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**Lost Among the Mountains: An Overlooked
History of African Americans in Western
North Carolina, 1865-1880**

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Lost Among the Mountains: An Overlooked History
of African Americans in Western North Carolina,
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Introduction

On the 9th May 1865, the American Civil War came to an end, bringing with it the termination of slavery in America's Southern states. The closure of slavery threatened the economic ground rock of society: the plantations. The dominant view taken by historians is that landowners were unwilling to accept African Americans' newfound freedom, attempting to force them back into servitude on their plantations for low or no wages. This was commenced with the implementation of the 'Black Codes': a series of statutes and laws enacted in 1865 and 1866 by the legislature of the Southern states to restrict the freedom of ex-slaves. One Southern newspaper aptly summarised this view, proclaiming that the emancipated slave (freedman) 'is free, but free only to labor.'¹

Between 1865 and 1880 (although these dates have been debated), the American South underwent a period labelled 'Reconstruction'; where the Southern states formerly part of the rebellious Confederacy were integrated back into the United States.² The most cited and renowned historian of Reconstruction, Eric Foner, set a precedent in his revisionist studies. Using Southern regions where revenue was generated predominantly by plantations, he argued that during Reconstruction Southern states aimed to 'reestablish control of the black labor force'.³ Foner justifies his focus on plantation economies because

it was in the plantation Black Belt that the majority of the emancipated slaves lived, and it was the necessity, as perceived by whites, of maintaining the plantation system, that made labor such an obsession in the aftermath of emancipation.⁴

Within Foner's narrative, an extensive account of African Americans' lives has been given. Indeed, to such an extent that historian Michael Perman famously ended his review of Foner's works with a disconcerting question for historians of Reconstruction: 'Ironically, because this

¹ *Louisville Democrat*, 3 Aug. 1866, 1.

² Some historians have used the end date of 1877 when Union soldiers were withdrawn from the Southern States. See E. Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York, 1989). Others have argued its termination was in 1880 when the socio-political impacts of Reconstruction reduced. See W. E. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-80* (New York, 1962).

³ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 426.

⁴ E. Foner, *Nothing But Freedom: Emancipation and its Legacy* (Louisiana, 1983), 44.

synthesis is so successful and thorough, it does raise one unsettling question and leave it unanswered - - what is left to be done?’⁵

While historians of Reconstruction have accepted Foner’s labour focused account as a correct overview, moving on to consider more specialised issues such as gender and the imagination, this study returns to Foner’s much-praised interpretation. Foner and historians following him have overlooked an area which has long been considered insignificant for the study of ex-slaves: The Southern Appalachian Mountain Region, running through Tennessee, Georgia, and western North Carolina (WNC). This paper will focus on the counties of WNC depicted in figure 1. The reason for WNC’s neglect can be traced back to scholars who dismissed the region as a racially ‘pure’, isolated area, with no necessity for slavery because large-scale plantations could not prosper in its sheer valleys (shown in figures 2 and 3). Belcher’s study of the area’s racial demographics concluded that

the number of negroes in the Appalachian Region is such a small proportion of the total population that the social consequences of their presence and migration are not of any great significance.⁶

Similarly, John Campbell - the pioneering scholar of the region - noted that although there was some black presence in the area, the

often generally repeated statement that there are no negroes in the mountains. . . [is factual because] in many of the more remote counties, especially those where there are few large valleys, few mining or industrial developments, or few cities, there are few negroes.⁷

These studies have influenced scholars proceeding them, resulting in mainstream historiography’s neglect of racial studies in WNC, most notably, Darin Waters’ *Life Beneath the Veneer*. Chapter 1 seeks to address this misrepresentation.

⁵ M. Perman, ‘Eric Foner’s Reconstruction: A Finished Revolution,’ *Reviews in American History* 17, no. 1 (March 1989), 78.

⁶ J. C. Belcher, ‘Population Growth and Characteristics,’ *The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey*, (ed.) T. R. Ford (Kentucky, 1967), 152.

⁷ J. C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*, (Kentucky, 1921), 201

