

[Rothera on Link, 'United States Reconstruction across the Americas'](#)

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Coffee, Diplomacy, and Rebellion: Exploring the International Dimensions of US Reconstruction

William A. Link, currently Richard J. Milbauer Professor of History at the University of Florida, has written or edited an impressive number of books about the US South in his career. The current volume, *United States Reconstruction across the Americas*, grew out of the Richard J. Milbauer Lectures on the American South and is the first entry in the University Press of Florida's new Frontiers of the American South series. The volume features contributions by three distinguished scholars, Rafael Marquese, Don H. Doyle, and Edward B. Rugemer, who focus on some of the international dimensions of US Reconstruction. Link is quite clear about this point in his introduction, writing, "it is the contention of this volume that Reconstruction, with all its implications for national self-identity, cannot be understood unless we extend our analysis beyond national borders" (p. 4). He is absolutely correct in asserting that exploring international implications and contexts is a useful and worthwhile enterprise. He also cautions that these contributions are hardly the final word on the subject. Nevertheless, like the essays in David Prior's *Reconstruction in a Globalizing World* (2018), they are "suggestive of new insights that might result from understanding the aftermath—and ultimately the legacy—of the American Civil War in an international context" (p. 10).

Rafael Marquese, professor of history at the University of São Paulo, is acknowledged as an authority on slavery in the Americas. He has written a number of important articles and book chapters and coedited a volume with Tâmis Parron and Márcia Berbel, *Slavery and Politics: Brazil and Cuba, 1790-1850* (2016). His essay, "The Legacies of the Second Slavery," argues that "the seemingly disconnected processes of the abolition of slavery and Reconstruction in the United States, on the one hand, and of the abolition of slavery and the increasing rates of expansion of the Brazilian coffee exports, on the other hand, were structurally related, mutually conditioning each other by means of the asymmetrical relations that both spaces maintained with the restructuring of the late-nineteenth-century capitalist world economy" (pp. 13-14). Marquese employs a comparative methodology to compare the US and Brazil. In doing so, he builds on important work by Eric Foner and Steven Hahn.[1] He also uses the concept of the "Second Slavery" and the framework of the long Reconstruction to "account not only for the integrated trajectory of slavery in Brazil and the United States but also for the destinies of the two countries *after* abolition" (p. 17). In sum, he discovers a

common process that encompassed the two economies. All good comparative histories highlight similarities as well as differences and Marquese compares sharecropping with the *colonato*, a new form of labor organization in Brazil. Both systems of labor attempted to accomplish the same end: recovering a high level of labor exploitation. However, he contends, “unlike the transition to sharecropping in the US South, the *colonato* maintained the slave organization of the labor process in several crucial aspects” (p. 34). In addition, for the *colonato* to work, Brazil needed a source of laborers. Importantly, the global consequences of the US Civil War and Reconstruction caused many Italians to immigrate to São Paulo and these immigrants provided the necessary labor to fuel the *colonato*. The “reconfiguration of the North American capitalist order in the Reconstruction era,” Marquese concludes, “was an essential constituent part of the crisis of the Second Slavery and the passage from empire to republic in Brazil” (p. 39).

Don H. Doyle, McCausland Professor of History Emeritus at the University of South Carolina, has published and edited a number of important books about nationalism and transnationalism.[2] He begins his essay with an admonition: “the story of the United States’ postwar Reconstruction era is usually told within a tightly bounded national narrative wholly disconnected from the world beyond” (p. 47). This statement might seem incredible, particularly decades into the “transnational turn” in US historiography. Nevertheless, Doyle is largely correct; only a small handful of scholars have really considered the transnational dimensions of US Reconstruction. He argues for analyzing foreign relations and projections of US power and influence in the world to grapple with the international repercussions of Reconstruction. The central figure in this essay is Secretary of State William Henry Seward. Many historians have labeled Seward the chief architect of the “new empire” in the post-1865 period. Doyle concedes that “informal commercial empire was certainly important to Seward’s worldview” but argues that Seward’s more immediate concern at the end of the US Civil War was “protecting the United States from European powers that had proven antagonistic during the war” (p. 48). The Mexican question, the foremost foreign relations problem the US faced in the postwar period, becomes Doyle’s case study and allows him to argue for a modification of the conventional portrayal of Seward. Indeed, here Seward’s foreign policy “aimed more at decolonizing neighboring territories than in acquiring them” (p. 50). Doyle perhaps considers the Monroe Doctrine as somewhat more dormant than it actually was during the war, but this is a fascinating account of how Seward’s “diplomatic solution may have been pokey, but it was ultimately effective” (p. 67). US and Mexican cooperation drove the French out of Mexico, toppled Maximilian’s fraudulent government, and restored Benito Juárez to the presidency.

