

GREAT DISAPPOINTMENTS: THE LESSONS FROM NINETEENTH CENTURY TRANSITIONS FROM SLAVERY TO FREE LABOR

Stanley L. Engerman

I.

This paper will focus on a relatively narrow set of transitions in property rights in humans, with or without changes in political controls, in the nineteenth century, especially the decline and complete elimination of slavery in the Americas.¹ There was a shift from legally coerced labor to legally free labor, although with some variations and constraints in the timing of the emancipation and in the extent of freedom that was granted. The transition of property rights in people who now owned themselves after having previously been owned by others has led to numerous discussions and debates, both at the outset with concern about expected impacts, and subsequently in evaluating their consequences in historical perspective and attempting to reach some judgement as to whether and to what extent the transition was (or was not) a good thing.

As with other great reforms, the emancipation of the slaves in most parts of the world aroused high expectations, but ended with a major sense of disappointment about what had been accomplished. Expectations were high as to the expected effects upon not only the ex-slaves but also upon other members of society, who were also expected to gain. Disappointment was widely spread

among groups in society, since ex-slaves, ex-slave owners, and other members of society all believed that emancipation had failed to achieve most of its promised ends, and that considerably more remained to be done if society were to ever be able to receive the expected benefits. The different expectations, and times required to achieve the desired ends, meant that different short-term, as well as long-term, policies were desired by the different parties, pointing to a major difficulty in evaluating the response to emancipation. Nevertheless, the fact that few individuals seemed satisfied with the outcome of emancipation, suggests that perhaps the outcomes were mixed, with no one getting all they had hoped for, yet each getting some desired benefits.

II.

To better understand the transitions in the labor force institutions in the nineteenth century, it is useful to consider previous changes that have occurred in Western Europe and its colonies. The late eighteenth and the nineteenth century saw dramatic declines in those forced labor systems that had characterized previous developments in Europe's overseas colonies.² This did not mark the universal disappearance of slavery, since it continued to exist within Africa and Asia for several decades into the twentieth century.³ Nor did it mean the ending of all forms of coerced labor even within Europe and its colonies, since there were continued shipments of convict labor to settle in Australia and other parts of the Pacific. The nineteenth century also saw the re-emergence of indentured labor in many parts of the world. Nevertheless, a large number of individuals had obtained some freedom, with an ability to relocate intra – as well as internationally. Most of the emancipations were accomplished with struggle and debate but, with the major exceptions of the United States and of Haiti, all were accomplished relatively peacefully, relying on political, not military, measures. Some transitions were more chaotic than others, based in part on the events in the years preceding emancipation or the initial difficulties of adjusting to the new system.

There were a number of different variations in the process of emancipation, based upon the changes in the ability to legally or quasi-legally control and influence the productivity of ex-slaves and in the allowances provided the former slaveowners (and serfholders) as compensation, whether in the form of cash, bonds, or allotted labor time, and whether this compensation was paid for by the state and the taxpayers or by those previously enslaved or enserfed.⁴ Legislation regarding access to land and other forms of labor influenced the ability to move and to seek new jobs, but in general these emancipations did add some flexibility to individual behavior in the economy. It was also

anticipated that a more effective labor input due to emancipation would have a favorable impact on the prospects for long-term economic development. Thus the transition was expected not only to lead to a new economic structure within society, but, as argued for in the legislation, it was believed that this would represent progress relative to the preceding condition, for both those freed and for others in the nation.

It should not be expected that the same legal changes would generate the same outcomes in all societies. The effects varied with, for example, the magnitude of the property value transferred, the relative importance of coerced labor in the total labor force, the relative importance of different agricultural crops and manufacturing outputs, the conditions of production for different commodities, and the internal and world market conditions in regard to different outputs, to point out the major economic variables, as well as with more general and social policies. Attitudes concerning differences in races and ethnicities involved in the emancipations also had an important impact on the range of transition possibilities. The economic conditions at the time of transition also had a significant impact on the nature of the adjustment to the new systems, with implications for the problems with the initial changes after emancipation. The ending of slavery in different parts of the New World took place when the systems were expanding economically, not declining, meaning that slavery's ending was more expensive, and its adherents less willing to see it end than earlier views of contemporaries and scholars had suggested. As indicated in the contemporary debates and, more importantly, by the rising trend in slave prices, slavery was expanding during the nineteenth-century, and was seemingly expected to continue into the indefinite future.⁵

This expansion reflected the increasing European and American demand for slave-produced commodities such as sugar, cotton, and coffee, the improved means of production made possible by the development of new methods and technologies of production, and also the transport developments that permitted the use of new, more fertile, soils. Thus the ending of slavery occurred at times of favorable economic conditions. This might be expected to provide for a smoother transition, although the prosperity under slavery would highlight any reductions in output that took place as a result of changing labor institutions.

