility of a handful of corrupt individuals, as opposed to asserting a majority like Thompson. Instead of blaming the organization's agents, Du Bois looks at the circumstances that faced the Bureau and analyzes the reasons for their failure, while also highlighting their accomplishments. In a response to the negative popular opinion, he writes, "Above all, nothing is more convenient than to heap on the Freedmen's Bureau all the evils of that evil day, and damn it utterly for every mistake and blunder that was made."[114] Du Bois directly addresses the mistake made in casting the Freedmen's Bureau as a scapegoat for all that went wrong with Reconstruction.

In July of the same year, Du Bois wrote an article concerning Reconstruction in Georgia, specifically focusing in on the landholding figures of freed people, "The Negro Landholder of

[111] Du Bois, "The Freedmen's Bureau," 357.
[112] Du Bois, "The Freedmen's Bureau," 358.
[113] Du Bois, "The Freedmen's Bureau," 360.
[114] Du Bois, "The Freedmen's Bureau," 362.

Georgia" for the *Bulletin of the U.S. Department of Labor*.[115] He had been commissioned by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to write five studies, which Du Bois agreed to in hopes of receiving a civil service appointment.[116] As is true with most of Du Bois's work, even this sociological one, he begins with historical context on his subject matter. Though the article is chock-full of graphs and maps and contains a painstaking description of methodology, the broader social and political aims of Du Bois's inquiry shine through. In a brilliant use of rhetoric, Du Bois takes on the assumptions made about freed people. "Certainly it would not have been unnatural to suspect that under the circumstances the Negroes would become a mass of poverty-stricken vagabonds and criminals for many generations; and yet this has been far from the case."[117] He also pushes back against racist generalizations, which Thompson perpetuates, about the migration of freed people into town centers. He writes, "The fact that an increasingly large proportion of the total property of the State is in the hands of town Negroes shows that it is not merely the idle and vicious that are drifting into town."[118] Du Bois, even in this sociological study weaved in elements of history. These historical elements and references to Reconstruction proved lucrative in terms of gaining further commissions to write for *The Nation* and the *Atlantic*. His hopes of working for the federal government in a sociological capacity never came to fruition, but history remained an intellectual lighthouse.

His interest in Reconstruction pervaded even what is arguably one of his most famous works, published two years after the landholding and Freedmen's Bureau articles, *The Souls of*

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[115] W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Negro Landholder of Georgia," *Bulletin of the U.S. Department of Labor* 6, no. 35 (1901): 647-777.
[116] Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 197.
[117] Du Bois, "The Negro Landholder of Georgia," 648.
[118] Du Bois, "The Negro Landholder of Georgia," 677.

Black Folk.[119] Like his work for the Department of Labor, this work was more sociological than historical. Furnished with his trademark flowery prose, Du Bois recounts what it meant to be Black in America, introducing key concepts of "double-consciousness" and the "veil" behind which Black people lived.[120] In the Forethought, he writes, "I have sought here to sketch, in vague, uncertain outline, the spiritual world in which ten thousand thousand [*sic*] Americans live and strive."[121] One of the most famous lines "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line," repeated from the Forethought, opens the second chapter, which Du Bois explicitly labels a history of the Freedmen's Bureau.[122] He echoes his *Atlantic* article in defining it as "one of the most singular and interesting of the attempts made by a great nation to grapple with vast problems of race and social condition."[123] The Freedmen's Bureau and Reconstruction serve as key examples of historical attempts made to erase the so-called color line. He describes the current state of race relations in the South as "born of Reconstruction and Reaction," which have founded "a society of lawlessness and deception."[124] Though much of *Souls* does not concern itself with Reconstruction, the goal of the book, to pull back the veil and reveal racism's effect, is not achieved without the context of that era.

As Reconstruction history remained a theme in Du Bois's intellectual production, the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906 caused internal tensions regarding the efficacy of scholarship versus political action. His many career shifts, including his departure from Atlanta in 1910 to join the NAACP and edit *The Crisis*, are evidence of the fact that he questioned whether he was enacting

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[119] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Greenwich: Fawcett Publications, 1961). Originally published by Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co., 1903.
[120] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 16, 55.
[121] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, v.
[122] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 23.
[123] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 24.
[124] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 204.

real change as an academic. In the face of the riot's violence, Du Bois turned to journalism as a medium to rouse popular action and rebuke Washington's "accommodationist strategy."[125] He wrote a poem "A Litany of Atlanta" for *The Independent*, published a couple weeks after the massacre, and contributed to the "From the Point of View of the Negroes" section of a *The World Today* article "The Tragedy at Atlanta."[126] In the poem, Du Bois makes general appeals like "Great God deliver us," interspersed with more specific ones: "Behold this maimed and broken thing…an humble black man…They told him: Work and Rise…Did this man sin? Nay…Yet for that [white] man's crime this man lieth maimed and murdered, his wife naked to shame, his children, to poverty and evil."[127] In his *World Today* article, he recounts the facts of the event, asserting that no alleged rape of white women occurred, and places the riot in a larger context of political rabble-rousing. He writes, "The real cause of the riot was two years of vituperation and traduction of the Negro race by the most prominent candidates for the governorship [referring to Hoke Smith and Clark Howell]."[128] Politics was a realm on which Du Bois kept a careful eye. His attempts to bring public awareness through journalism to the connection between southern politics and violence failed as the riot went largely unacknowledged by the white population. Du Bois needed to dig deeper than social science or politics to confront prejudice, and thus he returned to history and Reconstruction.

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[125] Clifford Kuhn and Gregory Mixon, "Atlanta Race Massacre of 1906," New Georgia Encyclopedia, last modified Nov 14, 2022. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/atlanta-race-massacre-of-1906/.

[126] W.E.B. Du Bois and John Temple Graves, "The Tragedy of Atlanta," *The World Today* (Nashville: Current Encyclopedia Co., 1906). W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. W.E.B. Du Bois, "A Litany of Atlanta," *The Independent*, 1906. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[127] Du Bois, "A Litany of Atlanta," 3.

[128] Du Bois, "The Tragedy of Atlanta," 1174.

In the final year of his first stay in Atlanta, Du Bois stepped boldly into the historiographical conversation surrounding Reconstruction at a 1909 American Historical Association Conference in New York City. In celebration of its twenty-fifth anniversary, he participated in a southern history panel on "Reconstruction and Race-Relations since the Civil War."[129] Du Bois was one of six speakers, joined by none other than William Archibald Dunning and one of his students Ulrich B. Phillips, a (similarly controversial) historian of slavery. His speech, "Reconstruction and Its Benefits," was published as an article in the *American Historical Review* in 1910.[130] This article laid the foundation for *Black Reconstruction*, introducing the argument that Black people were the real representatives of democracy in American history and was the only article by an African American published in the *AHR* until 1980.[131] Breaking with the contemporary interpretation of Reconstruction history, he canvassed the history of multiple states, creating an accurate, robust context. As for the "benefits" of Reconstruction, he emphasized three: *democratic government*, *free public schools*, and *new social legislation*.[132] Democratic government referred to the fact that all (male) citizens were now allowed to vote thanks to the Fifteenth Amendment. Free public schools in the South were also established under Reconstruction and by social legislation he refers to homestead

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[129] "The Meeting of the American Historical Association at New York," *The American Historical Review* 15, no. 3 (1910): 488.
[130] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Reconstruction and Its Benefits," *The American Historical Review* 15, no. 4 (1910): 781–99.
[131] Claire Parfait, "Rewriting History: The Publication of W.E.B. Du Bois's 'Black Reconstruction in America' (1935)," *Book History* 12 (2009): 269. As Parfait explains in her endnote, reviews by African American scholars and works about African American history were published in the 70-year period, but no historical essays by African American scholars were published until the February 1980 presidential address by John Hope Franklin, also about Reconstruction, entitled "Mirror for Americans: A Century of Reconstruction History."
[132] Du Bois, "Reconstruction and Its Benefits," 795.

exemptions and the establishment of boards of commissioners. He highlights these three to show the practical benefits as well as larger ideological benefits of Reconstruction.

As he later did in *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois challenged Dunningite arguments and used their words to lend authority to his own. One of those people was Dunning's mentor, Columbia professor John W. Burgess. Burgess, "whom no one accuses of being negrophile," agreed that the Black Codes were meant to put Black people back into slavery.[133] He also employed bipartisan testimonies as to the competence of Black southern leadership to disprove charges of inept and unprepared Black congressmen installed by northerners. The burden of proof weighed heavy on Du Bois as an early revisionist of the master narrative of Reconstruction; he deftly shifted that weight onto the shoulders of those he spoke against, scholars and southern democrats alike. Despite receiving praise from Dunning and presenting at such a prestigious conference, Du Bois's contribution went unnoticed against the hegemonic Lost Cause narrative of Reconstruction.[134]

"Reconstruction and Its Benefits" planted the seed for Du Bois's magnum opus that would not be published for another twenty five years, after his return to Atlanta University. The article's publication also coincided with the beginning of a new era for Du Bois, as he experienced frustration with his lack of influence on politics as an academic. Regarding this time as a "fork in his career," he resigned from Atlanta University on July 5, 1910, and accepted the position as Director of Publicity and Research at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).[135] As David Levering Lewis characterizes the

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[133] Du Bois, "Reconstruction and Its Benefits," 784.
[134] David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight For Equality and the American Century,1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 351.
[135] Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 386, 408.