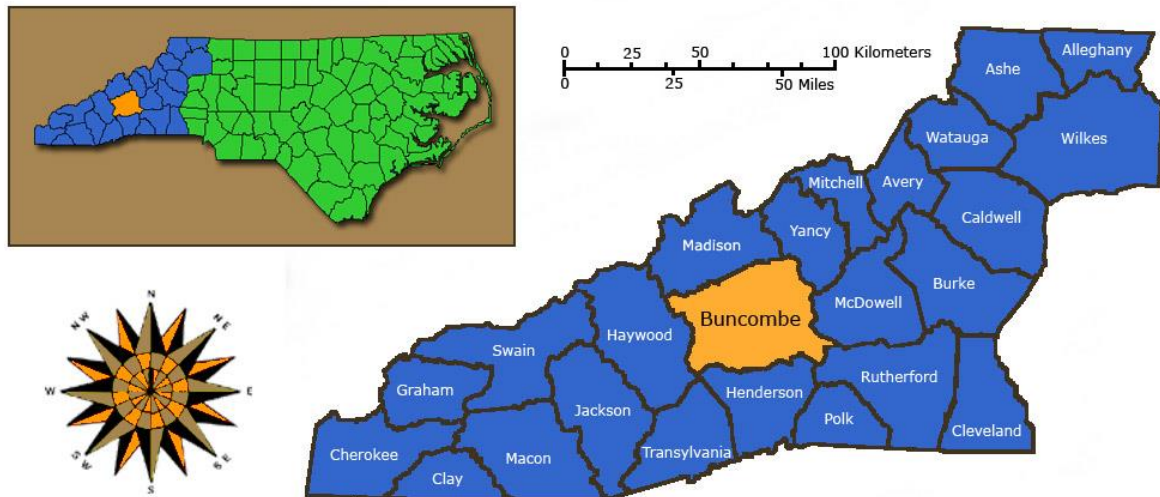
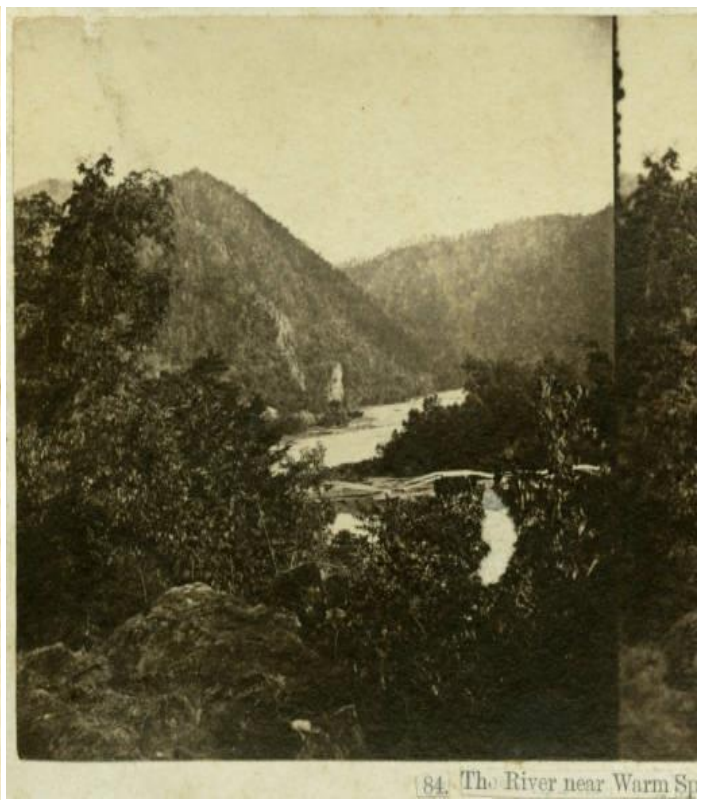
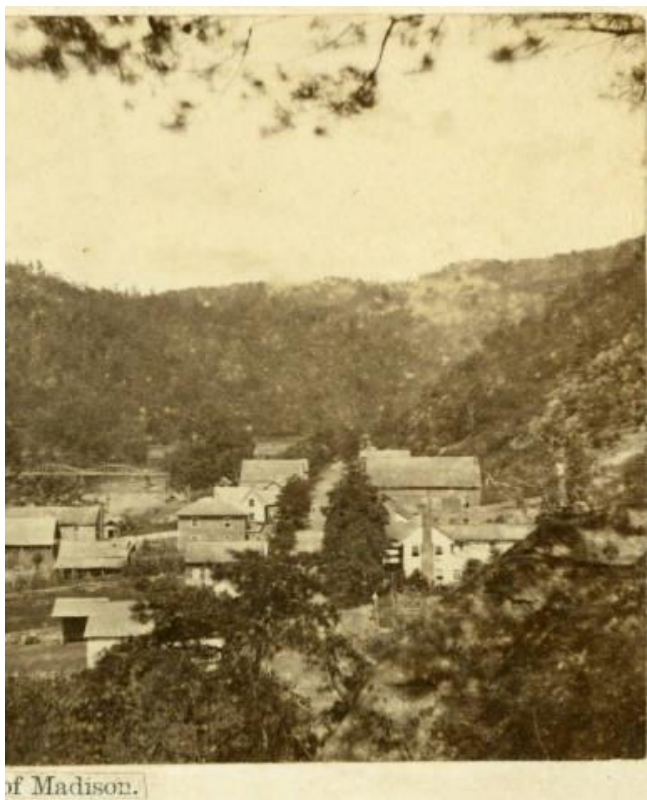


Figure 1: Counties of WNC.



Figures 2 and 3: Chapel Hill, Wilson Library, Rufus Morgan, ‘Marshall – County of Madison’ (c.1869-73), ‘The River Near Warm Springs’ (c.1870-79).

Waters' overlooked study argues that WNC's black population was ostracised, but this was covered up by the city's elite who constructed a 'veneer' to show the city as serene and modern.⁸ Waters' insightful conclusion has opened the door for a wider study of WNC's counties because it is based predominantly on Asheville, Buncombe County (highlighted in orange in figure 1), neglecting WNC's other counties. Moreover, it is influenced heavily by post-1880 industrial development and the growth of the tourism industry. Indeed, Steven Nash, perhaps the leading scholar of western North Carolinian history, commented that 'a significant gap persists in our understanding of what happened between the end of the Civil War and the influx of outside capital and industry after 1880' in WNC.⁹ Therefore, this study aims to expand upon Waters' conclusion of black marginalisation, focussing on a larger sample area of WNC's counties up until 1880; when the social and political consequences of Reconstruction were still being felt. It was during this period that the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) operated and was crucial to the marginalisation of African Americans, a point which Waters only touches upon.

The longevity of Belcher and Campbell's conclusions are shown by several erroneous generalisations made by historians who have treated the Southern states as a homogenous group. Alan Trelease's much-cited study highlights the two most significant. Firstly, that it was only where a large proportion of the population were freedmen that whites felt threatened by a black political and social overthrow, replacing whites as the dominant race.¹⁰ Secondly, that the KKK operated in a different manner in the mountains. Trelease overlooks WNC in his study because whereas the KKK in the plantation South worked to protect white supremacy, 'the major exception to this rule was in the mountain counties of Georgia [and] North Carolina. . . where the Klan protected moonshiners.'¹¹ This essay reveals the issues with these conclusions, showing a very real fear of a black political uprising in WNC despite its relatively small black population and, as a result, a KKK that worked to preserve white supremacy as it did across much of the plantation belt.