III.

In no case, with the exception of Haiti, did the transition from slavery begin with a complete collapse of the social system, and in that case the collapse was due not to economic factors but rather to a massive slave uprising.⁶ In all other cases the ending of slavery came by governmental decree or legislation. This

sometimes was due to, or enforced by, political change and military actions, as was the case with the ending of slavery in the United States as a result of the Civil War. In some cases the legislation followed rather quickly after successful revolutions, as was the case with some of the American nations when achieving independence from their European metropolis, as was the case with the northern states of the United States in the late eighteenth century and the several nations of South and Central America that gained their independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century. In only a few cases, none major, was there a widescale ending of a coerced labor system by a voluntary freeing of the laborers by their owners. The nature and terms of legislations for emancipating labor often differed, as did the form of legal actions taken to impose and enforce the changes, and this led to some differences in the ensuing transitions.

The legislation and political actions leading to the ending of systems of coerced labor, and the precise changes in the nature of property rights in laborers, as defined by nations, did not follow a uniform pattern. When labor was freed, their previous owners generally suffered a loss in wealth, due both to the ending of property rights in the surplus produced by slaves, and also because of the probable decline in land values with the fall in labor input.⁷ In some cases compensation, in cash or bonds, was paid to owners, while in other cases the returns to the slaveowners were supplemented by a period of compelled labor or apprenticeship. In some examples of gradual emancipation, new-born children were considered legally free, but they were required to work for their mother's owner for a specified number of years. While slaves were nowhere given land or granted special terms for land acquisitions, the abolition of serfdom often provided the ex-serfs with rights to purchase land from their lords, at some legislated or agreed upon price.⁸ The fact that ownership of land was frequently maintained by the former slaveowners indicates the limited nature of these reforms, and their attempt to maintain somewhat similar economic and political structures in the future.

IV.

Perhaps the most important economic benefit for the freed laborers resulting from the ending of coerced labor was the ability to move, both internally and externally, in response to economic and other forces, and the inability to be bought and sold.

Legal access to land ownership, which would limit the desire for mobility by the freed persons, varied with differences in the nature of legislation. There were no legal requirements or subsidized opportunities to acquire land from either the government or private landowners. Slaves could, of course, purchase

land on the same terms as other members of the population, as long as landowners were willing to sell to ex-slaves and the sale of government lands did not discriminate by race or prior legal status. It was this limited ability to acquire land that contributed to a highly mobile ex-slave population in many areas.

What the ending of coerced labor meant, particularly when there were also limits to land acquisition by ex-slaves, was that the landowners needed to learn how to deal in a labor market which entailed some degree of consensual bargaining with workers. No longer could force, coercion, or the purchase of labor be used either to acquire workers or to limit their departure from the working place. The need that arose to attract labor via bidding them away from others, with the use of incentives based on wages and other inducements, could lead to effects that no one hirer desired, such as higher wages and better working conditions for freed labor.⁹

Despite the dramatic nature of the changing labor institutions, emancipation often occurred with relatively limited political changes. The freed persons might not be given voting rights; indeed, many of the free people similarly lacked voting rights prior to the twentieth century. In other cases, such as the United States, the freed slaves were initially given voting rights, but over several decades there were effectively eliminated and were not reinstated for at least another half-century.¹⁰ Similarly, in most societies, maldistributions of wealth persisted, often without there being dramatic changes in either direction. There may, however, have been some change in the identity of specific wealthholders, with a new elite replacing the previous one, and a different group of individuals obtaining political and economic power.¹¹ For the freed persons it perhaps made little difference who were the elite if any changes would not have influenced their conditions, and if their own landholdings remained limited. In most cases, however, power still resided within the same groups as before the start of the transition, and the failure to strip landowners of their major economic asset meant that their losses in wealth were no doubt limited. This should not be surprising, since with few exceptions, emancipation came from above, and those who introduced these changes were interested in limiting the magnitude of the changes they permitted.

It is important to consider that those societies in which emancipations occurred were tied into the world economy and its political system, and these relations with the rest of the world need not have changed in response to the localized changes in labor institutions. Many of the constraints influencing trade, capital, and labor flows, and international relations, remained as before. Being part of an ongoing market system, in both domestic and foreign matters, provided opportunities which were often taken advantage of, but it also set

constraints on the possibilities for economic and political changes. It is not certain whether the transition from slavery to agricultural peasantry gave rise to an expanded market orientation on the part of the laborers and the landowners than had existed before. What it did mean, however, is that while previously many consumption and labor allocation decisions had been made by owners, choices were up to the laborers who now confronted the need to make decisions that had previously been made for them.