decision in the first volume of his biography of Du Bois, the "problem of the twentieth century impelled him from mobilizing racial data to becoming the prime mobilizer of a race."[136] The NAACP was founded following the 1908 race riot in Springfield, Illinois, which exposed violent racism as a national, rather than merely southern, problem. The organization began as a group of white advocates, namely William English Walling (who later urged Du Bois to leave Atlanta to join) and Mary White Ovington, who began meeting in the first week of 1909. By the time the official founding call was published on February 12, 1909, in the *Evening Post* and the *Nation*, the NAACP was officially interracial and steadily added Black members throughout the year.[137] Du Bois signed the call and spoke at the planned National Negro Conference meeting planned for May 31st, drawing on history in his discussion of politics and industry.[138] Once Du Bois arrived in New York, he advocated for a national monthly magazine, *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*, whose name was chosen in a meeting between him, Walling, and Ovington in August of 1910.[139]

Du Bois decided to "forsake the [ivory] tower for the platform" because of various racist incidents, ranging from economic to violent in nature, around Atlanta.[140] He writes of one in his autobiography, the lynching of Sam Hose, a Black man from central Georgia, on April 23, 1899.[141] He received the news on his way to the *Atlanta Constitution* office, to which he was presenting a piece on the facts of the alleged murder committed by Hose. As he describes it, the

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[136] Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 408.
[137] Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 390.
[138] Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 390-391, 393.
[139] Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 409.
[140] Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 408. Lewis explicitly enumerates Sam Hose's lynching, among other incidents, as one of the catalysts for Du Bois's career change.
[141] Darren E. Grem, "Sam Jones, Sam Hose, and the Theology of Racial Violence," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (2006): 41.

event caused two retrospective realizations: "first, one could not be a calm, cool, and detached scientist while Negroes were lynched, murdered and starved" and "secondly, there was no such definite demand for scientific work of the sort that I was doing..."[142] The demand, instead, was for impassioned activist work, which the NAACP allowed him to do, especially in his editorials for the *Crisis*. Besides the pull to the NAACP created by these events, Du Bois's push from Atlanta University came in the form of his opposition against Booker T. Washington, which made him unable to secure funding for the institution. In his outgoing statement, Du Bois wrote, "I insist on my right to think and speak," but lamented that his outspokenness had been used as "an excuse for abuse of and denial of aid to Atlanta University."[143] The point of his position at the NAACP, however, was to stir up controversy in hopes of publicizing the organization's cause.

One of the main modes of muckraking Du Bois employed in his editorials was the castigation of historical myths surrounding Reconstruction, a mode that carried into *Black Reconstruction*. He could use historical writing to generating controversy because of the political implications of the Lost Cause understanding of Reconstruction. In an article on the "Violations of Property Rights," Du Bois identifies the connection between the justification for Jim Crow laws and racist Reconstruction interpretations. He writes, "After the war…[southerners'] accusation against the Negro race was inborn laziness, and most superficial students of the Negro problem have seen what they think is ocular evidence of this laziness, despite" historical evidence to the contrary, which he lists.[144] Consistently, he identified racist scholarship as a main culprit. In the list of historic days for each month's issue, important events

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[142] Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois*, 141.
[143] Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois*, 146.
[144] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Violations of Property Rights," *The Crisis* 2, no. 1 (1911): 28.

during Reconstruction were frequently included, like the introduction of the 1867 Reconstruction Bill by Thaddeus Stevens, a figure Du Bois he would come to laud in *Black Reconstruction*.[145] Du Bois also writes of a University of South Carolina student who plagiarized over half of his 1901 *Atlantic* article on the Freedmen's and still won a prize from the United Daughters of the Confederacy, causing him "much innocent amusement."[146] From the beginning, his work at *The Crisis* reflected his continued interest in Reconstruction history.

During the twenty-four years that he edited T*he Crisis*, Du Bois built the journal into a widely-read periodical, but confronted by institutional issues, personal disputes, and changing philosophies, he was eventually forced to return to Atlanta in 1934. Du Bois funneled all his intellectual energy into this publication of "propaganda," sparking fights with the Board of Directors who expected *The Crisis* to be the organization's mouthpiece.[147] By 1919, he had increased the journal's circulation to over 100,000 copies each month due to the strength of his sole editorial voice.[148] This caused issues in the wake of the Red Scare for Du Bois, who covered, though did not yet truly support, socialism and organized labor in the periodical.[149] In the mid-twenties, however, his stance would change as he traveled through Europe and adopted the Marxist lens that informed *Black Reconstruction*.[150] Throughout the roughly twenty-year period between "Reconstruction and its Benefits" and the preliminary research for the

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[145] "Historic Days in February," *The Crisis* 3, no. 4 (1912): 166.
[146] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Modest Me," *The Crisis* 3, no. 6 (1912): 246-247.
[147] Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 468-470.
[148] Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight For Equality and the American Century*, 2.
[149] For editorial stances on socialism and organized labor see Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 419-420. For more on the Red Scare and the Justice Department's suspicion of The Crisis, see Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight For Equality and the American Century*, 5-7.
[150] For an account of his travels through Europe and introduction to Bolshevism, see "Bolsheviks and Dark Princesses" in *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight For Equality and the American Century*, 183-228.

monograph, the "Reconstruction challenge had consumed Du Bois," evidenced in part by his attempt to publish a revisionist statement on Reconstruction in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "even as he managed *The Crisis*… and maneuvered untiringly to out the NAACP secretary."[151] It was largely his feud with NAACP secretary Walter F. White that led Du Bois to sever ties with the organization, leave New York, and return to the Reconstruction debate that had haunted him for all those years.[152]

Du Bois started the official outlining process for *Black Reconstruction* around October 1931, three years before his return to Atlanta University.[153] From that time on, he had one foot out the door. He received funding from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, an organization he first encountered at *The Crisis*.[154] In addition to funding the construction of rural schoolhouses and paying for access to medical services in predominantly Black areas, the Rosenwald fund provided scholarships and fellowships to graduate students studying issues in social science

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[151] Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight For Equality and the American Century*, 350. For more on Du Bois's revisionist stance in the 1920s that was rejected from *Encyclopedia Britannica*'s fourteenth edition, see Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight For Equality and the American Century*, 232-235. Du Bois also discusses this rejection on p. 713-714 in the "Propaganda of History," the final chapter of *Black Reconstruction*.

[152] Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to Harry E. Davis, January 16, 1934. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. This letter describes the reason, in his own words, Du Bois left the NAACP.

[153] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Outline of Du Bois's book on Reconstruction*, ca. October 21, 1931. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[154]Julius Rosenwald was a Jewish-American businessman whose philanthropy was directed toward education, especially for African Americans. For the first instance of contact between the Fund and Du Bois, see a letter sent by them to Du Bois in 1922: Letter from Julius Rosenwald Fund to W.E B. Du Bois, August 11, 1922. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. Further correspondence regarding the Fund's scholarship advertisements in *The Crisis* includes Letter from A. C. Webb to Editor of the Crisis, August 12, 1923; Letter from Julius Rosenwald Fund to W. E. B. Du Bois, June 30, 1924; Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to Julius Rosenwald, April 3, 1926. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

related to the South.[155] In his outline, Du Bois distilled the thesis of the monograph into seven points. In his first point, he set out the raison d'être for the book as a direct response to Dunningite interpretations of Reconstruction, which have caused the lack of a "real Science of History." He wrote in the outline from 1931, "In the midst of strong feeling and deep hostility, history records not what really happened, but only what we wish to remember." He laid out the main aims of the Lost Cause-laden historiographical argument as the "paramount desire to forget slavery, justify the white South, allay prejudices, keep down bitterness arising from Civil War, and unite the thought and sentiment of the country for new progress."[156] The direct result of this historiography, he contended, was the obfuscation of the true history of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Du Bois addressed the book from the outset to "the honest historian and seeker after truth as clear as any historical facts can be," reanimating his search for truth as a remedy against racism as he put aside activism.[157]

To put such a claim of truth into practice, Du Bois needed a rigorous methodology. Since *Black Reconstruction* was to be a multi-state study spanning from the beginnings of sectional conflict to roughly his present time, it required careful research practices. Harcourt, Brace, and Company, a trade publisher, published the monograph, as opposed to the university presses that published many of the Dunning Reconstruction studies.[158] Harcourt wanted the book to be published in the spring of 1933, but Du Bois refused because he had "to have references

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[155] J. Scott McCormick, "The Julius Rosenwald Fund," *The Journal of Negro Education* 3, no. 4 (1934): 624.
[156] *Outline of Du Bois's book on Reconstruction*, 1.
[157] *Outline of Du Bois's book on Reconstruction*, 4.
[158] Parfait, "Rewriting History," 270.

carefully verified," as he explained to activist Rachel DuBois (no relation).[159] He organized the key parts of his narrative in careful chronologies.[160] He sought out additional source material from contacts around the South; in one letter he reached out to Howard University-trained lawyer Rene C. Metoyer for more advice on retrieving source material on African Americans in Louisiana during Reconstruction.[161] Similarly, he sought advice from the director of the Tuskegee Institute's libraries, Monroe N. Work, for sources on Alabama. Work suggested that he reach out to Carter G. Woodson, which Du Bois did not do, though he did cite him in the monograph.[162] About two years into the writing process, he also taught a class at Spelman College in Atlanta, in which he assigned Reconstruction-related projects to his students. "I've got them now each working on a state study of Reconstruction in the South," he wrote, "This will help with my book and they find it very interesting."[163] Just as Thompson reached out to her Georgia connections for research assistance, Du Bois used his activist and scholarly connections to further bolster his monograph, which required a far larger source base.

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[159]Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to Rachel Davis DuBois, January 3, 1933. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[160] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Reconstruction chronology,* ca. 1933. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[161] Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Rene C. Metoyer, November 15, 1933. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[162] Letter from Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute Library to W.E.B. Du Bois*,* June 29, 1934. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. While Du Bois did maintain contact with Woodson throughout the 1920s, he did not correspond with him about his research for *Black Reconstruction*.