Edward B. Rugemer, currently associate professor of African American studies and history at Yale University, has published two award-winning books, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (2008) and *Slave Law and the Politics of Resistance in the Early Atlantic World* (2018). In his essay, he focuses on the popular uprising that occurred in the fall of 1865 in Morant Bay, Jamaica, and argues that many people saw it as a “warning of what might take place in the American South” (p. 82). He contends that Jamaica and the US South experienced two distinct processes of emancipation that intersected “through the international impact of the Civil War and through the operation of the transatlantic public sphere of newspapers” (p. 83). The year 1865 was not the first time the US had thought about emancipation in Jamaica—a point Rugemer made forcefully in his previous scholarship—and he again finds that different groups of people derived different lessons from the Morant Bay rebellion. Indeed, “news of the rebellion in Morant Bay coincided with and reinforced widespread communal fears among whites in the American South that

the freedpeople would soon rise up in a rebellion of vengeance against their former masters” (p. 97). Thus, overheated rumors about Morant Bay fused with paranoid imaginings about a Christmas insurrection in the US South panicked former masters. Rugemer also contends that Morant Bay shaped legislation, specifically the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Military Reconstruction Acts. Charles Sumner certainly connected Morant Bay and US Reconstruction and reminded his contemporaries that freedpeople in the US South could well emulate the Morant Bay rebels if they were denied rights. Still, Rugemer might have said more about the attitudes of other members of Congress and the general public. Rugemer is correct that Congress overturned Andrew Johnson’s policy, but it is unclear how much of a factor Morant Bay played in this decision.

Because the essay stops rather abruptly in 1867, Rugemer does not really discuss how the authors of this legislation either learned the wrong lessons or did not apply the correct lessons from Morant Bay. If Morant Bay illustrated anything, it was the folly of allowing former masters to govern freedpeople. Rugemer offers a scathing indictment of how planters treated former bondspeople in Jamaica and it is not at all surprising that their anger exploded into rebellion in 1865. Anyone interested in preventing a Morant Bay rebellion in the US South needed to remove from power the governments formed under Johnson’s plan and to keep former masters out of power. Disfranchisement for all rebels, a significantly larger military presence in the formerly seceded states, or a much longer occupation would have been ways to accomplish this. However, most Republicans shied away from these means. Their solution was to give African American men the ballot. This was an important decision, to be sure, but the question remained: would the ballot be sufficient on its own to prevent the old elites from returning to power, particularly once the states were reconstructed? Rugemer points out that some people of color could vote in Jamaica at this time if they met property qualifications. If masters could return to power and enact similar restrictions, that would seemingly set the US on the road to Morant Bay. Republicans, in other words, did not seem to have learned the right lesson or were not able to overcome some of their own cultural and ideological blinders to create better solutions. White supremacist southern democrats learned a lesson of their own. Just as the Jamaican authorities used massive violence to repress the rebellion, so white ex-rebels used such violence to undo Reconstruction. In sum, it may be true that “the deep similarities between the social and political transformation that both societies faced made the Morant Bay Rebellion immediately relevant to Radical Republican journalists and legislators” and the Morant Bay rebellion may have “shaped the meaning of Radical Reconstruction in the United States” (p. 108). However, future scholars might think more generally about the many lessons that contemporary people did, or did not, learn from Morant Bay. On another note, it would be interesting to link Marquese’s and Rugemer’s topics by investigating the degree of interest or disinterest among Brazilians in what happened in Morant Bay in 1865.

This fascinating volume is a solid contribution to an ever-growing conversation about the international dimensions of US Reconstruction. Anyone interested in this topic should read and grapple with the ideas these authors advance. Given the quality of the volume, I will certainly look forward to future entries in the *Frontiers of the American South* series.

Notes

[1]. See Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); and Steven Hahn, “Class and State in Postemancipation Societies:

Southern Planters in Comparative Perspective," *American Historical Review* 95 (February 1990): 75-98.

[2]. Don H. Doyle, *Nations Divided: America, Italy, and the Southern Question* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002); Don H. Doyle and Marco Antonio Pamplona, eds., *Nationalism in the New World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006); Don H. Doyle, *Secession as an International Phenomenon: From America's Civil War to Contemporary Separatist Movements* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010); Don H. Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2015); Jörg Nagler, Don H. Doyle, and Marcus Gräser, eds., *The Transnational Significance of the American Civil War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); and Don H. Doyle, ed., *American Civil Wars: The United States, Latin America, Europe, and the Crisis of the 1860s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

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