V.

Emancipations of coerced labor were generally preceded by extended debates, political as well as among the general public, about what to do and how to go about accomplishing the desired ends.¹² The relatively democratic political systems in some nations meant that debates among the broad population or within the aristocracy were necessary concerning the proposed “progressive” reforms. These debates often took a rather long time, since reforms were seldom introduced immediately upon the emergence of social concern. Certainly the successes of British anti-slavery and United States abolition were not immediate, but were the products of decades of activity. There were few automatic or quick successes, and with the exceptions of Haiti, the Spanish-American mainland, and, ultimately the United States, few cases in which emancipation took place as the result of a rapid political change. Even in the latter two cases, however, the basic political and economic systems remained for the most part in place, since there were few major changes in political relations between rulers and lower classes. Political debate about emancipation generally concerned what measures should be introduced to put the proper institutions of the post-emancipation world into place, and what it was anticipated that new world would look like. While they were to free certain members of society, there was a professed belief that all would benefit, those freed as well as other members of society. The terms of the debate as to how the post-emancipation world would reform society included several separable issues. How much legal freedom should be allowed ex-slaves and at what pace? How long would it take the freed to be able to achieve real freedom and independence? To what extent should the state’s authority be used to set and implement plans for the future? The role of the state could be an extension of the existing state apparatus or, as with the stipendiary magistrates in the British colonies and the Freedmen’s Bureau in the United States, lead to the creation of new organizations.

Concerns with the future of the freed persons and the new society led to a number of variants in the changing property rights regimes, often with considerable differences in specific terms. The first major choice was whether

emancipation should be immediate or gradual, in the sense that its final granting was some time in the future. The primary argument for a gradual policy was that it would help ease the transition of the labor force (and their owners) to the new system, as well as lowering the costs of ending coerced labor. Apprenticeship periods lasted up to a decade, with that time presumably being used to help the laborers (and hirers) adjust to the needs of free labor markets. Another measure for gradual emancipation was to have all born after a given date be considered free, but required to work for their mother's owner for some period of time, often in the range of 18 to 25 years, thus having the slave's production when older compensate the owner for the prior costs of rearing, without requiring taxpayer money.¹³

Perhaps the best indicator of the limited range of the reform intended by legally ending coerced labor can be seen in the financial arrangements involved. Although there had been occasional discussion of providing land to the freed persons to supplement their right to benefit from their own labor, this was not provided for in any major case, nor were the freed given cash or any other assets. The ex-slaves were free to purchase land, but this was without any subsidization or compensation for their past exploitation. Rather, what compensation there was, was paid to the slaveowners, either by states in form of cash or bonds, or by the slaves in form of extended labor input. In general, land owned by slaveowners was not confiscated by the state, leaving the basic control over production still with the former elite. Thus the freeing of labor did not necessarily lead to dramatic shifts in the economic power structure, although the particular nature of the changes did vary with the ratio of labor to land in different societies.¹⁴

Of fundamental concern in defining the terms of emancipation and in setting the plans for the transition were the beliefs about the capabilities of the freed to deal with the new situation.¹⁵ If, for example, it was believed that, whether due to genetic or for sociological reasons, the slaves were basically "savages" and backward in behavior and belief, clearly more controls over the process of freedom and a greater period of time were regarded as necessary in order to obtain any long-term benefits. On the other hand, if the unfree laborers demonstrated abilities comparable to those already free, and had both the interest and the ability to negotiate and bargain in the economy and society more generally, then a lessened governmental role after emancipation would be possible. The discussions of the expected capabilities of the freed included consideration of both their conditions at the time of emancipation and also the opinions as to how long it might take for any necessary adjustments to occur. With more experience and education, it was asked, could the freed achieve equal accomplishments with other members of society, and be

able to attain full economic and political equality? And, given the opposition attitudes of the ruling elite, would the freed persons be able to achieve this desired adjustment despite the imposition of political and economic restraints? Would it be necessary for the state to prolong its aid to the freed and to limit the actions of others in society? All of these questions needed to be considered when establishing the policies for the transitions after emancipation.

VI.