[163] Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to Rachel Davis DuBois, March 27, 1933. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Du Bois's background in sociology proved helpful. He carefully collected statistics on land ownership, literacy rates, and voting records.[164] In keeping with conventional historical methods, he also pored through congressional records and newspapers.[165] Instead of merely quoting bits and pieces of these documents like Thompson and others did, Du Bois wrote out many of them in full in the monograph in an effort to anticipate charges of illegitimate research practices and invalid interpretations.[166] In his methodology, he prioritized the rebuttal of the Dunningites, whose monographs he combed through to interrogate their use of sources. He not only transcribed primary sources as part of his original research but took note of sources used by Dunning scholars.[167] Doing so allowed him to start from the exact evidence used by his historiographical foes and prove that he could draw from them correct conclusions, hence his heavy citation of Dunningites throughout the monograph.[168] One example of this technique occurs in his chapter on the white proletariat in Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. He cites Thompson profusely in his description of meetings of the Georgia State Legislature post-war, acknowledging her factual contributions and dismantling her mythical ones.[169] His bibliography

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[164] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Memorandum on Black Reconstruction*, ca. 1932. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
[165] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black reconstruction notes,* ca. 1933. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
[166] For one of many examples, see his reprinting of one of Charles Sumner's speeches before the Senate, which takes up four pages of the book. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 193-197. Originally published by New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1935.
[167] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Reconstruction, ca. 1933.* W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
[168] My claim is also substantiated in Eric Foner, "*Black Reconstruction*: An Introduction," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (2013): 411.
[169] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction,* 495-496.

is an essential piece of the monograph for determining which scholars he cites to argue against and which to agree with.

Du Bois categorizes his bibliography into eleven separate parts that delineated the degree of accuracy exhibited by each respective author's interpretation, four of which relate to the historical profession. Under the first category, *Standard—Anti-Negro (These authors believe the Negro to be sub-human and congenitally unfitted for citizenship and the suffrage)*, almost every Dunningite is listed. Thompson has the honor of appearing twice with citations of both her 1914 "Carpet-Baggers in the United States Senate" article and 1915 *Reconstruction in Georgia* monograph. He then breaks down the rest of the profession into three categories. The first is *Propaganda, Historians (Fair to Indifferent on the Negro)*, under which Howard K. Beale's *The Critical Year* and Francis B. Simkins's and Robert H. Woody's *South Carolina During Reconstruction* appear. Simkins and Woody would go on to participate in a retrospective roundtable on Reconstruction with Thompson in 1940. Beale also wrote a major article for the *AHR* about Reconstruction historiography five years after *Black Reconstruction*'s publication.[170] The second is *Historians (These historians have studied the history of Negroes and write sympathetically about them)* included *Slave-Trading in the Old South* by Frederic Bancroft, after whom the Bancroft Prize, a major award in U.S. history, was named. Lastly, Du Bois lists *Negro Historians (These are the standard works of Negro historians, some judicial, some eager and even bitter in defense)* in a category unto themselves.[171] Here, he cites his own *Atlantic*

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[170] For more on the roundtable and Beale's article, see chapter 3 of this thesis, Albert B. Moore, "The Sixth Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association," *The Journal of Southern History* 7, no. 1 (1941): 55-70, and Howard K. Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," *The American Historical Review* 45, no. 4 (1940): 807-827.

[171] "Bibliography" in Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 731-737.

Freedmen's Bureau article as well as Carter G. Woodson's *The Negro in Our History* and *Negro Orators and their Orations*.

Unlike Thompson, Du Bois begins *Black Reconstruction* with the history of slavery in the United States and sectionalism in the first chapter "The Black Worker," who he poses as the catalyst of the Civil War.[172] The seven hundred and thirty-nine page book is divided into seventeen chapters, a bibliography, index, and no introduction. He is deliberate from the outset about asserting a Marxist framework, evident in the first chapter's title and the second ("The White Worker"), and employing the concepts of monopoly and capitalism.[173] Du Bois's use of a Marxist framework manifests itself in his thesis that the Civil War was a general strike and, accordingly, Reconstruction was a "pivotal episode in American labor history" in its attempt to establish labor rights.[174] Most importantly, he argues that enslaved workers, "as founding stone of a new economic system in the nineteenth century and for the modern world," were the "underlying cause" of the war.[175] Beginning with a completely different premise from that of the Dunningites, Du Bois contends that the Civil War was about the abolition of slavery rather than states' rights. In doing so, he cast Reconstruction in a different light as well—as an effort to preserve the freedom won through the war. In the next two chapters he goes on to chronicle the two other classes in the South, the white worker, who supported slavery despite its negative impact on their employment and wages, and the planter, a pragmatist who would stop at nothing, including brutal enslavement, to increase his profits.[176] His fourth chapter focuses on enslaved

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[172] Du Bois, "The Black Worker" in *Black Reconstruction*, 3-16.
[173] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 15.
[174] For an extended analysis of Marxist methodology in *Black Reconstruction*, see Foner, "*Black Reconstruction*: An Introduction," 409-418.
[175] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 15.
[176] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 19, 30, 37, 39.

resistance, which he contends "was not merely the desire to stop work. It was a strike on a wide basis against the conditions of work."[177] With this argument, Du Bois directly rebuts the claim made by Thompson that enslaved people were mindless pawns manipulated by the Union army. Through the actions of enslaved people, Du Bois argues, "slowly but surely an economic dispute and political test of strength took on the aspects of a great moral crusade."[178]

When transitioning to Reconstruction, Du Bois confronts Lost Cause ideology directly. He writes, "When a right and just cause loses, men suffer. But men also suffer when a wrong cause loses. Suffering thus in itself does not prove the justice or injustice of a cause."[179] Faced with overturning the idea perpetuated by Lost Cause adherents that "Negroes were lazy, poor, and ignorant," Du Bois reveals that the Black Codes instituted following the Civil War were the real culprit of restricting Black work; conveniently, this allowed white southerners not only to restrict Black freedom, but also accuse Black people of needing slavery as a motivation to work.[180] On the vilified Freedmen's Bureau, he places the onus on the South for its failure, doubling down on his earlier assessment that white southerners portrayed it as corrupt and declaring that "the bureau was a dictatorship of the army over property for the benefit of labor."[181] Over the thirty years since his *Atlantic* article, his language and analysis took on a Marxist cast; not to mention, this medium was different in that he did not have to concern himself with appealing to a white audience, allowing him to be stronger in his condemnation of southern attitudes.

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[177] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 67.
[178] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 80.
[179] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 129.
[180] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 132, 167.
[181] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 227.

In his assessment halfway through the book, the instruments of Reconstruction were doomed not because of their own incapability but because of southern resistance to it. Reconstruction officials were believed by southerners to be "without exception…liars, jailbirds, criminals, and thieves, and the hatred of them rose to a crescendo of curses and filth."[182] With an attitude like that towards its leaders, the South would never accept Reconstruction as legitimate. Du Bois's coverage of southern attitudes adds an essential analysis of social conditions absent from Dunningite studies, who vindicated those attitudes. He is not tied down to the social realm, however, as he chronicles the stories of labor in specific states in chapters ten through twelve to draw economic comparisons between them. Although Atlanta factored largely into his scholarly inspiration, Georgia does not appear more than any other state in the book. Unlike the Dunningites' state-specific histories, having a national scope that never attends to one state more than any other, but still acknowledges their individual importance, further allows Du Bois to address federal debates that remained points of contention in his day. Specifically, he historicizes the debates surrounding the Reconstruction amendments, which were often misrepresented as being dominated by aggressive northerners as an excuse for southern disobedience.[183] That southern disobedience, which took on the form of Jim Crow laws, only served to highlight the work's greater purpose.

After several delays, *Black Reconstruction* was published in 1935. The book was met with a plethora of reviews thanks to the promotional budget of Harcourt. Even Walter White worked with Harcourt, promising to help publicize the work however possible, despite his feud with Du

[182] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 348.
[183] See chapter 8 of Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*.

Bois.[184] White "mailed a copy…to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who promised not only to read the book, but also attempt to persuade the president to read it as well."[185] Conversations about the book and its controversial thesis lit up newspapers across the country. Almost all of New York's most influential journalist-critics reviewed it.[186] Included in this pool were reviewers from the *New York Herald Tribune*, *New York Times*, and, outside the city, the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*.[187] Each review labeled Du Bois with some form of the word "passionate," a reductive adjective for a historian concerned with objectivity. The reduction of his work is perhaps most evident in the *Los Angeles Times* review, which begins with "A Negro comes to the defense of his maligned people," as if the purpose of the book were not far larger. The *Washington Post* pointed out the dilemma of the work as a "well-written thesis on a gravely controversial subject." The *NYT* review criticized his overreliance on secondary source material, "especially since he has had the benefit of grants from the Rosenwald and Carnegie funds and has been given some leisure for writing."[188] This criticism was unfair considering that he largely uses the secondary sources cited to track down primary sources, as opposed to lifting interpretations out of them. Not to mention, Du Bois did not have access to racially segregated southern archives. Noticeably absent from this large base of reviewers is the *American*

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[184] Letter from Walter Francis White to Harcourt Brace & Company, September 22, 1934. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
[185] Parfait, "Rewriting History," 278.
[186] Parfait, "Rewriting History," 279.
[187] Lewis Gannett, "Books and Things," *New York Herald Tribune*, June 13, 1935, 17. William MacDonald, "The American Negro's Part in the Reconstruction Years: A Survey of the Period Between 1860 and 1880 by Professor W.E. Burghardt Du Bois," *New York Times*, June 16, 1935, 4, 16. J.J.W. Riseling, "Tragic Era," *Washington Post*, July 14, 1935, 8. Ida Needham, "Negro Educator's History Defends Black People: Years of Post-Civil War Reconstruction Shown in Important Rescue of Long Ignored Facts," *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1935, 8.
[188] MacDonald, "The American Negro's Part in the Reconstruction Years," 4.

Historical Review, which published his Reconstruction article, and the *Atlanta Constitution*, which reviewed Thompson's monograph. Still, Du Bois's work received considerably more press coverage than the typical Dunning School monograph—Thompson's included.