This study will draw on an array of source material which must be used with caution. As was the case in many Southern regions, in WNC there was fierce political competition between

⁸ D. J. Waters, *Life Beneath The Veneer: The Black Community in Asheville, North Carolina from 1793 to 1900* (Chapel Hill, 2012), 6.

⁹ S. E. Nash, *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge: The Politics of Postwar Life in the Southern Mountains* (Chapel Hill, 2016), 6.

¹⁰ A. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York, 1971), xxi

¹¹ Trelease, *White Terror*, xlviii.

Republicans and Democrats for county seats. Republican's policy tended to be more liberal in its attitudes toward freedmen, hoping to capture the votes of ex-slaves and more forward thinking whites. The Democrats were typically conservative, often aiming to suppress African American rights to please their principally white voters. When analysing contemporary sources in WNC, it is important to notice political agendas which distort the truth. WNC does, however, reveal that in moments of tension, political persuasion was sometimes reduced to insignificance, with racial alliances prevailing. Therefore, one should be careful when generalising that Republicans aided African Americans as mounting fears for preserving white supremacy often diluted political concerns.

One source used frequently is the *Report of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States* (hereafter the *Insurrection Report*). It was commissioned by the federal government to investigate violence within the South during Reconstruction. The North Carolina volume has numerous useful testimonies regarding emancipated slaves' treatment. However, Democrats were incentivised to play down the violence of the KKK – which often intimidated Republican voters, aiding Democrat's campaigns – to reduce the intervention of the Freedmen's Bureau, an organisation established to aid ex-slave's lives and prevent intimidation. Republicans were incentivised to exaggerate the role of white supremacist groups to increase the Bureau's presence and reduce intimidation towards their voters. This is one limitation of the study since there are limited impartial, personal accounts to make comparisons with.

Neglect of the Southern Appalachian Mountain region has allowed assumptions made by historians of Reconstruction to go unchallenged. Each chapter will attempt to address an assumption that has been made. Chapter 1 will prove the presence of WNC's antebellum and post-war black population in an attempt to bring studies such as Waters' into mainstream thought. It shows that slavery was undoubtedly of smaller scale and slaves were seen through a paternal lens because they were more integrated into family lives. Chapter 2 demonstrates that after emancipation this paternal outlook soon dispersed, however, marginalisation of the black population up until the arrival of the railroad in 1875 was not due to an 'obsession' with the need for labour as Foner argues. WNC was never dependent on slave labour and so maltreatment of freedmen resulted from a fear of black supremacy. This questions historians who have assumed that fear of black supremacy was only present in areas with majority black populations. Chapter 3 seeks to address the assumption made by historians of the KKK; that the organisation operated differently in the mountains, working for moonshiners rather than

white supremacists, because of the perceived insignificant black population. In fact, evidence suggests it worked in the same manner as in many Southern plantation areas, intimidating African Americans, Republicans, and their supporters.

Taken collectively, these chapters reveal the issue of treating the South as one homogenous area and making assumptions about peripheral areas based on the majority. It argues that an understanding of the Southern Appalachian Mountains shows the need for a greater consideration of the regional variation in the treatment of African Americans during Reconstruction. Indeed, in 2013, Foner himself admitted that Reconstruction is still ‘one of the most significant and most misunderstood eras in our nation’s history.’¹² This study unveils the validity of Foner’s statement and the need for further investigation.

¹² J. H. Franklin, *Reconstruction After the Civil War: With a New Forward by Eric Foner* (Chicago, 2013), xi.

Chapter 1: Slavery in the Mountains

Since this study is based on the premise that there was a significant black population in WNC, it is necessary to show the magnitude of both the pre-Civil War and post-Civil War black populations in its counties. Slavery existed on a much smaller scale in the mountains; whereas plantations could have hundreds of slaves, slave-owners in WNC rarely possessed over 10. Records from a farm in Madison County in 1859 listed items purchased and their costs. They recorded the farm hands comprising ‘negroes John, George, Ham, Tusquitta, old Sam and Jane.’¹³ This trend of having a small number of slaves to aid with daily work is shown to be consistent across WNC by the United States Slave Census of 1850. It demonstrates that although slavery did not exist in large numbers, it was still present. For example, in Henderson County there were two relatively major slaveholders keeping 30 and 21 slaves. However, most owners rarely exceeded 5 slaves. This pattern is present across the counties.¹⁴

Without large-scale agriculture slavery was not a lucrative industry, nor was it a necessity. Slaves were expensive and a luxury for wealthier businessmen or households. There are numerous documents to show their expense, for example, a receipt from 1863 for a payment ‘received of Joseph Ellern [for] fifteen hundred dollars for being in full purchase of one negro slave.’¹⁵ Frederick Law Olmstead, an American journalist and social critic, travelled across the South and the Southern Appalachian Mountain region in the late 1850s. In WNC, he noted that he was ‘often told [slaves] were “unprofitable property” in the mountains’. It, therefore, existed in a more ‘mild and segregated form in which it is found, when found at all. . . than in the large properties of the cotton and sugar districts’.¹⁶ As a result, slavery operated in a different manner with slaves displaying more freedom in WNC. Slaves did not have one major objective, as those on large plantations did and so

¹³ Asheville, Pack Memorial Library, (hereafter PML): MS020.002H, Papers, 1837-1911, Miscellaneous Records 1859.

¹⁴ United States Census Slave Schedule, 1850, North Carolina, *FamilySearch*, citing National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) microfilm publication M432. [<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HY-67K7-PC7?cc=1420440&wc=MJCD-BZG%3A1042936501%2C1042975601%2C1042975602> accessed 14/11/2016]

¹⁵ PML: MS066.001N, Legal and Financial Documents Collection, Slave Indentures 1863.

¹⁶ F. L. Olmstead, *A Journey in the Back Country* (New York, 1860), 226.