There is considerable information available about the economic changes with emancipation in those societies that had been based on slave labor. In many slave societies the principal crops, mainly sugar, but also cotton and coffee, were produced on plantations, with large numbers of workers, using a variant of a gang labor system. Gang labor had always been avoided by workers who had some choice of job and location. With emancipation, workers preferred, wherever possible, to leave plantation units using gang labor, and to work producing the same (if it could be done profitably without gangs) or different crops on smaller units.

As indicated by Table 1, those ex-slaves areas in which sugar production had been important suffered sharp declines in production, from which recovery took a long period of time. Declines in sugar production meant declines in income and export revenues, as indicated in the cases of Jamaica and British Guiana (see Table 2). Similarly, in the United States, emancipation meant a sharp decline in cotton production as well as in southern regional income, both of which took about two decades to recover (see Table 3). There were readjustments in production, with increased shares of foodstuffs produced in most areas, but it seems doubtful that these increased farm outputs offset the declines in plantation production.¹⁶

Thus, in general, emancipation led to declines in the number and sizes of plantations, with probable reductions in overall agricultural output. There were particularly sharp reductions in the production of export crops, with little development of a manufacturing sector or expansion in the production of other export crops. The effects on the material consumption of ex-slaves are not clear, given the varying effects of the changes in crops grown, the redistribution of the work forces involved, and our presently limited information of pre- and post-emancipation consumption patterns. The ending of slavery did however, often mean measured deterioration in health conditions and in life expectation.

Table 1(a). Average Annual Sugar Production Before and After Emancipation (000 tons).

	Five Years Before Abolition	Five Years After End of Restrictions ^a	Percentage Change	Period in Which Pre- Emancipation Level Regained
Haiti ^b	71.7	1.2	-98.3	1960s
Martinique	29.1	(1847) 20.05	-29.6	1857-1861
Guadeloupe	31.9	(1847) 17.7	-44.5	1868-1872
St. Croix	9.7 ^c	(1848) 7.3	-24.7	c. 1890
Louisiana ^d	177.1	(1865) 44.0	-75.2	1887-1891
Surinam	15.7	(1873) 9.7	-38.2	1927-1931
Puerto Rico	94.0	(1876) 74.4	-20.9	1900-1904
Cuba	595.4	(1886) 745.7	+25.2	-
Brazil	254.0	(1888) 170.6	-32.8	1905-1909

Notes: ^a Date either of abolition or end of "apprenticeship" controls, except for Martinique and Guadeloupe, where emancipation occurred in April 1848; Louisiana, where it was the end of the Civil War; and Haiti (note b).

^b The first column relates to the period ending 1791. The second column relates to the first years for which postrevolutionary data are shown (1818-1822).

^c Output in 1840.

^d Shown here are the averages for 1857-1861 (which includes the high output record for 1861, the highest of any antebellum year) and 1866-1870. The 1856-1860 average, which includes the very low output of 1856, was 132.4. If an additional two years were allowed for readjustment, the 1868-1872 average was 62.8, still a substantial decline for whatever combinations of years are chosen.

Table 1(b). Changes in Sugar Production in the British Slave Colonies Prior to and After Emancipation.

	(1) Percentage Change in Average Annual Sugar Production 1824-1833 to 1839-1846	(2) Period in Which Pre-Emancipation Level of Sugar Production Regained	(3) Ratio of Sugar Production in 1887-1896 to Sugar Production in 1839-1846
1. Antigua	+8.7	-	1.5
Barbados	+5.5	-	3.5
St. Kitts	+3.8	-	2.7 ^c

Table 1(b). Continued.

	(1) Percentage Change in Average Annual Sugar Production 1824–1833 to 1839–1846	(2) Period in Which Pre-Emancipation Level of Sugar Production Regained	(3) Ratio of Sugar Production in 1887–1896 to Sugar Production in 1839–1846
2. Trinidad	+21.7 ^a	—	3.0 ^b
British Guiana	–43.0	1857–1866	3.4
Mauritius	+54.3	—	3.1
3. Dominica	–6.4	1847–1856	0.7
St. Lucia	–21.8	1857–1866	1.7
Nevis	–43.1	1867–1876	— ^c
Montserrat	–43.7	1867–1876	2.5
St. Vincent	–47.3	never	0.7
Tobago	–47.5	— ^b	— ^b
Jamaica	–51.2	1930s	0.6
Grenada	–55.9	never	— ^d

Notes:

^a Trinidad output did decline slightly after the end of the Apprenticeship and it was not until 1845 that the 1834 level was regained.

^b Tobago data merged with Trinidad after 1891. The 1877–1886 level of sugar production in Tobago was two-thirds that of 1824–1833.

^c Nevis data merged with St. Kitts after 1882.