The *Atlanta Daily World*, the city's preeminent Black newspaper, commended the book's "combination of research and unbiased judgement." Several other prominent Black newspapers praised the work for its contribution to a long obscured history, as did Black scholarly journals including Woodson's *Journal of Negro History* and *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*.[189] Three academic journals, the *Catholic Historical Review*, the *Southern Review*, and the *North American Review*, presented Du Bois in somewhat negative lights. John Gillard of *Catholic Historical Review* claimed Du Bois "failed to write *the* history of Reconstruction" and Douglas DeBevoise of the *North American Review* called the claim that slavery was the reason for the Civil War "factually…the weakest section of the book." Benjamin Kendrick, of the *Southern Review*, who would later participate in a *Southern Historical Association* Roundtable with

[189] Lucius Jones, "Society Slants: W.E.B. Du Bois and 'Black Reconstruction,'" *Atlanta Daily World*, August 11, 1935, 2. V.P. Harris, "Book Chats," Review of *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, by W.E.B. Du Bois, *Chicago Defender*, December 28, 1935, 11. E.W.R., "Du Bois Book on Post-War Era His Best: 'Black Reconstruction' is Highly Informative, Easy to Read," *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 4, 1935, 5. "Another Book by Du Bois: 'Black Reconstruction' is Du Bois' Best Literary Effort, Critics Claim Writes His Best," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 8, 1935, 4. "Reconstruction, a Dixie Blessing, Says Du Bois in New Book," *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 8, 1935, 10. P.J. Young, "The Melting Pot: Du Bois Rewrites History," *New Journal and Guide*, June 29, 1935, 8. Rayford W. Logan, "Book Reviews," Review of *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, by W.E.B. Du Bois, *Journal of Negro History* 21, no. 1 (1936): 61-63. Charles H. Wesley, "Racial Propaganda and Historical Writing (A Review of 'Black Reconstruction')," Review of *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, by W.E.B. Du Bois, *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* (1935), 244-246, 254.

Thompson on Reconstruction, chalked up Du Bois's criticism of the Dunning School to "his own bias," and lamented his use of history to right the wrongs of the past.[190]

More than external critics, however, Du Bois addresses the book to those historians he places in the "Anti-Negro" section of his bibliography. He ends *Black Reconstruction* with an epilogue titled "Propaganda of History," which plainly lays out the tenets of Lost Cause Reconstruction history that had made their way into school curricula across the nation. He uses Helen Boardman's textbook study at the outset to distill the main racist theses on Reconstruction in then-current textbooks, but ultimately places the culpability on the Dunning School.[191] He casts their work as "reflect[ing] small credit upon American historians as scientists," and Dunning himself as a professor who "deliberately encourage[d] students to gather thesis material in order to support a prejudice."[192] His omnipresent musings on Truth appear here as he exposes the stakes of using it to reform not only in the history profession but in the nation's memory. It is shame, he postulates, that keeps the nation in a state of forgetfulness, on the part of the South out of its defense of slavery and on the part of the North out of its defense of Black people.[193] The national aim, then, of writing Reconstruction history is to remember and "to establish the Truth, on which Right in the future may be built."[194] He gives a warning to the profession: "We

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[190] John Gillard, "Brief Notices," Review of *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, by W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Catholic Historical Review* 22, no. 2 (1936): 233. Benjamin B. Kendrick, "History as a Curative," Review of *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, by W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Southern Review* 1 (1936): 545. Douglas DeBevoise, "Black Reconstruction," Review of *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, by W.E.B. Du Bois, *The North American Review* 240, no. 2 (1935): 369.
[191] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 711-712, 725.
[192] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 713, 725.
[193] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 711.
[194] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 725.

shall never have a science of history," an object that greatly concerned his colleagues, "until we have in our colleges men who regard the truth as more important than the defense of the white race…"[195] These pertinent moral issues for both the American and the historian were far from an afterthought. The propaganda epilogue drove his inquiry. During his early research, Du Bois wrote a series of eight questions on propaganda that directed the chapter, surrounding the value of telling the exact scientific truth, the efficacy of truth in the face of sensitivity, the repercussions of telling the truth (especially when ugly), and the lessons that can be learned from losing a war.[196] Truth preoccupied Du Bois because of his belief in its ability to make a more perfect union, a goal abandoned along with Reconstruction.

At the end of the chapter, just as he canvasses each southern state in the book, Du Bois canvasses the state-studies of each Dunningite. He points out the illogic of the racism displayed by Thompson in her monograph. He writes, "It seeks to be fair, but silly stories about Negroes indicating utter lack of even common sense are included, and every noble sentiment from white people." As an example, he provides, "When two Negro workers, William and Jim, put a straightforward advertisement in a local paper, the author says that it was 'evidently written by a white friend.' There is not the slightest historical evidence to prove this, and there were plenty of educated Negroes in Augusta at the time who might have written this."[197] The critique on Thompson is brief, as are those of her peers, but come together to reveal a tapestry comprised of their respective negative contributions to the history of Reconstruction. By 1935, many of the Dunningites had died. But both Thompson and Du Bois lived past midcentury, leaving them

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[195] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 725.
[196] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Propaganda*, ca. June 1932. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
[197] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 720.

with time and opportunities to define their legacies in the face of a changing American political landscape.

Chapter Three

Passing the Torch: The Profession's Responses to Thompson and Du Bois

While W.E.B. Du Bois and C. Mildred Thompson moved on to new endeavors in their lives and careers, the conversations they began continued throughout the century and followed them. Thompson, as the last surviving Dunningite, was brought into conversation with revisionist scholars in 1940. Beyond that conversation, she established a political and social legacy removed from historical scholarship through her Vassar deanship and friendship with Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Dismayed by *Black Reconstruction*'s inability to change public memory, Du Bois turned to the international political sphere. Nevertheless, the call for change made by Du Bois revealed that the scholarship on Reconstruction for much of the century was in desperate need of revision.

Du Bois's monograph marked a major change in the historiographical conversation, beginning with Black scholars at the time of publication and followed by a delayed response from mainstream historical organizations and journals a few years later. Its publication caused historians to question the long-revered Dunningite state studies of Reconstruction. The blatant racial bias, false claims of widespread corruption, and portrayal of the South as a victim made historians think more critically about the implicit assumptions driving scholarship. [198] As the early civil rights challenges to Jim Crow began during World War II, the link between these historical misinterpretations and southern politics became impossible to ignore.[199] Black

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[198] For more on the issues historians in this era took up with Reconstruction historiography, see Bernard A. Weisberger, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography," *The Journal of Southern History* 25, no. 4 (1959): 427-447.

[199] For an examination of the early emergence of the civil rights movement and the corresponding backlash in the form of the segregationist movement, see Jason Morgan Ward, *Defending White Democracy: The Making of a Segregationist Movement and the Remaking of Racial Politics, 1936-1965* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011). See

scholars, scholarly journals and popular periodicals immediately engaged with *Black Reconstruction* upon its release, praising its robust scholarship and revisionist argument.[200] The later mainstream rumblings began in largely white historical journals and at conferences in the South and then in the *American Historical Review* (*AHR*)—the journal of record for professional historians in the United States.

A particularly important early response to Du Bois was an article that appeared in the *Journal of Southern History* in 1939.[201] In the essay, titled "New Viewpoints in Southern Reconstruction," future Southern Historical Association (SHA) president Francis B. Simkins referenced both Du Bois and Dunning in his call for a "more critical, creative, and tolerant attitude."[202] Simkins, a native South Carolinian, earned his doctorate at Columbia University

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also Mia Bay, *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance* Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021) for a history of the "Long Civil Rights Movement."

[200] For its reception by Black scholars and journalists, see Lucius Jones, "Society Slants: W.E.B. Du Bois and 'Black Reconstruction,'" *Atlanta Daily World*, August 11, 1935, 2. V.P. Harris, "Book Chats," Review of *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, by W.E.B. Du Bois, *Chicago Defender*, December 28, 1935, 11. E.W.R., "Du Bois Book on Post-War Era His Best: 'Black Reconstruction' is Highly Informative, Easy to Read," *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 4, 1935, 5. "Another Book by Du Bois: 'Black Reconstruction' is Du Bois' Best Literary Effort, Critics Claim Writes His Best," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 8, 1935, 4. "Reconstruction, a Dixie Blessing, Says Du Bois in New Book," *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 8, 1935, 10. P.J. Young, "The Melting Pot: Du Bois Rewrites History," *New Journal and Guide*, June 29, 1935, 8. Rayford W. Logan, "Book Reviews," Review of *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, by W.E.B. Du Bois, *Journal of Negro History* 21, no. 1 (1936): 61-63. Charles H. Wesley, "Racial Propaganda and Historical Writing (A Review of 'Black Reconstruction')," Review of *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, by W.E.B. Du Bois, *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* (1935), 244-246, 254.

[201] Francis B. Simkins, "New Viewpoints of Southern Reconstruction," *The Journal of Southern History* 5, no. 1 (1939): 49-61.

[202] Simkins, "New Viewpoints," 60.

under none other than Dunning himself, making him an unlikely candidate for a revisionist.[203] Even more unlikely was the fact that Simkins learned to reject the idea of Black people as innately inferior during the 1910s as an undergraduate at University of South Carolina.[204] He sought out an education at Columbia because it was an open-minded intellectual environment relative to the one in which he grew up.[205] In that way, it is not surprising that Simkins became a revisionist, or at least considered one among southerners—he was a contrarian, often just for the sake of the challenge.[206] Between his prestigious education and knack for identifying historiographical holes, Simkins became a commander in the field of southern history.