[<https://archive.org/stream/ajourneyinbackc01olmsgoog#page/n8/mode/2up> accessed 27/11/2016]

their labour being directed to a great variety of employments, their habits resemble those of ordinary free laborers, they exercise responsibility, and both in soul and intellect they are more elevated.¹⁷

Slave's relative liberty is supported by the account of James Silk Buckingham, an English author and traveller who toured the slave states in 1840. He noted that in WNC it was rare to see slaves working in agriculture, instead, they often took on other roles. Arriving at a hotel he recorded with surprise that 'the business of the inn is left mostly to the black servants to manage as they see fit.'¹⁸ These two accounts reveal WNC's slave's relative freedom and integration in a range of professions.

As a result, some slaves were even seen in the same terms as white labourers. Olmstead met one western North Carolinian farmer who believed that 'the white men here who will labor, are not a bit better than negroes' in their ability, but will refuse to work if they are scolded.¹⁹ Indeed, Buckingham observed that white and black workers acted in the same way towards him: 'the manners of the whites and blacks are equally rude; and among all, there seems to be a determination to do just as much, or as little, as they see fit, and no more.'²⁰ With no fear of being disrespectful to customers, slaves clearly felt freer than in the plantation South. He is further shocked, that unlike in many Southern homes, the wives of slave owners did not concern themselves with the superintendence of domestic duties, 'nor the training of their children, which, like household affairs, is chiefly confined to negroes here.'²¹ Slaves were involved intimately in the family lives of western North Carolinians, particularly in the training of their children. They were, therefore, treated differently in WNC and it is worth assessing whether their exceptional treatment continued into Reconstruction. This will be addressed in Chapter 2.

After the Civil War's end, there persisted to be a considerable black presence in WNC. The 1870 census reveals how significant the black population of WNC was. Buncombe county had 2303 'free colored', McDowell 1772, and Rutherford 2642. Haywood and Madison had smaller, but not insignificant black populations; with 515 and 314 African Americans recorded. Indeed, in McDowell freedmen made up over 23% of the population, while in Buncombe and

¹⁷ Olmstead, *Journey in the Back Country*, 227.

¹⁸ J. S. Buckingham, *The Slave States of America* (London, 1842), 193.

[<https://archive.org/stream/slavestatesofame02buckuoft#page/n13/mode/2up> accessed 12/12/2016]

¹⁹ Olmstead, *Journey in the Back Country*, 228.

²⁰ Buckingham, *Slave States of America*, 193.

²¹ Buckingham, *Slave States of America*, 196.

Rutherford they constituted nearly 15% and 20% of the total population.²² See Appendix A for a full list of the counties' 1870 black populations. Such evidence reveals the need for a greater consideration of WNC when assessing black lives during Reconstruction.

While this evidence is conclusive, there are documents which may explain Belcher and Campbell's dismissal of WNC. Nicholas W. Woodfin, a member of the state senate from 1844 to 1854 and a resident of Buncombe County since 1831, gave testimony to a Federal committee set up to investigate insurrection in North Carolina, recorded in the *Insurrection Report*. When asked if he lived in a section of the state where there were very few African Americans, he replied 'very few' and stated that in WNC 'we never had many slaves in that part of the state.' He concluded that as a result freedmen's actions 'excite[d] little attention one way or the other.'²³ Such sentiment could be responsible for leading historians to assume black lives were irrelevant in the mountains. However, Republican Governor of North Carolina: William Holden, won Buncombe County in 1868 by just 174 votes.²⁴ As a result, even if only one-eighth of Buncombe's black population voted Republican (as they often did), they would have played a significant part in Holden's victory. African Americans' voting power suggests they would have attracted far more attention from white Democrats and those who feared black political control than Woodfin's statement would insinuate. This is a point which will be expanded upon when considering black marginalisation in Chapter 2 and the KKK's impact on black lives in Chapter 3.

The 1870 Census data shows the need for WNC to be included within the racial history of Reconstruction. Yet, as the antebellum travel accounts noted, slavery operated on a much smaller scale than in the plantation areas normally studied, with slaves showing greater freedom, allowing them to be more elevated in 'soul and intellect'. Therefore, Chapter 2 will test if African Americans' experiences of emancipation were different to the standard account given by historians, and what these experiences add to the historiography of Reconstruction.

²² United States Census Office, *The statistics of the population of the United States: embracing the tables of race, nationality, sex, selected ages, and occupations ... compiled from the original returns of the ninth census* (1870), 52-54. [<https://archive.org/details/1870census> accessed 05/12/2016]

²³ United States Congress Joint Select Committee on the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States (hereafter USC), *Report of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, vol.2, North Carolina* (hereafter *Insurrection Report*) (Washington, 1872), 243-4. [<https://archive.org/stream/reportofjointsel02unit#page/n5/mode/2up> accessed 04/12/2016].

²⁴ E. J. Olson, 'Asheville, North Carolina: Three Incidents, 1868-1906', in B. M. Buxton (ed.) *The Appalachian Experience: Proceedings of the 6th Annual Appalachian Studies Conference* (Boone, 1980), pp. 154-6.

Chapter 2: The Decline of Paternalism

Historians have often assumed that only in Southern areas where there were large numbers of ex-slaves – in the plantation belt across lowland North Carolina, Georgia, South Carolina, Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida – were there fears of a black uprising that threatened white supremacy. As a result, freedmen's liberation was limited and they were treated with suspicion and ostracised. Trelease, for example, argues that only where there were substantial black populations were there concerns that enfranchised African Americans could vote in a government that favoured black 'supremacy.' As a result, 'the most constant surveillance was needed to keep [the ex-slave] from bursting his bonds of discipline and turning upon his friends and protects'.²⁵ This argument implies that where there were fewer freedmen in a mountain economy there was less fear of black uprising and, therefore, African Americans may have continued to enjoy a greater degree of freedom and a higher quality of life. Indeed, due to the more intimate nature of slavery, with slaves working closely within a family - as opposed to on a large plantation - there is evidence for a more paternal treatment of ex-slaves. However, this section argues that paternalism soon dissipated into a fear of black supremacy, showing that insecurity about African Americans' new freedom was not just present in areas with majority black populations or where landowners were dependent on slave labour.