^d No sugar output shown after 1888 a year in which only 77 tons were recorded.

Source: Noel Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1949–1950), pp. 112, 126, 131, 199–200, 212, 235, 236, 240, 250, and 377.

Measures of economic output were often used in debates as to the success or failure of emancipation. Even the abolitionists accepted this conceptual framework. Few initially argued that even with a fall in output, emancipation could still be regarded as a success, albeit now on moral, not economic, grounds. When post-emancipation output fell it was argued that the key to the problem of adjustment was the behavior of labor. Disagreements did persist as to the causes of the “labor problem,” along rather predictable lines. To some it was the failure of the planters to behave properly toward their workers or to pay them adequate wages; to others it was due to the inherent characteristics of the workers, whose lack of desires for material goods and an unwillingness to labor led them to avoid plantation labor and/or production for the market.

Table 2. Population, Per Capita Income, Sugar Production, and Output Structure. Jamaica and British Guiana, post-1832.

Jamaica	Population (000)	Per Capita Income	Sugar Production (000 tons)	Share of Exports in Total Output
		(1910 prices)		(Current Prices)
1832	370.0 ^a	£15.6	72	43.5%
1850	400.5 ^a	12.2	29	24.3
1870	506.1	11.9	25	20.2
1890	639.5	12.4	17	19.1
1910	831.4	13.7	20	22.6
1930	1017.2 ^a	15.7	65	19.8
British Guiana		(1913 prices)		(1913 prices)
1832	98.0	£23.9	55	43.3%
1852	127.7	19.9	49	22.8
1871	193.5	—	92	—
1891	270.9	—	114	—
1911	289.1	—	86	—

Note: ^a Computed by using Eisner's estimates of total product and per capita product.

Sources: The population estimates are for census years different from the year of output estimates in several cases, but these differ by only one or two years.

- Col (1) Gisela Eisner, *Jamaica, 1830–1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), pp. 134, 289; Jay R. Mandle, *The Plantation Economy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973), p. 19.
- (2) Eisner, p. 289; Michael Moohr, "The Economic Impact of Slave Emancipation in British Guiana, 1832–1852," *Economic History Review*, 25 (November 1972), pp. 588–607; Mandle, p. 19.
- (3) Deerr, *History of Sugar*, pp. 198–199, 203.
- (4) Eisner, p. 237; Moohr, p. 589.

Table 3(a). Per Capita Income and Share of Exports in Agricultural Output, South, 1860–1900.

Year	Per Capita Income	Share of Exports in Agricultural Output	
	\$	(a) Constant Prices	(b) Current Prices
1860	93.9	37.9%	—
1880	85.4	39.5%	51.7%
1900	116.1	—	48.4%

Source: See Engerman (1982).

Table 3(b). Changes in Output of Four Plantation Crops of the U.S. South, Before and After the Civil War.

	Average Output 1856–1860	Average Output 1867–1871	Period in Which Pre-Civil War Level Regained
Cotton (million lbs.)	1,720.2	1,323.6	1871–1875
Tobacco (million lbs.)	434.2	284.3	1877–1881
Rice (million lbs.)	123.3	47.9	1882–1886
Sugar (million lbs.)	132.4	54.4	1884–1888

Sources: See Engerman (1982).

VII.

Emancipation had an economic impact not just in the area in which freedom was granted, but also in other parts of the world influenced by trade patterns and labor flows. Reductions in sugar production in the British West Indian colonies not only provided a spur to Cuban production, but led to the development of sugar production in areas of new production such as Fiji, Australia, and Natal. More important, perhaps, was the increased flow of labor into the Caribbean from Asia and Africa, to provide the basis of a new plantation labor force and to permit increased sugar production. And, as Table 4 indicates, not only did labor flow to the Caribbean, but also to older sugar producing areas, such as Mauritius and Reunion, and to those areas newly producing sugar, where slavery had not previously existed.¹⁷

In regard to more general social and political changes, the patterns were more mixed. Advances in some dimensions were often matched by backward moves in others. The nature of changes varied over time, depending on the basis of the political controls, as well as the shifting distribution of property rights regarding land and legal controls over labor. In the case of the United States, for example, the freed people gained political rights to vote at the same time as many southern states passed restrictive labor regulations. Both of these changed over time, but the alternating pushes forward and ensuing setbacks meant that there would be a slow route to progress, with the pace dependent upon what was happening in other aspects of society. With such a prolonged period of changes, a specific legacy of slavery becomes hard to define, and the precise definition of the period of transition hard to isolate.