According to Simkins, the obvious issue with Reconstruction historiography within the profession was that the interpretations surrounding it were only multiplying over time, leading to a lack of historical consensus. Furthermore, Simkins recognized the political implications of Reconstruction myths, especially as politicians employed them rhetorically as a justification for Black political disfranchisement. Taking a cue from Du Bois, he explained that, because a negative historical memory of Reconstruction was part of the Southerner's "civic code," the historian now had a "serious civic duty" to avoid the pitfalls of Lost Cause bias.[207] He saw the "color line" of southern society as even stronger following Reconstruction because of the resentment it created among white people.[208] The problem rests, he contended, with the conflation of political and social spheres during Reconstruction, which led historians to conceal the positive and "quietly constructive" elements that occurred in southern society during the era.

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[203] James S. Humphreys, *Francis Butler Simkins: A Life* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2008), 2.
[204] Humphreys, *Francis Butler Simkins: A Life*, 29.
[205] Humphreys, *Francis Butler Simkins: A Life*, 35.
[206] Humphreys, *Francis Butler Simkins: A Life*, 168.
[207] Simkins, "New Viewpoints," 51.
[208] Simkins, "New Viewpoints," 55.

Even Du Bois is implicated among those historians who overlook those aspects of life that were not "directly political."[209] Simkins came to a different conclusion about the proper trajectory of Reconstruction historiography than Du Bois; he saw the issue as a lack of historical consensus whereas Du Bois saw it as a set of flawed premises. What Du Bois did do that influenced revisionists like Simkins was open the debate on Reconstruction history, a subject previously considered set in stone.

Still, the radicalism of Du Bois's work had yet to be accepted by mainstream historians, especially in the South. Simkins's reverence for the "sagacious" Dunning and the distant, white gaze of Black people he held are case in point.[210] He upheld Dunning's assertion that "the newly-liberated freedmen were 'fascinated with the pursuit of the white man's culture'" and denigrated the desire of freed people to connect with Africa.[211] Simkins did not apply the same criticism of political white supremacy to social white supremacy. A "radical in the South Carolinian sense," there were limits to his understanding of racism's pervasive nature.[212] He recognized that political disenfranchisement was unjust and illogical because he did not believe in its premise that Black people were intellectually inferior. He did not, however, believe African Americans were entitled to social equality, evidenced in his comments that uphold the supremacy of white "civilization."[213] On this point, he and Du Bois differed greatly.

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[209] Simkins, "New Viewpoints," 52.
[210] Simkins, "New Viewpoints," 59.
[211] Simkins, "New Viewpoints," 59.
[212] Humphreys, *Francis Butler Simkins: A Life*, 29. Simkins labeled himself as a "radical in the South Carolinian sense" in recounting his transformative visit to a Black church as an undergraduate, during which he saw, for the first time, Black people as capable of being "as civilized as a member of the ruling race." This statement in and of itself demonstrates the fact that being a "radical" in the South in his time required only general tolerance of Black people and still consisted of racist thinking.
[213] Humphreys, *Francis Butler Simkins: A Life*, 30.

Further evidence of racism's pervasiveness in the profession was the fact that Simkins and another white historian were recognized as the representatives of revisionist history at the 1940 SHA Roundtable on Reconstruction. Both were explicitly piggybacking off the contributions of "the most extreme" revisionist scholar Du Bois.[214] The other historian was Simkins's mentee, Duke University professor Robert Hilliard Woody, with whom he wrote *South Carolina During Reconstruction*, earning them the prestigious John H. Dunning Prize from the American Historical Association (AHA) in 1931.[215] Simkins reverberated the argument of the monograph in his "New Viewpoints of Southern Reconstruction" article, which was that Reconstruction had genuinely constructive elements and a focus on life during the period would reveal such. Woody and Simkins represented the middle ground between Dunning and Du Bois, distinguishing themselves in the book's preface as "forego[ing] the temptation of following in the footsteps of historians who have interpreted the period as only a glamorous but tragic melodrama of political intrigue."[216] Woody, a graduate of the Atlanta-based Emory University, had direct contact with Du Bois, whom he asked for advice about finding source material on extra-legal racial discrimination in North Carolina, before *Black Reconstruction* was published.[217] In a curt response, Du Bois recommended he go directly to the source and conduct interviews with Black people in North Carolina, warning him that they may not trust him as a

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[214] Albert B. Moore, "The Sixth Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association," The Journal of Southern History 7, no. 1 (1941): 55-70. Du Bois explicitly referenced on page 66.
[215] For a list of all John H. Dunning Prize, now called the AHA Prize in American History, recipients, see "AHA Prize in American History Recipients," American Historical Association, https://www.historians.org/awards-and-grants/past-recipients/aha-prize-in-american-history-recipients.
[216] Francis Butler Simkins and Robert Hilliard Woody, *South Carolina During Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1932), viii.
[217] Letter from R. H. Woody to W.E.B. Du Bois, November 18, 1927. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

white southern man poking around for information.[218] This exchange reveals the distance that existed between white historians and the racial issues they wrote about, and the reason why Black voices remained silenced in historiography, leading to further myth perpetuation, whether intentional or not. Sidelining Black historians created an echo chamber in the field that Du Bois worked to actively disrupt.

On Saturday, November 9, 1940, the SHA kept this echo chamber intact with their Roundtable on Reconstruction. Opposing Simkins and Woody were C. Mildred Thompson and Benjamin B. Kendrick, a fellow Georgian, Columbia University graduate, and Dunning student. Kendrick was not one of the eight students to write a state study on Reconstruction. However, his dissertation focused on the congressional committee responsible for the creation of the fourteenth amendment, which he finished a year before Thompson's in 1914.[219] Kendrick was very familiar with Du Bois's contribution as a reviewer of *Black Reconstruction*. Du Bois was likewise familiar with Kendrick's dissertation, which he cites in his *Black Reconstruction* bibliography. Kendrick's work appeared under the section of authors who "seek the facts in certain narrow definite field and in most cases do not ignore the truth as to Negroes," a better label than the propagandist one Thompson received.[220] Du Bois created the distinction between Kendrick and Thompson largely because Kendrick's work was one of constitutional history, containing the journal of the joint committee of fifteen on Reconstruction reprinted in full. The

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[218] Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to R. H. Woody, November 23, 1927. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[219] Benjamin B. Kendrick, "The Journal of the Joint Committee of Fifteen on Reconstruction," Ph.D. diss., (Columbia University, 1914).

[220] For more on Kendrick's *Black Reconstruction* review, see Chapter 2 of this thesis. For Du Bois's bibliographic categorizations, see "Bibliography" in Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 731-737.

monograph remained in the realm of historicizing the committee itself: its members, how the journal came to be, their debates. The state studies of Reconstruction allowed for more bias in their scope and subject than a study that consisted in large part of a close reading of one document.

During the roundtable discussion, Woody first addressed the two-pronged revisionist grievance with original Reconstruction historiography: the "attitudes toward race questions" on one hand and "the whole problem of social classes and their economic interests and the responsibility for the failures of Reconstruction" on the other.[221] Woody further acknowledged the "burden of proof" on the revisionists to overturn "the pattern of Reconstruction as exhibited by many able scholars…so well fixed in American historiography."[222] Simkins echoed the sentiments of his article in calling for the acknowledgement that Reconstruction was condemned by southerners before it began, that it was never "un-American or excessive and dovetailed with the demands of the Negroes themselves," and that Black inferiority as a premise must be eliminated.[223] These acknowledgements were vital to changing the historiographical conversation and the history itself.

Thompson and Kendrick were asked to speak on any revisions they would make to their previously published studies of Reconstruction. Thompson, who proved more open to this suggestion than Kendrick, reflected on the periodization of her work. She said she would extend the study two decades past its original endpoint, from 1872 to 1890, because the social and economic ramifications of Reconstruction reverberated into the next decades. She added that she would have directed the study more towards the implications of economic and social materials,

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[221] Direct quotes from Woody as recorded in Moore, "The Sixth Annual Meeting," 66.
[222] Moore, "The Sixth Annual Meeting," 66.
[223] Moore, "The Sixth Annual Meeting," 67.

the growth of towns, population mobility, and the church's role in urban life. Most surprisingly, however, she singled out the study of race relations of "the more common sort than those made critical by the Ku Klux." By "the more common sort" Thompson meant the quotidian, average interracial interactions that occurred during the period, as opposed to the more, she seems to suggest less frequent, violent ones spearheaded by the KKK. Removed from interracial interaction, she expressed interest in Black perspectives. "I would want to know more about the part of Negroes themselves in securing and maintaining their freedom."[224] This would have required Thompson to change her source base significantly to include Black voices.

Thompson's admission was quite significant considering the specific criticism levied against her by Du Bois in his "Propaganda of History" chapter. Thompson, as portrayed by Du Bois, "seeks to be fair, but silly stories about Negroes [indicate] utter lack of even common sense…"[225] When she did mention Black people, she certainly did not use sources produced by them, as Du Bois suggested to Woody. By privileging the "official" records produced by whites, she perpetuated their racist interpretations instead of challenging them. In another comment that seems to be an implicit response to Du Bois, Thompson said, "time has passed for utilization of the state unit for further inquiry into reconstruction problems," though the state studies served their purpose "well, on the whole."[226] Thompson did not specifically reference Du Bois by name, but the issues she found with her work align with his previous critiques of her work.