Mounting Fears of Black Equality

Following emancipation, there is evidence to suggest former slave-owners saw their slaves in an affectionate child-like manner. Mary Brown, wife of slave-owner John Brown, saw her slaves in a maternal light, telling her son in an 1865 letter that she 'should be very sorry to part with any servants, for they are to me as part of our family, and I feel attached to them as to my own children.'²⁶ Woodfin, a renowned supporter of black suffrage, noted that in WNC where 'those counties not having very many slaves' there was little prejudice against freedmen as 'they were generally humane toward their slaves.'²⁷ It is, therefore, reasonable to hypothesise that this paternalism would continue into the post-war climate.

²⁵ Trelease, *White Terror*, xxi.

²⁶ Chapel Hill, Wilson Library, (hereafter WL): Vance Brown Papers, Mary Taylor Brown to John Evan Brown, June 20, 1865.

²⁷ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 244.

This paternal view has been contended to manifest itself in a more lenient application of the apprenticeship scheme. The scheme was part of the 'Black Codes'; courts were authorised to apprentice black children against their will. Foner argues the apprenticeship system exploited the poverty and separation of ex-slave families and was used 'as an excuse for providing planters with the unpaid labor' of black workers.²⁸ Indeed, according to the minutes taken from the Freedmen's Convention of 1866 held in Raleigh, North Carolina, African Americans complained that 'in and through the counties of this state our children. . . are ruthlessly taken from us and bound without our consent.'²⁹ In North Carolina and the plantation South, exploitation of black workers through the apprenticeship system was common, taking children against their parents' will and utilising them for cheap work.

Waters argues, using Buncombe County court records between 1865 and 1869, that there is no evidence authorities in WNC 'flagrantly or unjustly removed any black children from the care of their parents.'³⁰ Waters suggests that WNC was exceptional in its more lenient application of the Black Codes which may imply a connection between former owners' closer relations with their slaves and a better treatment after emancipation. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest apprenticeships were used to aid vulnerable and neglected black children. E. A. Harris, Sub-District Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau in WNC, reported to his colonel the apprenticeship of 'very young orphans. Blind and infirm – totally dependent negroes' that were 'crippled' and unable to support themselves.³¹ This insinuates Waters' argument extends beyond Buncombe County, with the apprenticeship system working as a paternal method of reducing poverty.

Waters' view, however, is not representative of WNC. Reports from Clinton Cilley, made the head of WNC's Freedmen's Bureau in 1866, contradict Harris' assessment. Indeed, Harris had considerable motivation to falsely report apprenticeships as Bureau officials were paid \$1 per indenture. Therefore, any crippled child who could conveniently 'pass away' would be a prime target for a false apprenticeship declaration. Other reports reveal that shortly after the termination of slavery, residents dropped their paternal care for ex-slaves. Cilley notes that

²⁸ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 201.

²⁹ *Minutes of the Freedmen's Convention, Held in the City of Raleigh, on the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th of October 1866* (Raleigh, 1866), 14. [<https://archive.org/details/minutesfreedmen00unkngoog> accessed 16/02/2017]

³⁰ Waters, *Life Beneath The Veneer*, 142.

³¹ North Carolina Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1863-1872, *Family Search*, citing NARA publication M1909, E.A. Harris to C.A. Cilley, 23 Dec. 1865. [<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G9ZP-5B8S?cc=2143119&wc=9HQ6-6Y7%3A1067906202%2C1067908901> accessed 06/04/2017]

‘there are not one hundred men that I know of in this district [WNC] who would deal out what I call justice to the blacks’, and ‘if not for the presence of the authorities here, these feelings would assert their old ways and the blacks would suffer accordingly’ (see Appendix B for full report).³² The lack of justice which ex-slaves suffered was present in the apprenticeship scheme; where possible white businessmen would exploit the system, resembling Foner’s description of the South. The Freedmen’s Bureau had to intervene regularly due to this abuse. For example, Hannibal Norton, the Sub-District Commissioner for the areas surrounding Burke County, informed Harris that he had to cancel the apprenticeships of 3 black children because they had been indentured ‘without their mother’s consent.’³³ Forced apprenticeships suggest the attitudes of western North Carolinians to ex-slaves were no different to those which Foner describes in the plantation South.

Early historians of the American South noted that, during Reconstruction, it was a mistake to believe whites in areas which were most densely populated by freedmen were in the greatest danger. Lester and Wilson, writing in 1905, noted that in the plantation belt freedmen still respected white’s as ‘beings almost superhuman’ due to their severe treatment during servitude. Race relations were worse in more densely white areas, especially outside the plantation belt where ‘the whites were somewhat divided amongst themselves’ with a lot more variation in Union and Confederacy values. It was here, they believed, that whites were in the most danger.³⁴ Although this view has been regarded as racist paranoia, it is a realistic interpretation of white mountain insecurity. Due to the comparatively less severe nature of slavery when contrasted with plantations, ex-slaves had less fear of their former masters and were physically and socially more mobile. White western North Carolinians showed a similar fear of black ‘supremacy’ as in the plantation South. However, this fear was not due to a black numerical threat but because the relative autonomy of slaves in WNC made ex-slaves more confident to use their freedom after emancipation.