In other areas, the basic change in economic institutions occurred in the absence of political changes. For the British West Indian areas where slavery was ended, there was a lag of over one century between emancipation and the

Table 4. Estimates of Intercontinental Flows of Contract Labor, Gross Movements, Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries.

Areas of Origin to Receiving Region	Years	Numbers (thousands)
India to:		
British Guiana	1838–1918	238.9
Trinidad	1838–1918	143.9
Other British Caribben	1838–1915	46.8
Mauritius	1834–1910	451.8
French Caribbean	1853–1885	about 79.7
Reunion	1826–1882	86.9
Surinam	1873–1916	34.0
St. Croix	1862	0.4
Fiji	1878–1917	61.0
Natal	1860–1912	152.4
Mombassa	1895–1922	39.5
Malaya	1844–1910	249.8
China to:		
British Guiana	1852–1879	13.5
Trinidad	1852–1865	2.6
Other British Caribbean	1852–1884	1.7
Peru	1849–1874	about 90.0
Cuba	1848–1874	124.8
Hawaii	1865–1899	33.6
Transvaal	1904–1907	63.7
Japan to:		
Hawaii	1868–1899	65.0
Peru	1898–1923	17.8
Java to:		
Surinam	1890–1939	33.0
Portuguese Islands to:	1878–1899	10.8
Hawaii		
British Guiana	1835–1881	32.2
Other British Caribbean	1835–1870	8.8
Pacific Islands to:		
Australia	1863–1904	61.2
Elsewhere in Pacific	1863–1914	about 40.0
Peru	1862–1863	3.5
Africa to:		
British Guiana	1834–1867	14.1
Jamaica	1834–1867	11.4
Trinidad	1834–1867	8.9
Other British Caribbean	1834–1867	5.0
French Caribbean	1854–1862	18.5
Reunion	1848–1861	34.3

Table 4. Continued.

Areas of Origin to Receiving Region	Years	Numbers (thousands)
Yucatan to:		
Cuba	1849–1871	about 2.0
Angola to:		
Sao Tome and Principe	1876–1915	about 96.5

Note: Several intracontinental flows are included, those from India to Malaya, from Yucatan to Cuba, and from Angola to the offshore islands. Also, some relatively minor intercontinental flows of contract labor are omitted, in addition to movements within Africa in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In a few cases there may be small amounts of noncontract labor included, and there may be some differences between numbers registered, numbers departing, and numbers arriving, but these will have only a minor impact on the figures. The years are not in all cases calendar years, and the dates of flows are approximations in some cases, including years in which the trade was prohibited, but again these will not have any impact on the interpretations. Finally, there are a number of discrepancies among the various sources (compare, for example, the details of estimates for the Indian emigration in Ferenczi and Wilcox, *International Migrations*, with the estimated inflows given in others sources), but again these do not alter the basic patterns.

Sources: See Stanley L. Engerman, Contract Labor, Sugar, and Technology in the Nineteenth Century, *Journal of Economic History*, 43 (September, 1983) pp. 635–659.

granting of political independence, while even today the French Caribbean islands are part of France, and some of the Dutch islands remain part of their (rather shrunken) colonial empire. Elsewhere, as in Brazil, political independence preceded the ending of slavery, by some six-plus decades, as was the case with large lags, for the United States and with varying lags for Spanish-America. The 1889 coup in Brazil, one year after slave emancipation, may, however, have had some relation to the abolition of slavery, but as effect, not cause.¹⁸ In the United States a war between North and South was needed to end slavery. In most cases, however, ending slavery had more limited political impacts.

VIII.

In the southern U.S., ex-slaves remained within the agricultural sector, generally still growing cotton, but now producing on small, family-operated units or else working as laborers on small farms owned by whites. Aggregate cotton output was maintained in the late nineteenth century by the movement of whites into the production of cotton throughout the South. White families generally worked

on owner-operated farms. The lower measured efficiency of smaller farms led to a decline in overall southern agricultural output for several decades, higher costs, and a temporary loss of the near monopoly position of the U.S. South with respect to the world cotton production.¹⁹

The nature of the economic and political adjustments made within the South were not uniform over time, there being several dramatic shifts within the first three or four decades after emancipation.²⁰ Blacks were granted, legally, the same citizenship and voting rights as whites in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. Black political voting and the election of black officials persisted for several decades, until ended by state legislation in the 1890s.²¹ Education of ex-slaves, on the basis of private and public expenditures, expanded after the war, albeit with smaller amounts spent than for whites, but with an extended decline after the loss of voting rights in the 1890s.²² Further the 1890s saw a large number of laws and regulations in the southern states regarding black occupation, residences, and public discrimination, in addition to a sharp increase in the lynching of blacks.²³ Thus it took about one-quarter century after the Civil War to the full extent of southern regulation and racism to become legally secure.