Kendrick, on the other hand, conceded nothing. He defended his own work in saying he would not make any "material alteration" and called the Dunning state studies "on the whole

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[224] Moore, "The Sixth Annual Meeting," 67.
[225] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 720. Originally published by New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1935.
[226] Moore, "The Sixth Annual Meeting," 67-68.

scholarly and sound."[227] His response is especially strange considering not only Du Bois's assessment of his work but also Du Bois's request that he contribute to his *Encyclopedia of the Negro* project. Du Bois sent the request in September 1935, several months before Kendrick's ambivalent review of *Black Reconstruction*. Despite proclaiming a "long time interest in the progress of the Negro race," and agreeing to "prepare an article on any or all of the reconstruction legislation affecting the Negro," Kendrick saw no use in revising the history he took part in writing.[228]

The fact that the SHA was segregated barred Du Bois and other Black scholars from participating in discussions such as this one.[229] While not surprising considering the period or setting, their absence begs the question as to whether the responses of Thompson and Kendrick would have been more critical of the Dunning School had Black revisionist scholars been present. Bernard A. Weisberger, a scholar of various topics in American history, wrote an essential Charles Ramsdell prize-winning article "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography" in 1959 which canvassed the century's Reconstruction historiography. Weisberger explains the attitude that led to the sidelining of Black scholars in the period. He writes that Black historians were patronized "as restricted by adherence to a minority point of view" whereas white historians, as the majority, were considered inherently objective, leading to "unrecognized value judgements."[230] All participants strayed away from

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[227] Moore, "The Sixth Annual Meeting," 68.
[228] Letter from B. B. Kendrick to W.E.B. Du Bois, October 9, 1935. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
[229] For more on the history of segregation within the organization, see Fred A. Bailey, Thomas D. Clark, John Hope Franklin, and Anne Firor Scott, "The Southern Historical Association and the Quest for Racial Justice, 1954-1963 [with Comments]," *The Journal of Southern History* 71, no. 4 (2005): 833-864.
[230] Weisberger, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography," 437.

the explicit critiques Du Bois made of this supposed objectivity and yet, he, with his critiques and contributions, was the reason for conversations like this one. Without Du Bois, there was no revisionist camp. An evolving historiographical discussion likely would have existed, but Du Bois set its schismatic tone.

Further proof of the revisionist effect on the historical profession is Howard Beale's *American Historical Review* article published in the same year as the roundtable.[231] Beale defended his dissertation, "The Critical Year: A Study of Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction," (later published by *Black Reconstruction*'s publisher Harcourt, Brace, & Co in 1930) in 1924. This work introduced the "Beale Thesis," which painted northern industrialists as the villains of Reconstruction and the reason for anti-southern sentiments among Radical Republicans.[232] Due to the impact Beale made in revising one aspect of Reconstruction history, he and Du Bois corresponded frequently following the publication of his revised and expanded dissertation.[233] Beale was deeply interested in Du Bois's views on Reconstruction, to the point of hounding him with questions as to when he could read *Black Reconstruction* as he taught a course on

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[231] Howard K. Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," *The American Historical Review* 45, no. 4 (1940): 807-827.

[232] Allan D. Charles, "Howard K. Beale" in *Twentieth-Century American Historians*, edited by Clyde Norman Wilson, Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 17 (Detroit, MI: Gale, 1983). *Gale Literature Resource Center*. https://link-gale-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/apps/doc/H1200005977/LitRC?u=emory&sid=bookmark-LitRC&xid=bb0c7c34.

[233] Letter from Howard K. Beale to W.E.B. Du Bois, December 10, 1932. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Reconstruction at University of Chicago.[234] He also helped to proofread the monograph as Du Bois was in his final stage of edits in 1934.[235]

The relationship between the two men did not make Beale sycophantic in his assessment of Du Bois's work. "Du Bois's volume is far too wordy; it is distorted by insistence upon molding facts into a Marxian pattern," Beale writes in his *AHR* review. "Yet in describing the Negro's role Du Bois has presented a mass of material, formerly ignored, that every future historian must reckon with."[236] Beale recognized Du Bois's singular contribution as a shift in the historiography. Interestingly, Beale frames the revisions by Du Bois, along with Frances Simkins and C. Vann Woodward, as mere continuants of the historiographical conversations as opposed to disruptors of it. He portrays them as following in the footsteps of the Dunning School, who he says presented "a much-needed revision…at the turn of the century" following the very first Reconstruction historians Hilary Herbert and Henry Wilson.[237] To him, the culprits of dangerously subjective history were these "men of the postwar decades [who] were more concerned with justifying their own position than they were with painstaking search for truth."[238] This criticism of the very first Reconstruction historians parallels the language used by Du Bois to criticize the postwar men's successors, the Dunning School, in "The Propaganda of History."

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[234] Letter from Howard K. Beale to W.E.B. Du Bois, April 5, 1934. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[235] For the correspondence between Du Bois and Beale on proofing Black Reconstruction, see Letter from Howard K. Beale to W.E.B. Du Bois, May 9, 1934; Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to Howard K. Beale, July 17, 1934; Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to Howard K. Beale, October 24, 1934; Letter from Howard K. Beale to W.E.B. Du Bois, October 31, 1934. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[236] Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," 809.

[237] Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," 807.

[238] Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," 807.

Du Bois writes, "We shall never have a science of history until we have in our colleges men who regard the truth as more important than the defense of the white race."[239] The fact that the Dunning School's skewed interpretation became "classic" and remained influential clouds his judgement as to the stark difference between them and Du Bois, who was far more radical than acknowledged.[240] Perhaps it would not be evident until later in the century when an entire cadre of historians, predicated on the work of Du Bois, wrote the true history of Reconstruction.

Beale also mentioned Thompson's work in his essay. She is represented as having "delved into social and economic life, though without seeing its full implication" while escaping "from the restricting frames of reference of the others."[241] Dunning encouraged his students to focus on the political sphere, but the revisionist historiography, according to Beale, was more geared towards social and economic forces. Thus, Thompson's monograph, in its social and economic lenses, stood the test of time better. She missed "its full implication" in failing to chronicle Black experiences. The "restricting frames of reference" to which Beale refers is that of white supremacy, which is clearly present in the work of Thompson, though perhaps less blatant than those of her peers. Beale's positive assessment of her only reveals his own limitations in being susceptible to bias, especially as he displays it himself in the piece. He perpetuated the stereotype by writing "Negro voters were ignorant, childlike, and inexperienced."[242] This kind of statement appearing in the *AHR* revealed the profession still had a long way to go in dismantling caustic bias.

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[239] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 725.
[240] Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," 808.
[241] Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," 809.
[242] Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," 826.

Revisionist scholarship inched along at a glacial place, in large part due to the continuing reign of the Dunning School interpretation. Six years after Beale's *AHR* essay appeared, T. Harry Williams, a professor at Louisiana State University and later president of the SHA, acknowledged him and Du Bois as the main revisionists in the field.[243] An expert on narrative and oral history, Williams wrote fifteen monographs over the course of his career. In *Lincoln and the Radicals*, published in 1941, Williams portrayed the president as a pragmatist seeking compromise who ultimately surrendered to the so-called Radical Republicans.[244] Five years after the book's publication, he wrote "An Analysis of Some Reconstruction Attitudes" for the *Journal of Southern History*. In this essay, Williams proposed that historians shift their focus from economic and social forces to the motivations of northerners and southerners during the period.[245] He levied two major criticisms at Du Bois. First, Williams argued that Du Bois overestimated the number of people in the North dedicated to abolition democracy, though Williams conceded Du Bois's assertion of abolition democracy's existence was "a good, although minor, corrective to the purely economic analysis."[246] Williams also took issue with a "basic error that invalidates most of his thesis," being that there "was no white proletariat of any significant numbers."[247] His comment reflects the often-levied critique against *Black Reconstruction* about its Marxist analytical lens. This critique became an excuse for throwing the baby (his historiographical contribution) out with the bath water (Marxism).

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[243] For more biographical information on Williams, see Anne Smith, "Biographical/Historical Note," T. Harry Williams Papers, 1775-1977 (MSS 2489, 2510). Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University Special Collections, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
[244] T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and the Radicals* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1941).
[245] T. Harry Williams, "An Analysis of Some Reconstruction Attitudes," *The Journal of Southern History* 12, no. 4 (1946).
[246] Williams, "An Analysis of Some Reconstruction Attitudes," 471, 473.
[247] Williams, "An Analysis of Some Reconstruction Attitudes," 474.

In two footnotes, Williams presented contradictory disclaimers indicative of his respect for both Du Bois and the Dunning School. He wrote, "These criticisms of Du Bois do not detract from the fact that his book was a valuable contribution to Reconstruction history. In some respects he got closer to the truth than any other writer."[248] Interestingly, when writing about the Dunning School as historians who "wrote literally in terms of white and black," he made a similar disclaimer that his criticisms "are not made in any carping spirit" and that the group made "important factual contributions to its [Reconstruction's] history."[249] Still in the late forties, the white historical establishment was unwilling to antagonize the Dunning School as Du Bois had done since the turn of the century. Du Bois's Marxist analysis, however, created a new lane of discontent directed toward his work, which would only expand to include him personally as the Cold War raged on.[250]

The general acceptance of the Dunning School proved helpful for Thompson in terms of creating connections that extended her legacy beyond it. By midcentury, she was especially busy in all things unrelated to history, aside from the one to two history classes she taught per semester. The Dunningite Reconstruction narrative was as much a part of her past as it was of the past of her contemporaries who learned it in school. Her liberal politics and illiberal scholarship were not irreconcilable for the time. Due to her support of his policies and proximity to his home in the Hudson River Valley, she established a friendship with Franklin Delano

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[248] Footnote 13 in Williams, "An Analysis of Some Reconstruction Attitudes," 474.
[249] Footnote 11 in Williams, "An Analysis of Some Reconstruction Attitudes," 474.
[250] For more on the beginnings of Du Bois's political alignment with Socialism and the Communist Party along with the FBI's investigation into the NAACP, see Lewis, "Against the Grain: From the NAACP to the Far Left" in *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 496-553.

