The Rage for Order: Reconstruction and Jim Crow in America

The Romance of Reunion
Our Session Subjects:

1. America in 1860
2. Presidential Reconstruction
3. Congressional Reconstruction
4. Reconstructing Reconstruction
5. The Romance of Reunion
6. The End of Reconstruction
7. The Lost Cause Movement
8. Jim Crow comes to town
“Public opinion is one of the most powerful weapons, which like religion penetrates the most hidden corners where administrative measures lose their influence; to despise public opinion is like despising moral principles. Public opinion requires a cult all on its own.”

Clemens Metternich, an anti-republican

However, the Freedman has no champion, no Lincoln or Harriet Beecher Stowe
The Romance of Reunion

Romanticism in 19th Century America

- The growing supremacy of individualism
- The growing supremacy of feeling
- The pressures of the modern age and the 2nd industrial revolution
- The reaction to the pressure – the Romantic South
The Northern urge to forgive and the sentiments driving it

1. The various sentiments immediately after the War

- The South must be forgiven – Reunion needed to end the War
- The South must be punished – Lincoln’s Assassination and Andersonville Prison
- The North was cruel – Sherman’s March to the Sea
- The South must be redeemed – Brought up to date to 19th century economic habits or brought back to date before the War?
- The South is still a threat – no prosecutions to date (though Jeff Davis is in prison and Andersonville commandant executed)
2. A change occurs in who is to blame for the War

- Southern aristocrats, not southern commoners
  - From warriors to lazy liars
  - So commoners are relieved
- Free labor and middle-class resentment
  - Initially, view of Freedmen as hard workers but morally deficient

- Evolving concepts of honor and self identity – Feudal to Victorian
3. Northern hostility shifts away

- Northerners then lost their hostility for the Southern aristocracy in sympathy with their new poverty and economic losses

- Sympathy for Southern whites in general
- Increased spending brings increased corruption and then economic depression

  - Hostility shifts to Blacks with reports of Black political participation combined with overall political White and Black corruption
  - Labor strife in the Gilded Age
  - The demands by Freedmen for reparations

- Economic depression of the 1870s and Black political participation and State spending on schools and railroad loans/grants

- Black suffrage and Southern problems of recovery
4. Sentiment in Command

- Sentimental notions of the 1860s and early 1870s left imprint on the tone and rhetoric of the “reunion discourse” – “let’s forgive and forget”

- The Northern public abandons a political solution (i.e., Congress and the Reconstruction Amendments) and strives for a sentimental solution to reconciliation
  - Avoidance of strife and complication
  - Framing the South as not bad but idyllic
5. Economic Growth and Stress

- Change in the Northern American psyche
- Remembering the simpler life – the South
- Confronting immigration and disorder
- Defending the sanctuary of the homestead
- Forgetting the past for the sake of the future
6. The Romance of Reconciliation

- The narrative of the old conflict in novels and plays (think *Gone with the Wind*, but not *Absalom, Absalom*)

- Slave life was not so bad

- The noble southern soldier

- The power of forgiveness

- The moral anxiety of the 1880s
7. The new American patriotism

- It’s for whom you fight, not what, that’s important – the sentiments of War and Conflict

- The Southern soldier as noble patriot
8. Public resentment of the Robber Barons – look away from the South

- White northern workers are the real slaves
- Labor strife and spill over to the black laborer
- Labor unions and farmers seek unification with the South
- The nobility of the poor southern aristocrat
- Faithful slaves and their employers
9. The role of Blacks in America
- More appropriate for farms and plantations than cities
- Clan violence had ceased in early 1870s and Blacks were safe
- White control was necessary for immigrants and Blacks
- Who was the North to dictate South’s control of society? “Federalism” extended.
- Reports of tolerance from the South
- The South is kinder to Blacks than the North and the South is more agreeable for Black living
10. The Depression of 1893
- North’s attention turns to economics
- The need for expansion into foreign markets dominated by non-white foreigners
- Social Darwinism
- Jim Crow appears
Next Week: The End of Reconstruction