How mobile freedmen were following the termination of the Civil War has been debated among scholars of Southern history. Foner noted that freedmen took great satisfaction in using

³² North Carolina Freedmen’s Bureau Field Office Records, *FamilySearch*, citing NARA microfilm publication M1909, C.A. Cilley, 30 Dec. 1868. [<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-89ZP-5PXH?cc=2143119&wc=9HQ6-6Y7%3A1067906202%2C1067908901> accessed 25/03/2017]

³³ United States Freedmen’s Bureau Labor Contracts, Indenture and Apprenticeship Records, 1865-1872, *FamilySearch*, citing NARA microfilm publication M1909, E.A. Harris, 27 Jul. 1868. [<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2W3-ZQJS> accessed 4/03/2017]

³⁴ J. C. Lester and D. L. Wilson, *Ku Klux Klan: Its Origin, Growth and Development* (New York, 1905), 23-4.

their new-found freedom, packing up their possessions and simply leaving.³⁵ African American mobility has been perceived as restricted by the mountain environment which had few transportation networks until 1875. This limited freedmen's movement and stagnated their socio-economic position because they were reduced to working for the same employers as when they had been slaves. Nash is a proponent of WNC's exceptionalism, arguing that 'a poor transportation network restricted mobility' and as a result 'the opportunities for African Americans were truncated.'³⁶ However, evidence suggests WNC's freedmen enjoyed the same freedom of movement as in lowland areas. The Henrys, an important slaveholding family in Buncombe, suffered from this mobility. Cornelia Henry complained bitterly in a letter to her husband (see Appendix C for full extract) that 'you have no idea how big the nigs feel'. Former slave Molly had left the household and gone to town, while Old Andy - who had attempted to use the threat of Union soldiers to coerce his former master into giving him live-stock - also left. Relieved, she noted, 'the negro has gone to Tennessee now'.³⁷ Such evidence shows that the lack of transportation network did not limit their movement.

Once slaves were freed and mobile, residents started to see African Americans in a new light. Cornelia's diary shows that white residents noticed a change in the black population, and tensions increased when they acted as equals. She noted numerous troubles with her black workers: 'there is a great change in the negroes they seem not to want to do anything only as they are hired.' One of her black workers, Tena, sent back some of the clothes Cornelia asked her to mend, 'her first time of showing freedom.' Indeed, just 3 months after the end of the Civil War, Cornelia had become infuriated by her ex-slaves' actions, deciding 'I never intend to associate with a negro for I shall ever consider them my inferiors.' She 'wish[ed] they were all gone from here everyone of the colour I hate the nig'.³⁸ Cornelia's resentment shows how WNC's white population soon became frustrated with African Americans' displays of equality.

These attitudes soon turned into a desire to rid the area of black workers. Thomas Lenoir, son of a prominent land owner in Haywood County, in a letter to his brother decided - having hired 2 black workers - they 'must not encourage others to come and settle around me'.³⁹ This view was outwardly made by an 1876 advertisement brochure entitled: 'NO BETTER CLIMATE IN THE WORLD for HEALTH, COMFORT & ENJOYMENT', clearly designed to boost the

³⁵ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 79.

³⁶ Nash, *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge*, 28-9.

³⁷ PML: MS020.001I, Henry Letters 5/1865, C. Henry to W. Henry, 27 May. 1865.

³⁸ PML: MS020.001C, Papers, 1837-1911, Henry Diary 5 Jul., 16 Jun., 10 Aug., 9 Jul. 1865.

³⁹ WL: Lenoir Family Papers, Tom Lenoir to R. N. Lenoir, August 14, 1865.

area's tourism. It also stated: 'there are no colored people here. Only good white laborers can be hired for fifty cents per day and board.'⁴⁰ The brochure shows that not only did locals not want black workers in the area, but neither did visitors, giving residents further incentive to marginalise freedmen. It is clear from these statements that any pre-war paternalism had disappeared and resentment for freedmen's equality had taken over.

Historians have normally attributed growing ostracism to an underlying economic desire to return freedmen to work on the land in slave-like conditions. This position is taken by historians of Reconstruction who have treated the Southern states collectively. Foner argues that Southerners' 'obsession' with 'maintaining the plantation system' meant that post-emancipation Southern politics focussed on returning freedmen to the land through labour contracts and African American taxation. He concludes that 'the conflict over these issues. . . reveal how much of postemancipation politics was defined by the "labor problem".'⁴¹ Stanley corroborates this leading view, arguing that freedmen were mistreated to force them into slave-like labour contracts for plantations which they would otherwise not have accepted.⁴² Yet, evidence from WNC suggests that in the Southern mountains little changed regarding the 'labour problem', showing that Foner's generalisation has overstated the importance of labour. It was not until 1875 that labour became an issue in WNC, and that was not due to plantations' need for cheap work, but because of industrialisation reaching the mountains. It is important for historians of Reconstruction to step away from a labour-centric view, and analyse other causes of black marginalisation.

Growing negative attitudes towards freedmen cannot be explained by the notion Southern politics was 'defined by the labour problem' because WNC's farmers were never dependent on slave labour. For example, Walter Lenoir, a large landowner in Haywood and Jackson County, had been reliant on white tenant-leases before emancipation. Between 1821 and 1858, Lenoir had no registered slaves but at least 39 different white tenants on his lands with many sharecropping.⁴³ After emancipation and the end of the Civil War little changed for him and the profitability of his land. He informed another prominent landowner that there was 'more

⁴⁰ S.T. Kelsey, *The Blue Ridge highlands in western North Carolina* (Greenville, 1876) [<https://archive.org/stream/blueridgehighlan00kels#page/n3/mode/2up> accessed 04/12/16]

⁴¹ Foner, *Nothing But Freedom*, 44-47.

⁴² A. D. Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge, 1998), 124.

