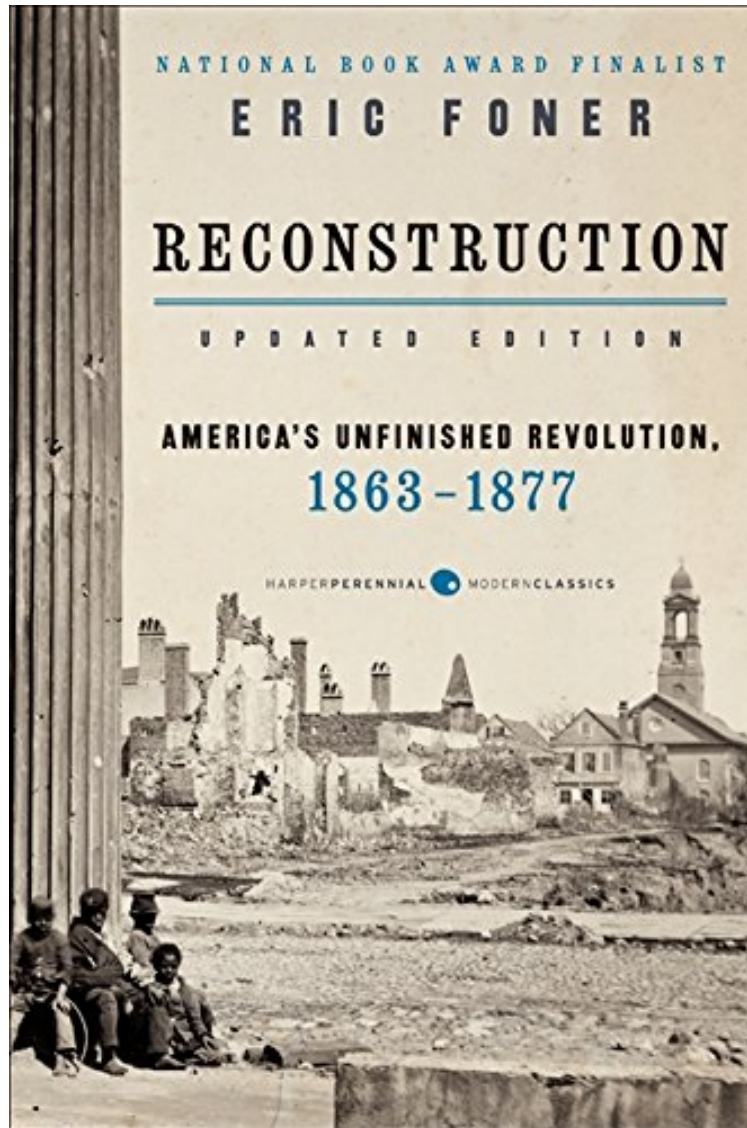


Reconstruction Updated Edition: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877

Eric Foner

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Eric Foner : Reconstruction Updated Edition: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Reconstruction Updated Edition: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877:

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. A Good Update of the Original with an Essay about it's