Roosevelt.[251] As a result, during World War II, she was appointed by the State Department as a delegate at the Allied Ministers of Education Conference in London. A little more than a year later, two months after the war's end, she again served as a delegate, this time at the UNESCO chartering conference in London.[252] She also gained national notoriety through her twenty-five year tenure as dean at Vassar. Post-war, she made the two-hour commute to New York City from Vassar to broadcast her weekly radio show "Listen, the Women" and occasionally act as a participant on "Information, Please."[253] *Time* magazine described her as an "outspoken feminist, internationalist, and F.D.R. Democrat."[254] Her views resonated with fellow liberals. She corresponded with major political and entertainment figures like Presidents Harry Truman and John F. Kennedy (when he was a senator), Producer-Director Cecil B. DeMille, Comedian Harpo Marx, and *Gone with the Wind* author Margaret Mitchell.[255] Even though Thompson was not nearly as renowned or remembered as Du Bois, she was an important public figure engaged in both the academia and politics of her day.

Thompson's only lasting engagement with Reconstruction scholarship occurred in one class she taught at Vassar during her tenure as dean. In "History 360: America from the Civil War to the Present," which she taught in 1945, Thompson spent six weeks on the course's first

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[251] William Harris Bragg, "C. Mildred Thompson: A Liberal among the Dunningites" in *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*. Smith, John David and Lowery, J. Vincent, ed (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 248.
[252] Biographical Notes, Folder 2, Box 1, C. Mildred Thompson papers, MSS 256, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.
[253] Evelyn A. Clark, Elizabeth M. Drouilhet, and David L. Schalk, "Vassar College Memorial Minute for C. Mildred Thompson," October 24, 1975, Subject File—Thompson, C. Mildred Thompson papers, MSS 256, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.
[254] "Education: Goodbye, Messr. Chips," *Time*, June 21, 1948, https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,798792,00.html.
[255] For her correspondence with these individuals, see Folder 7, Box 1 C. Mildred Thompson papers, MSS 256, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

unit "Problems of War and Reconstruction 1860-1880."[256] This periodization reflected the expanded timeline that she referenced at the SHA Roundtable. In outlining the Reconstruction section of the course, she singled out the following points: "Problems that grew out of war," "Reconstruction-comparison with today," "Relation to other countries during war and after," and "Problems of neutrality."[257] Noticeably missing were the themes of the race relations and freedmen's experiences she had mentioned at the roundtable.

For the class, Thompson took notes on contemporary scholarship on Reconstruction. One of the most popular texts for college Reconstruction courses in this era was James G. Randall's *The Civil War and Reconstruction*.[258] Unlike Thompson and Du Bois, Randall argued that the war was avoidable and that both sides were at fault for stoking the flames of sectionalism.[259] In Thompson's notes on the monograph, she evaluated it as "very full" and "thorough-going," though "not brilliant or new in any particular" as it "follows the traditional line."[260] Thompson wrote of another staple of the era, Harvard professor Paul H. Buck's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900*, "Well written. Fair minded. Difficult to tell whether writer is Southern or Northern—Southern, I suspect—but without obvious

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[256] History 360 Syllabus Outline, Lecture notebooks, 1945, 1950, 1955, Box 4, C. Mildred Thompson papers, MSS 256, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.
[257] History 360 Syllabus Outline, Lecture notebooks 1945, 1950, 1955, Box 4, C. Mildred Thompson papers, MSS 256, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.
[258] Harry E. Pratt, "James Garfield Randall, 1881-1953," *The Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 46, no. 2 (1953): 119–131.
[259] James Harvey Young, "Randall's Lincoln: An Academic Scholar's Biography," *The Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 19, no. 2 (1998): 1-13.
[260] Thompson's notes on Randall's *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, Lecture notebooks 1945, 1950, 1955, Box 4, C. Mildred Thompson papers, MSS 256, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

prejudices."[261] Ironically, Thompson displayed her own "obvious prejudice" in assuming a fair-minded work on Reconstruction to have been written by a southerner. The Ohio-born Buck's book was also obviously prejudiced, as he depicted Jim Crow as a necessary means of stability for southern racial relations and one that allowed Black southerners the chance to progress.[262] Thompson's assessment further enforces North-South dichotomy that characterized Dunningite analysis. In writing history from the perspective of indignant southerners, the Dunning School enforced sectional division. The Lost Cause necessitated this in assuming the South had the moral imperative to secede. And yet its Reconstruction narrative united the nation.

After leaving Atlanta University in 1944, Du Bois returned to the NAACP and, like Thompson, engaged in UN founding activities as part of the NAACP delegation.[263] He shifted back to the public advocacy realm that had consumed him during the 1910s and 1920s, this time advocating socialism as the "one hope of American Negroes."[264] For Du Bois, this was an era of "'Efforts for Social Progress,'…for World Peace and colored emancipation."[265] Though he left academia, the historiographical mark he made with *Black Reconstruction* was indelible. In his words, it made it "impossible thereafter to repeat the legend that ignorant and venal Negro

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[261] Thompson's notes on Buck's *The Road to Reunion 1968-1900*, Lecture notebooks 1945, 1950, 1955, Box 4, C. Mildred Thompson papers, MSS 256, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.
[262] Robert Cook, "The Quarrel Forgotten?: Toward a Clearer Understanding of Sectional Reconciliation," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 6, no. 3 (2016): 413–436.
[263] For an account of Du Bois's time in San Francisco, see Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 502-510.
[264] Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 558.
[265] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The life of W.E.B. Du Bois, 1868-1953*, June 1953. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

freedmen were the caused the [*sic*] disasters which followed the Civil War."[266] Much of his correspondence during this time consisted of various students and scholars reaching out to Du Bois for copies of the book, evidence of its impact.[267] "Considerable effort has been made to keep this work from the notice of American readers," he remarked in 1960. "The publishers let it go out of print while there was still demand for it and historical studies have largely ignored it."[268] Echoing the sentiment when inquiring about republishing the book, he wrote, "I have a feeling that it was taken off the market much too soon, and that pressure from various sources stopped its circulation."[269] The hegemonic nature of the Dunning School narrative kept Du Bois's work from being critically engaged with by the public at large.

Despite being a topic in the historiographical conversation, *Black Reconstruction* did not yet accomplish what Du Bois had intended, which was to alter the scholarship and popular memory of Reconstruction in the way the Dunning School had done. When asked via letter by a Ph.D. student in 1959, "has any new material or interpretation emerged since your writing of Black Reconstruction which would cause you to alter any of your views or emphases if you were writing it today?" Du Bois responded, "I have not altered my interpretation of Reconstruction as

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[266] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The life of W.E.B. Du Bois, 1868-1953*, June 1953. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[267] For examples of this correspondence, see Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to Elsee Pogue, March 13, 1945; Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to J. Saposnekow, March 30, 1944. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[268] W.E.B. Du Bois, "The American civil war and the abolition of Negro slavery," ca. December 1960. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[269] Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to Henry S. Commager, November 30, 1951. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

set down in my book."[270] The American public, similarly, had not altered its perception of Reconstruction, as textbooks remained littered with the historical myths of Reconstruction perpetuated by the Dunning School through the sixties, especially in their assertions of the failure of Black people to run governments.[271] Those perceptions were further informed by films like *Birth of a Nation* and the novel-turned-blockbuster *Gone with the Wind* that added a strong cultural resonance to these myths by representing the South as a "romantic and nostalgic" place tainted by northern and Black corruption.[272] Without a concerted effort towards a revision of the scholarship and educational curriculum, Du Bois's work would be for naught.

So little progress had been made in Reconstruction historiography over the century that by the time the first Black president of the AHA, John Hope Franklin, was elected, he decided to deliver his presidential address on the topic.[273] Over the course of his career, John Hope Franklin authored just shy of two-dozen monographs relating to race in the South—the most influential of which was *From Slavery to Freedom*, which placed African Americans at the center of American history—received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and taught in various history departments, retiring with a chaired professorship at Duke University.[274] He wrote mostly about the antebellum South, but wrote *Reconstruction After the Civil War* in 1961,

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[270] Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to Robert J. Moore, November 9, 1959; Letter from Robert J. Moore to W.E.B. Du Bois, November 7, 1959. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
[271] Weisberger, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography," 437. James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 156-157.
[272] W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 183-184.
[273] John Hope Franklin, "Mirror for Americans: A Century of Reconstruction History," *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 1 (1980): 1–14.
[274] Leon F. Litwack, "Remembering John Hope Franklin," *Perspectives on History* 46, no. 5 (2009).

convinced "there was a need for a new and revisionist view of Reconstruction," and engaged in the historiographical debate in writing a scathing a review of E. Merton Coulter's popular *The South During Reconstruction* in 1948.[275] His dissertation adviser at Harvard was Paul H. Buck, author of *The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900*, the monograph commented on by Thompson in her lecture notebooks.[276] As a historian of race and the South, Reconstruction loomed large in Franklin's education and career. He understood the importance of the period and the negative effects of biased historiography, thus deciding to deliver his historic presidential address on Reconstruction historiography.

Franklin delivered the speech, entitled *Mirror for Americans: A Century of Reconstruction History*, on December 28, 1979, in New York City, sixty-nine years after Du Bois presented his paper "Reconstruction and its Benefits," at the organization's annual meeting. Du Bois was prescient in his assessment that the "great difficulty in writing about Reconstruction is…the bitter exaggeration of the times which makes truth difficult to find."[277] The fact that the memory of Reconstruction had been so frequently used as a political tool made the historical objectivity appealed to by the Dunning School and longed for by Du Bois nearly impossible to achieve. Even when Du Bois pointed out the historical inaccuracies and propaganda of the Dunning school, the historical profession responded slowly. Franklin's speech treated this exact issue. He argued that the historiographical debate was warped to the point of revealing "as much

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[275] John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction After the Civil War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961). John Hope Franklin, "Whither Reconstruction Historiography?," *The Journal of Negro Education* 17, no. 4 (1948): 446-461. John Hope Franklin, *Mirror to America: The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 195.
[276] Franklin, *Mirror to America*, 76.
[277] Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to Mary Schumann, January 13, 1944. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

about the times in which they occurred as about the period with which they are concerned."[278] Twenty years earlier, Bernard A. Weisberger made a similar argument that the Dunningites were historians of their time and that if history was to be changed, the historiography needed to subject "itself to the same discriminating analysis which it applies to the documents of history."[279]

In the spirit of discriminating analysis, Franklin did what far too many historians before him shirked the responsibility of doing: labeling the Dunning school what it was instead of bowing to the reputation it manufactured for itself. He said of Dunning, "Despite this evaluation [of scientific objectivity], he was as unequivocal as the most rabid opponent of Reconstruction."[280] If anything, Franklin asserted, Dunning's students were even "more ardent than he" in playing the blame game and "placing upon Scalawags, Negroes, and Northern radicals the responsibility for making the unworthy and unsuccessful attempt to reorder society and politics in the South."[281] Dunning, as the head of the School, started the interpretation and his students proliferated it tenfold.