⁴³ J. D. Reid, 'Antebellum Southern Rental Contracts', *Explorations in Economic History* 13 (1976), 71.

white labor about seeking employment than I have the means to hire.’⁴⁴ This demonstrates that for WNC’s landowners, labour was not such a definitive issue. Plentiful labour continued throughout Reconstruction and its immediate aftermath. Walter’s son: Thomas J. Lenoir’s tenant leases, in 1879, mirror the antebellum contracts of his father, revealing how little had changed for employers in the region.⁴⁵ WNC’s farmers were never dependent on slave labour, therefore, WNC’s shift from a paternal view of slaves to seeking their marginalisation cannot be explained by an ‘obsession’ with labour.

The main reason for this change in the attitudes of white western North Carolinians was a fear of black social and political supremacy. In 1868, Cornelia noted that her husband, Henry, had attended a mass meeting in Buncombe County. Her concern for a Republican challenge to white supremacy was clear: ‘I fear the Radicals will us on negro equality.’ Two weeks later, in the April elections she expressed her desire for the ‘white man’s party’ (the Democrats) but ‘fears it [would] be voted down by the negroes and their equals.’⁴⁶ Concern that white political control would be replaced by black power is echoed in an 1866 speech printed in the *Henderson Pioneer* by R. P. Dick, a local politician. He expressed concern that the government was neglecting its purpose of profiting the white man and that ‘recent events seem to show that it is tending toward negro-superiority.’⁴⁷ As a Democrat, Dick was almost certainly attempting to repel voters from voting Republican by stirring up fears of black supremacy, explaining why this view was so persistent. Yet, white voters and citizens such as the Henry family were genuinely scared of a black political uprising, suggesting WNC’s residents did not make this distinction.

Indeed, despite being the more liberal of the two candidates, Major Wallace Rollins, a politician running for state senate in 1865, used this fear in his campaign. In an October address tackling ‘the negro question’ to the voters of Transylvania, Henderson, Buncombe, Madison, Yancey, and Mitchell counties, he expressed his intention to preserve the pre-war racial hierarchy: ‘we cannot with any safety to the country enfranchise him [the freedman]’, reiterating ‘it would be dangerous to the white race and the country to elevate the freedman to be his political equal.’

⁴⁴ WL: Lenoir Family Papers, W. Lenoir to Joseph C. Norwood, 4 Aug. 1865.

⁴⁵ Reid, ‘Antebellum Southern Rental Contracts’, 79.

⁴⁶ PML: MS020.001C, Papers, 1837-1911, Henry Diary, 21 Mar., 5 Apr. 1868.

⁴⁷ *Henderson Pioneer*, June 27. 1866, 4.

Indeed, to prevent black supremacy, he promoted his policy of ‘colonizing’ the freedmen.⁴⁸ Fears of black equality were prevalent across the period which is demonstrated by the fact the speech was still being printed to stir up fears of black supremacy in 1900. Such fears explain why pre-war paternalism was eroded by post-war marginalisation and partly explains the emergence of the KKK which will be explored in the next chapter.

The Western North Carolina Rail Road and Convict Labour

The need for improved transport networks meant the Western North Carolina Rail Road Company (WNCRRRC) commenced the construction of its railroad in 1875. It required cheap labour willing to work in severely inhumane conditions. Therefore, slave-like labour was needed to underpin its formation and African American convicts made up the bulk of this workforce. The lives of some western North Carolinian freedmen started to resemble those of many other freedmen in the plantation South, returning to slave-like conditions due to the need for labour. Scholars have generally agreed that convict labour was the backbone of many Southern industrial developments. Mancini notes that there were few actual prisons and predominantly black convict labour was leased out to plantations and industry to improve Southern economic prosperity.⁴⁹ A similar pattern was seen in WNC during the construction of the Western North Carolina Rail Road (WNCRR). The minutes of the WNCRRRC’s annual meeting reveal that by 1879 the company was dependent on convict labour for the railroad’s construction:

This work [laying of track] has been done, with the exception of skilled labor on the bridge, mainly by convict labor, under the supervision of experienced railroad men.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ W. W. Rollins, ‘To the voters of the senatorial district composed of the counties of Transylvania, Henderson, Buncombe, Madison, Yancey and Mitchell’, 23 Oct. 1865, as printed in *Asheville Citizen Times*, 28 June 1900, 4.

⁴⁹ M. J. Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866-1928* (Columbia, 1996), 1-2.

⁵⁰ Western North Carolina Rail Road Company, *Proceedings of the annual meeting of the Western Rail Road Company* (1879), 11. [<https://archive.org/stream/proceedingsofann1879west#page/n1/mode/2up> accessed 14/11/2016]

Once large-scale industrial work commenced, cheap African American work was needed to enable its construction, and those freedmen who worked as convict labourers endured harsh conditions.

Convict labour ran in the same brutal manner as in many other Southern states. Mancini argues that attitudes towards black convict labour were summarised by the beliefs of one railroad superintendent: ‘these convicts, we don’t own ‘em. One dies, get another.’⁵¹ A comparable stance was taken in WNC with the deaths of black convicts swept under the rug. Many decades later, an ex-employee revealed 20 deaths on the day the Swannanoa tunnel was finished.⁵² While this report was over 70 years later and therefore is perhaps speculative, reports by the North Carolina Penitentiary, which leased out its convicts to the WNCRR, uncovers the likelihood that this account is true. The report, which comprises the years 1878-80, reveals that of the 558 convicts who started work on the WNCRR in November 1878, 100 died, 6 were killed, 79 escaped, and numerous others were discharged or pardoned.⁵³ Considerable escape numbers could be an attempt to hide the even higher number of convicts that died. Regardless, the death rate is inhumanely high and there is a clear racial element to it. Of the 942 prisoners received during these years, 87% were black, while of the 357 surviving WNCRR convict workers, 90% were black.⁵⁴ Unless those who died were disproportionately white, which is highly unlikely given the superintendent role of whites in WNC’s society, the WNCRR’s workers were over 90% black.