Legacy! By Eric Foner begins with an assessment of the historiography up to 1988. In the first decade of the 1900s, William Dunning and John W. Burgess articulated a history of Reconstruction that condemned Radical Republicans, Northern carpetbaggers, Southern scalawags, and freedmen. W.E.B. Du Bois, in 1935, and Howard Beale, in the 1940s, initiated the revisionist school, which cast Northern policymakers and freedmen in a more positive light. Foner writes of the revisionist school, "Reconstruction revisionism bore the mark of the modern civil rights movement" (Short History of Reconstruction, xiii). Despite their efforts to portray Reconstruction as a revolutionary moment, the social situation of the 1950s and 1960s belied that interpretation and fostered postrevisionist critiques. Foner admits the faults of the Dunning method, but believes it offered the best synthesis of the era. His work "aims to combine the Dunning School's aspiration to a broad interpretive framework with the findings and concerns of recent scholarship" (xxiv). Summarizing the book's impact in 2014, Foner wrote, "By the time my book appeared numerous scholars had exposed one or another weakness of the Dunning interpretation. Reconstruction was to drive the final nail into the coffin of the Dunning School and to offer an alternative account of the era" (Updated Edition, xxxi). Foner describes the impact of his work by citing historians who use the "unfinished revolution" framework to examine the disappointments of Reconstruction, including Stephen Kantrowitz's *More Than Freedom* (Updated Edition, xl). Foner presents a four-part argument in *Reconstruction*. First and foremost, he argues that African Americans "were active agents in the making of Reconstruction" (xxiv). Additionally, he argues that the changes during Reconstruction resulted from "a complex series of interactions among blacks and whites, Northerners and Southerners, in which victories were often tentative and outcomes subject to challenge and revision" (xxv). Third, "racism was an intrinsic part of the progress of historical development, which affected and was affected by changes in the social and political order" (xxvi). Finally, the same economic and class changes that occurred in the South were simultaneously occurring in the North. Elaborating on his first point, Foner writes, "Black soldiers played a crucial role not only in winning the Civil War, but in defining the war's consequences. Their service helped transform the nation's treatment of blacks and blacks' conception of themselves" (8). Foner writes of black Republicans, "The spectacle of former slaves representing the lowcountry rice kingdom or the domain of Natchez cotton nabobs epitomized the political revolution wrought by Reconstruction" (355). When addressing class issues, Foner describes the conflict between elite and common Southerners as "a civil war within the Civil War" (15). Discussing the impact of racism on politics, Foner writes, "Even where blacks enjoyed greater influence within the party, Republican governors initially employed their influence to defeat civil rights bills or vetoed them when passed, fearing that such measures threatened the attempt to establish their administrations' legitimacy by wooing white support" (370). Elaborating on his Southerners' reactions to Northern involvement in the South, Foner argues against the traditional narrative of carpetbaggers, writing, "Despite instances of violent hostility or ostracism, most Southern planters recognized that Northern investment, ironically, was raising land prices and rescuing many former slaveholders from debt – in a word, stabilizing their class" (137). Foner describes the economic changes of Reconstruction, writing, "Republican rule subtly altered the balance of power in the rural South" (401), and planters, "once alone at the apex of Southern society, they now saw other groups rising in economic importance" (399). To Foner, the Northern Reconstruction involved increasing industrialization, government activism and public reform, wage-earning dominating jobs, new social opportunities for African Americans, and the rise of Gilded Age politics (460-511). Foner draws upon various manuscripts and letters in archives throughout the United States, government documents such as Congressional records, newspapers, contemporary publications from the time of Reconstruction, and memoirs written after the fact. He also performs a great deal of synthesis of the various parts of the historiography, working to undo the legacy of the Dunning School's racism. As Foner wrote in 2014, "Most books in the New American Nation Series summarize, often very ably, the current state of historical scholarship, rather than rely on new research" (Updated Edition, xxix). His contribution blends the two approaches.⁷ of 10 people found the following review helpful. An Interesting account of Reconstruction By Barbara A. Anderson This was an interesting book about Reconstruction by a leading authority. After having read a great deal about the Civil War, it was interesting and depressing to learn more about the reversals during Reconstruction⁴² of 46 people found the following review helpful. Valuable Brilliant True By Sylvia Hawley Foner's work is new to me so I did not read the edition that is not updated and cannot point out the differences. I cannot say enough about this historian professor author and his work. I cannot imagine being without it now that I have found it. The story of reconstruction must be impossible to understand or tell for the themes, the influences, the elements, all so complex, so HUGE and so MEANINGFUL in our history then and our body politic now. I would recommend this for anyone who wants to understand and is willing to face our history full on and see how and why things stand as they do today, how and why it has taken so long, how and why it appears that we do learn, we do evolve, and we also do choose not to.

From the "preeminent historian of Reconstruction" (New York Times Book Review), the prize-winning classic work on the post-Civil War period which shaped modern America. Eric Foner's "masterful treatment of one of the most complex periods of American history" (New Republic) redefined how the post-Civil War period was viewed. *Reconstruction* chronicles the way in which Americans—black and white—responded to the unprecedented changes unleashed by the war and the end of slavery. It addresses the ways in which the emancipated slaves' quest for

economic autonomy and equal citizenship shaped the political agenda of Reconstruction; the remodeling of Southern society and the place of planters, merchants, and small farmers within it; the evolution of racial attitudes and patterns of race relations; and the emergence of a national state possessing vastly expanded authority and committed, for a time, to the principle of equal rights for all Americans. This "smart book of enormous strengths" (Boston Globe) remains the standard work on the wrenching post-Civil War period—an era whose legacy still reverberates in the United States today.

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