Du Bois made the first step toward revision in explicitly challenging the Dunning School's propagandistic effects. Franklin called Du Bois's work the "most extensive and, indeed, the most angry expression of dissent from the well-established view of Reconstruction," and criticized the *American Historical Review* for failing to review it.[282] This anger proved ineffective in immediately changing the profession, as by midcentury, the studies of Reconstruction remained riddled with "assumptions regarding the roles of blacks, the nature of

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[278] Franklin, "Mirror for Americans," 2.
[279] Weisberger, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography," 446.
[280] Franklin, "Mirror for Americans," 3.
[281] Franklin, "Mirror for Americans," 4.
[282] Franklin, "Mirror for Americans," 5.

Reconstruction governments in the South, and the need for quick—even violent—counteraction."[283] Anticipating critiques that had been made against revisionism, Franklin warned "it is important to make certain that the zeal for revision does not become a substitute for truth and accuracy and does not result in the production of works that are closer to political tracts than to histories."[284] Falling into the traps filled with past historians was a risk then-current historians could not afford to take. Franklin acknowledges that there were "syntheses…undertook…all too briefly, to make some overall revisionist generalizations about Reconstruction," including Horace Mann Bond's 1939 monograph on Black education in Alabama and Vernon L. Wharton's 1947 monograph on Black people grappling with the newly won freedom in Mississippi.[285] Though Du Bois is represented as a "dissenter" by Franklin, he does not chart the legacy of *Black Reconstruction* on the profession.[286] Franklin ended on the note that in the process of studying Reconstruction itself, it "will doubtless have much to teach all of us," the true goal of historical inquiry.[287] His speech represents that the twentieth-century historians of Reconstruction had been concerned more with lessons of history than the history itself, leading to a distortion of the truth that took a century to dismantle. Therefore, Reconstruction history became a series of mirrors for the times in which each historian wrote.

Franklin's speech reflected a broader trend in Reconstruction historiography, with scholars moving past revisionist interventions to "post-revisionist" assessments and a new synthesis. Eric Foner's 1988 *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* was said longed-for synthesis. Foner places Du Bois among Francis Simkins and Robert Woody as

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[283] Franklin, "Mirror for Americans," 6.
[284] Franklin, "Mirror for Americans," 12.
[285] Franklin, "Mirror for Americans," 6-7.
[286] Franklin, "Mirror for Americans," 5.
[287] Franklin, "Mirror for Americans," 14.

revisionists who created "a more sympathetic appraisal" of Reconstruction and emphasized the era as essentially radical.[288] As members of the revisionist school, however, the syntheses of Du Bois et al. lacked the post-revisionists claim of historical continuity that Foner included in his synthesis. Enough time had passed, and enough mistakes had been made, for Reconstruction to finally become history. During the middle of the century, historians, at the call of Du Bois, began to dismantle the premises that fueled the Dunning School interpretation. From there, the way was paved for revisionist historians to write new, true histories of Reconstruction. They were able to do so with a conscious understanding of the biases that had skewed past narratives. While Du Bois's impact was by no means instantaneous, it was nevertheless the impetus of a movement towards practicing truth in historiography.

[288] Eric Foner, "Reconstruction Revisited," *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (1982): 83, 86.

Conclusion

The significance of *Black Reconstruction* is not lost on today's historians, and neither is the historical influence of the Dunning School. Examining the Dunning School's work alongside W.E.B. Du Bois's undermines the argument that these Dunningites were simply products of their time. Du Bois was of the same time, after all, and they were well aware of his radically different assessment of Reconstruction. Eric Foner points out that the strawman argument of today, which William Harris Bragg makes, that "past actors should not be expected to live up to the standards and outlook of the present" is irrelevant in the case of the Dunning School because of contemporaneous alternative views of Reconstruction.[289] Du Bois knew better, presented his knowledge to the public, and was pushed aside for decades until political challenges to segregation caused historians to reexamine their biases, at least enough to engage meaningfully with Black scholars. While the methodologies of the Dunning School may have been important to the historical profession, their philosophy fundamentally flawed it. Du Bois, in pointing out those flaws, helped to reform a profession "devastated by passion and belief." The difficulty with passion and belief, Du Bois found, was that it turned history into a discipline that "paints perfect men and noble nations, but…does not tell the truth."[290]

While Thompson was certainly a product of her time and circumstances in many ways, her alignment with the Dunning School and continuation of Lost Cause narratives learned in her childhood undermine her scholarship. She consoled readers of her time with the idea that "while

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[289] Foner, "Foreword," *The Dunning School*, xi. For the strawman argument, see William Bragg, "C. Mildred Thompson: A Liberal among the Dunningites" in *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, John David Smith and Vincent J. Lowery ed. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky 2013), 298.

[290] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 725, 722.

the republican government…was both extravagant and corrupt, Georgia managed to recover rather easily from its financial abuse and mismanagement," enforcing the Lost Cause victory narrative of Reconstruction's end.[291] Rather than twisting her scholarship into various configurations that demonstrate its methodological legitimacy, as current scholar Bragg has done, the white supremacist ideology that undergirds each of her assertions must be exposed and dismantled.[292] She may be unrecognized by the American public at large, but the persistence of ideas that she helped to legitimize warrants the exposure of their basis. Perhaps the most popular cliché about the study of history is that it teaches lessons that prevent us from repeating mistakes of the past. The Dunning School narrative of Reconstruction is an apt example of the grave consequences of history with false lessons created by false premises.

The orthodoxy of the Dunning School among the historical profession for the majority of the twentieth century presents the unfortunate truth that even the most well-trained professional historians are only as strong as their ability to reject bias-laden narratives. Credit must be given where credit is due—some did recognize Du Bois's revision as a positive and necessary development. With all the damage done, however, recognition was not enough. Action was required. Late twentieth century historians including Eric Foner answered the call to action, synthesizing an accurate history of Reconstruction.

As not only a revisionist but a reformer of the profession, Du Bois looms large in Reconstruction historiography. David Levering Lewis, Du Bois's biographer, writes in an introduction to *Black Reconstruction* that from its publication, "Pro or con, students of American

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[291] C. Mildred Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia: Economic, Social, Political 1865-1872* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1915), 399.
[292] See Bragg, "C. Mildred Thompson: A Liberal among the Dunningites" in *The Dunning School,* 281-307.

history were in large agreement that the debate over Reconstruction had been irreversibly transformed."[293] Despite quibbles in the profession that persist about Du Bois's choice of a Marxist framework and lack of extensive archival research, many historians laud the monograph, especially in recent years. Foner labels *Black Reconstruction*'s analysis "highly sophisticated, and its language…poetic."[294] He acknowledges that despite not being widely read, many of its arguments are now widely accepted, a welcome change from the dominance of Dunningites in previous generations. Thomas C. Holt, former President of the American Historical Association and current chaired Professor Emeritus of History at University of Chicago, contends that contemporary scholars are indebted to the study. "We celebrate this book not simply as we might any other seminal work of scholarship," Holt wrote in 2019, "but to pay homage to a man and a work that at some point in our professional and personal development enabled us literally to imagine a seminal historical moment and thus to reimagine our own moment, our own future."[295]

Black Reconstruction, especially in the current political climate, is more widely and publicly discussed than ever before. Foner and Harvard's Henry Louis Gates Jr., perhaps best known for his many PBS documentaries, have led the charge.[296] In a recent conversation recorded for the Smithsonian, Gates expanded the monograph's relevance beyond Reconstruction, noting, "It's a poetic meditation on the history of the race and the history of anti-

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[293] David Levering Lewis, "Introduction" in W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1998).
[294] Eric Foner, "*Black Reconstruction*: An Introduction," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (2013): 409.
[295] Thomas C. Holt, "'A Story of Ordinary Human Beings': The Sources of Du Bois's Historical Imagination *in Black Reconstruction*," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (2013): 419.
[296] For more on Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s biography, see "Henry Louis Gates Jr.," Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard University, https://hutchinscenter.fas.harvard.edu/henry-louis-gates-jr.

Black racism."[297] As time passes, the salience of *Black Reconstruction* has only grown, a testament to its quality.

Just before the completion of this thesis, *Black Reconstruction* was finally reviewed in the *American Historical Review*.[298] Elizabeth Hinton, the review's author, writes, "We are still asking the questions Du Bois raised of the period that call the very notion of American democracy into question."[299] Following the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 and the January 6th insurrection, Hinton's assertion could not be truer. Black Reconstruction, at its core, is not just a monograph—it is a bold example of truth in the face of power.

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[297] The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, "Black Reconstruction—A Conversation Among Eric Foner, Henry Louis Gates & Kevin Young," YouTube, January 11, 2022, 11:23 to 11:30, https://youtu.be/dep00QGh2Ls.
[298] Elizabeth Hinton, "The Last Great Battle of the West," Review of *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, by W.E.B. Du Bois, *The American Historical Review* 127, no. 4 (2022): 1909-1915.
[299] Hinton, "The Last Great Battle of the West," 1910, 1915.

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