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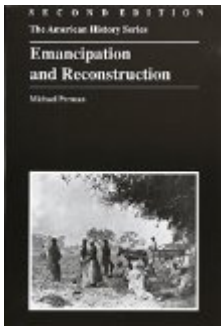

Michael Perman. *Emancipation and Reconstruction.* Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 2003. x + 144 pp. $13.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-88295-995-5.

Reviewed by Tilden G. Edelstein

Published on H-CivWar (December, 2003)

Winning the War and Losing the Peace

Earning a doctorate directed by John Hope Franklin at the University of Chicago, Michael Perman, primarily a political historian of the nineteenth-century South after the Civil War, has written three enduring scholarly monographs. Thirty years ago, he published his first book, ***Reunion without Compromise: The South and Reconstruction, 1865-1868***. ***Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869-1879*** (1984) appropriately won the V. O. Key Award from the Southern Political Science Association. His ***Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888-1908*** appeared in 2001.

Emancipation and Reconstruction summarizes and revises both some of Perman's earlier work and abundant publications by numerous other historians. First published in 1987, it is described by the two editors of this forty-book series as suited for beginning and advanced undergraduates or first-year graduate students. Dedicated to Franklin, this second edition most dramatically differs from Perman's 1991 forceful essay "Counter Revolution: The Role of Violence in Southern Redemption" in ***The Facts of Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of John Hope Franklin***. Still stressing violence toward African Americans by white Southerners in the 1870s, he ceases declaring that Reconstruction indisputably "was overthrown" (p. 139) and did not collapse because of multiple causes. While analyzing the politics of Reconstruction and the post-Reconstruction era have become his major historical contributions, his newest book provides a much broader interpretation, thereby avoiding August Meier's plaintive fear that by excessively emphasizing politics, historians of Reconstruction, like David Donald in ***The Politics of Reconstruction, 1863-1867*** (1984) were returning to William Dunning's historiographical school.[1]

Similar to Franklin, Perman focuses on significant scholarly details, not on an overall thesis. His personal identification with Southern uniqueness is far less than it was, for example, for David M. Potter and C. Vann Woodward. Largely rejected are both the economic and many of the racial analyses presented in Woodward's eloquent and most influential books. Fully embracing the work,

nevertheless, of some of Woodward's very numerous past doctoral students (Willie Lee Rose, Otto H. Olsen, J. Morgan Kousser, Thomas Holt, and J. Mills Thornton III), Perman barely mentions James M. McPherson (the most productive and eminent of Woodward's students). Perman understandably admires and depends upon Eric Foner's Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877 *(1998 ed.), particularly his more recent illumination of black officeholders during Reconstruction.[2] In a relatively compact text, usefully filled with citations of historical monographs and a bibliographical essay of seventeen pages, Perman's* Emancipation and Reconstruction_ comprehensively presents a complex era. Its analysis and details far exceed evocative narrative. A very informative book results, especially useful to some advanced undergraduates and graduate-level students. Most beginning undergraduates, however, will continue to do better with an updated and informed textbook.

Perman's impressive chapter on "Shaping Emancipation, 1861-1870," which appeared in the first edition of this book (1993), has been enhanced by an additional section, "The Impact of Emancipation." Most telling is the distinction in status made in that era between being free and becoming free. Additionally, by comparing emancipation in other New World nations and the United States, the latter's uniqueness becomes apparent. Only in the United States were newly freed slaves given legal and voting rights and not replaced by workers from Europe or Asia. The growth of black self-rule becomes an essential part of congressional Reconstruction, seeking to support freedmen rights with federal policy and armed force. It is self-rule, however, by voters, representatives, and businessmen, who are black, which provides the substance of freedom for the ex-slave. For Perman, who refrains from making specific comparisons with the creation of New Deal federal agencies, this is "quite probably" (p. 5) the largest program of domestic reform ever undertaken in this country's history.