An important explanation of the changes in the 1890s is the sharp decline in the world cotton market in that period, influencing whites as well as blacks, landowners as well as sharecroppers. This cotton crisis had an impact throughout southern political and economic life, and led to a more pronounced racism than in the earlier periods. Nevertheless by focusing on this decade of poor southern economic performance, a number of quite significant changes after the end of slavery are sometimes overlooked. Since at least 1880, if not 1870, the southern economy was growing about as rapidly as was the North, in the years of rapid northern industrialization. The regional inequality of per capita income continued until about 1940, after which southern per capita income levels began to converge on that of the North. The ex-slaves were able to achieve some degree of economic progress, with increasing wealth, with land ownership, and bank deposits. While they suffered from severe economic problems, their precise nature is often misunderstood, and their causes different from often argued. While interest rates charged by merchants on credit sales (and presumably with an equivalent high charge for cash sales) must have exceeded the rate of large, collateralized loans in northern financial centers, the difference, if any, compared to small, personal, uncollateralized loans such as in the south, was much smaller, if today's markets provide any relevant comparison.²⁴ Given the conflicts of landowners and merchants, often legally resolved at the state level in favor of landowners, it is doubtful that the merchants were in a monopoly position, a conclusion consistent with the inability of merchants to accumulate large

amounts of wealth.²⁵ To understand the circumstances generating high interest rates in the South it is important to consider the southern shortfall in capital after the War, and the high cost of capital to that region and its entire population at the time.

Thus, the material economic and political gains to ex-slaves in the U.S. South exceeded those elsewhere in the Americas, and even after the changes in the 1890s, the economic circumstances were, in material terms, still better. Yet these gains were not as substantial as those expected by those advocating the end of slavery, and whether a legacy of slavery or the response to the post-slave period, the early optimism and hoped for large scale improvements did not occur.

IX.

Despite the great surge of accomplishment and optimism that occurred with most emancipations, relatively soon afterwards there often emerged a sense of disappointment regarding the outcomes of these transitions. This, of course, may have been no different than the reactions to most other economic and social changes. After emancipation, a belief soon emerged that things had not turned out as hoped, that progress was too slow, and, whether the political system was regarded as democratic or not, that the nature of conflicting individual interests often meant quite messy and complex occurrences.

Clearly, based on this long history, any sense of disappointment in our present-day examples of transitions in Eastern Europe is not unusual, the same feelings having existed for many earlier cases. Change has always tended to be slow as well as reversible, and the equality desired impossible to achieve. Not all steps in the process of transition go in the preferred direction, and to achieve proper changes often takes considerable times. And, today, unlike in the past, there is much more immediate coverage of the problems and pitfalls, all brought to everyone's attention at once. Given a bias toward emphasizing the negative aspects of change, and the particular problems of delayed adjustment, the political course during the transition can now be quite difficult. While in the nineteenth century we had Parliamentary hearings and Congressional debates to present the negative aspects of those changes with the ending of slavery, this type of information seemed then to be diffused more slowly and to reach fewer people.

Why then have changes been so limited and so slow in response to major changes in labor institutions? First, dramatic changes in labor institutions generally occurred with only limited changes in the balance of political power, thus precluding any major opening up of the system. As noted, the Asian and Caribbean colonies of Britain did not achieve independence until after World

War II; in the United States blacks continued to face racism in a nation where political power remained with whites. It is also important to recognize that not all individuals and societies sought the same ends, and to many the relative benefits to be obtained from racism or from ethnic rivalry outweighed the benefits of a higher overall income for all.

Since each nation cannot be independent of the rest of the world, world economic conditions and conditions in other countries can limit the prospects for what might be considered a satisfactory adjustment. At various times the problems of the world cane sugar market due to the presence of too many producers, as well as to the development of beet sugar, meant that unless a rapid structural change took place, incomes of cane sugar producers could not expand rapidly. The difficulties in the world cotton market had a similar important influence on the United States transition in the 1890s. The success of manufacturing in Britain and elsewhere in Europe served to limit opportunities in other areas. Thus the changes in the world economy had significant, but at times perverse, effects upon economic growth and income distribution. Economic reality, with its limits on the amount that could be produced, with its recurrent cyclical fluctuations, and with the problems of market coordination, provided constraints on what could be accomplished by changing labor institutions alone. This need not mean that positive changes had not occurred. Even reasonable economic growth, if starting from a low level, may make it hard to appreciate the absolute changes that have occurred.