With Reconstruction, like Emancipation, beginning before the war had ended, the presence of Union troops in the South became integrally connected with freeing the slaves and controlling the Confederacy. Perman finds it noteworthy that vice presidents named Johnson were chosen twice in American history to pacify the South, with each becoming chief executive because of assassinations. But unlike Lyndon Johnson, Andrew Johnson neither had the political skills nor a party capable of achieving unity on how to include the recalcitrant South in the nation. Factional divisions, of course, were not new to American nation-building or nineteenth-century political history. But splits among the radical Republicans on how both to shape and include the South in the Union were formidable. The desire of moderate Republicans to find areas of Southern consent was further aggravated by continuing conflicts among Southern Republicans, including carpetbaggers and scalawags, as well as with the politically desperate Southern and Northern Democratic Party. After Ulysses S. Grant's election in 1868, for him to declare "Let us Have Peace," Perman correctly notes, was nothing more than a pious hope.

Clear need for the federal government's constant involvement in Reconstruction conflicted with continuing concerns about federal-state relations and the military role in civilian affairs. Added to these disputes were the significant part played by both black carpetbaggers and the substantial number of freedmen participating in Southern politics--all dependent upon both black and white support. Perman's full discussion of extensive southern black public activity during Reconstruction substantially adds to our understanding of the era, as does his analysis of the degree racial segregation (only Louisiana had integrated schools) coincided with equal rights. By 1896 and *Plessy v. Ferguson*, however, equal

rights had disappeared and as early as the 1870s racial intimidation became increasingly common.

Perman convincingly concludes that the faction-ridden Republican Party lacked organizational cohesion to succeed at Reconstruction: "the task was simply beyond the resources and capabilities of the party" (p. 102). The South had two political parties, but not a two-party system. When stopping disorder was necessary, the party's efforts were branded as intimidation, increasing the North's growing reluctance, which had never been strong, to be involved in Reconstruction. And racial prejudice had always dominated the North--only six states, which had a mere 5 percent of the black northern population, enfranchised them (p. 124). Finally, keeping the South from being won by the Democrats proved far less important than keeping the North out of Democratic Party control. Whatever the failures of Reconstruction, in the sixty years after the Civil War, only Grover Cleveland, until Woodrow Wilson's election, would be a Democratic President.

The North won the war, but perhaps with the exception of abolishing slavery, lost the peace. If the North's industrial dominance was a central issue, the North also won another important part of the peace. Significant portions of the South, however, persistently defied the North until Reconstruction concluded. North-South rivalry, of course, remains characteristic of American politics. Relevant to me is Kenneth Kagan's view that "the most important component of war" is to translate "the destruction of the enemy's ability to continue to fight into the accomplishments of the political objectives of the conflict."[3] Perman's analysis in ***Emancipation and Reconstruction*** precedes Kagan's but demonstrates the same point: although the Union Army effectively ended the Confederates' ability to wage a war on battlefields, the divided Republican Party was not able to transform this into successful and lasting implementation of its "political objectives."

In today's context of substantial Iraqi resistance to America's recent military victory, it is regrettable that Michael Perman was updating his thought-provoking book before the current end of "major combat operations" in Iraq was declared by President George W. Bush and while the United States was involved in another conflict that resulted in a war "won" but a hotly contested "peace." Some of the author's perspectives might have been shaped by valid or false historical analogies between the two wars.

Notes

[1]. August Meier, "An Epitaph for the Writing of Reconstruction History?" ***Reviews in American History*** 9 (1981): p. 87. Dunning's work is best represented in his ***Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction*** (1897).

[2]. Eric Foner, ***Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders during Reconstruction*** (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[3]. Kenneth Kagan, "War and Aftermath, ***Policy Review*** (August and September 2003): p. 9.

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Citation: Tilden G. Edelstein. Review of Perman, Michael. *Emancipation and Reconstruction.* H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. December, 2003.

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