Unlike other debates about historical changes, few compare the post-emancipation adjustments with some variant of the "good old days," and argue that some retrogression had taken place. Nevertheless the claim of the absence of progress returns us to the comparisons of alternative labor forms and the question of whether slavery was unique in its effect upon people. Certain labor forms, such as convict labor, indentured labor, and debt peonage had preceded slavery in many parts of the world, and they were to succeed it when slavery was abolished. Indentured labor, the most important of these for transoceanic movements, can be regarded either as primarily voluntary, reflecting a choice made at low incomes, or else as coercive, "a new system of slavery" since working conditions, even after the initial contractual agreement, were harsh, individuals could be bought and sold, and labor mobility was limited.²⁶ Depending on which of these possible interpretations of indentured labor is accepted, the overall evaluation of the effects of slave emancipation and the nature of the ensuing sense of disappointment will differ. In the same manner, if low incomes, with or without legal coercion, are considered to be the outcome of exploitation and "wage slavery," disappointment with the outcome of emancipation would occur, similar to the disappointment with the outcomes in a free labor society which provide a similar result.

NOTES

1. Parts of this essay draw upon related materials published in Engerman (1999, 2000), attempting to place major institutional transitions in a broad context.

2. For a discussion and dating of these changes, see Engerman (1995). The endings of slavery in the Americas occurred at about the same time that serfdom was abolished throughout Eastern Europe, and many of the arguments about effects and expectations for the future were quite similar for these two types of forced labor. See Blum (1978).

3. For interesting descriptions of the long persistence and late ending of slavery in Africa and Asia, see Klein (1993) and Miers and Roberts (1988).

4. See Engerman (2002).

5. See, e.g. the discussion of slave price trends in Eltis (1987).

6. For discussions of Haiti, before and after emancipation, see Rotberg (1971), Fass (1988), and Fick (1990). One of the ironies (and tragedies) of independent Haiti in which the farmers avoided plantation production of sugar, was that in the twentieth century Haitians migrated, seasonally or permanently, to produce sugar on plantations elsewhere in the Caribbean.

7. See, for example, the discussions in Fogel and Engerman (1974), as well as Fogel (1989).

8. See Blum (1978), and for the perverse case of Russian land sales, see Domar (1989).

9. For this general argument, see Higgs (1977), who points to the crucial nature of the political system in influencing the economic conditions of the South. For an analysis of postbellum black migration, see Cohen (1991).

10. On the important change in legislation and other controls on black voting patterns, see Kousser (1974).

11. This is the basis of the debate started by C. Vann Woodward, (1951), which has long been one of the staples of southern postbellum history. For discussions of postbellum southern land ownership, see Shugg (1968) and McKenzie (1994).

12. For a recent examination of these issues, primarily in the British case, see Drescher (1999).

13. See Fogel and Engerman (1974) for a presentation of these arguments.

14. For an argument on the role of the land-labor ratio in influencing the rise of coerced labor, see Domar (1989), chapter 12. The argument is equally useful in describing the differing effects of emancipation given that most European powers introduced policies to achieve the same ends in all areas.

15. While the debates on the effect of slavery on the enslaved, raised by Elkins (1959), have continued, there seems less discussion linking the answer to the slavery questions to that of the nature of the emancipation process designed for the transitional period or even how long the transitional period was expected to continue.

16. This paragraph included material from Engerman (1982).

17. See Northrup (1995) for a detailed description of contract labor, its sources and its destinations and on the movement from China and India to the British West Indies, see Look Lai (1993).

18. For a discussion of this issue, see de Costa (1985).

19. See Ransom and Sutch (1977) and for a different perspective, Wright (1978).

20. For discussions of the initial gains, limited as they were, of ex-slaves in regards to land ownership and related matters, see Oubre (1978), Holt (1994), Kerr-Ritchie (1999), and Rabinowitz (1978). On Reconstruction more generally, see Foner (1988).

21. See Kousser (1974).

22. See Margo (1985) on black education and black wealth in the postbellum period. Even then, however, the literacy rate of blacks in the South, while considerably lower than for the whites, exceeded that in the other nations of the Americas.

23. On lynchings, see Tolnay and Beck (1995), Patterson (1998) and Williamson (1984).

24. Forthcoming work by Peter Coclanis will deal with the issue of the appropriate interest rate comparison.

25. On the merchant-landlord conflict, see Woodman (1995).

26. See the classic indictment by Tinker (1974).

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