Of course, not all the black convict labour was taken from WNC, yet in just those two years alone at least 114 convicts were taken from the counties this paper has studied.⁵⁵ It is, therefore, apparent that the development of the WNCRR reduced the quality of lives of African Americans and introduced them to a system which had been prevalent in much of the plantation South since the close of the Civil War. Indeed, these horrific death rates were due to the brutal conditions the convict’s endured. The report conceded that ‘the death rate in the prison has been very large over the past two years’. Most of the deaths had been from those ‘who have taken regular shifts for several years in the Swannanoa and other tunnels of the West N. C. R.

⁵¹ Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another*, 2-3.

⁵² Herbert G. Monroe, “Murphy Branch,” *Railroad Magazine* (June 1949), 42.

⁵³ North Carolina Penitentiary (hereafter NCP), *Biennial report of the Board of Directors, architect and warden, steward and physician: For the two years ending October 31, 1880* (Raleigh, 1893), 29.

[<https://archive.org/stream/biennialreportof1879nort#page/n1/mode/2up> accessed 03/04/2017]

⁵⁴ NCP, *Biennial report*, 5, 29.

⁵⁵ NCP, *Biennial report*, 34.

R., and . . . return[ed] with shattered constitutions, and their physical strength entirely gone'.⁵⁶ The physician's section of the report recorded numerous atrocities including one black convict who returned from the railroad 'physically prostrated, and with his feet gangrenous.'⁵⁷ Such evidence unveils the return to slave-like conditions - or even worse since no one had paid for or owned them - for part of the black community during the industrial development of WNC.

The end to slavery and the commencement of Reconstruction brought about a surprisingly negative impact on WNC's slaves. Slaves moved from being a naïve, almost child-like presence, who were given a relatively relaxed (by the standards of slavery) existence in the mountains, to a threat to white supremacy. Ex-slave's marginalisation was due to the fear of black supremacy and not because they threatened the profitability of the plantations, as historians have often generalised. This section highlights two assumptions that must be questioned in future studies of Reconstruction. Firstly, that it was only where there were high densities of African Americans that whites feared a challenge to white supremacy. Secondly, that the main reason to marginalise black populations was the necessity to return them to slave-like labour to aid the threatened prosperity of the plantations that were dependent on slavery. Although ex-slaves were marginalised in WNC, it was due to a fear of 'negro supremacy'. A desire to acquire a slave-like workforce was not seen until 1875 when the WNCRR required low-wage workers in severely inhumane conditions.

⁵⁶ NCP, *Biennial report*, 8.

⁵⁷ NCP, *Biennial report*, 45.

Chapter 3: Klan Violence

The KKK is subject to an ongoing uncertainty in the historiography of the American South. As Perman has observed, there is still substantial ambiguity surrounding the purpose and origin of the Klan.⁵⁸ One view held by notable historians is that the Klan was used ‘in pursuit of the goals of the planters’, helping preserve the plantation system. By putting pressure on freedmen to work for poor wages and intimidating those who attempted to aid their social standing, the KKK protected the economic necessities for a profitable plantation.⁵⁹ The Klan was a national operation, but violence was normally executed by regional band’s own initiatives. Foner argues that ‘the unity of purpose and common tactics of these local organizations makes it possible to generalize about their goals and impacts’.⁶⁰ The example of WNC is an under-cited yet highly useful case study which reveals the issue of making such generalisations. Although the KKK did share many of the same tactics and impacts of the Klan in the plantation Black Belt, labour was not a significant problem for western North Carolinians, as was shown in Chapter 2. Therefore, despite a shared purpose of preserving white supremacy, to generalise about the KKK’s goals and intentions is misleading.

WNC has been excluded from the Klan’s history due to its perceived exceptionalism. Since black presence was ignored or seen as too small to have a great impact, the Klan has been recognised to operate in a different manner to the plantation Black Belt. For example, Trelease highlights that WNC’s KKK was used to preserve the interests of moonshiners and was not concerned with white supremacy.⁶¹ Bruce attributes the Klan’s exceptional function to its operation in counties where black and white residents were not evenly balanced in numbers.⁶² These two views aptly summarise much of the leading scholarship, revealing the prevailing opinion that white demographic domination of the mountains meant the KKK operated in a

⁵⁸ M. Perman, ‘Counter Reconstruction: The Role of Violence in Southern Redemption’, in *The Facts of Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of John Hope Franklin*, ed. Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss Jr. (Louisiana, 1991), 129.

⁵⁹ J. M. Wiener, *Social Origins of the New South, 1860-1885* (Louisiana, 1978), 61; Foner, *Nothing But Freedom*, 47.

⁶⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 425.

⁶¹ Trelease, *White Terror*, xlviii.

⁶² S. E. Bruce, ‘When Darkness Reigns then is the Hour to Strike: Moonshining, Federal Liquor Taxation, and Klan Violence in Western North Carolina, 1868-1872’, *The North Carolina Historical Review*, vol.80 (2003), 454.

different manner to the rest of the South; predominantly in the form of protecting moonshiners instead of operating along racial lines.

One crucial source to examine these views is a collection of testimonies from a Congressional committee that investigated the KKK in the states previously part of the Confederacy. The *Insurrection Report* (1872) was not included in Waters' *Life Beneath the Veneer*, yet is a vital source for analysing the lives of freedmen in WNC. The North Carolina volume contains numerous accounts referring to its western regions. The report alludes to instances where the KKK acted to safeguard moonshiners. Woodfin referred to an incident he had heard of in Rutherford County. He describes 'the killing of some parties who were supposed to be witnesses against some depredators' in court about 'some liquor stealing.'⁶³ Although Woodfin conveys uncertainty in his testimony due to the hearsay nature of the event, it reveals that stories of the KKK protecting moonshiners were circulating the counties. Woodfin's account is corroborated by other incidents. For example, the case of James McGahey is mentioned multiple times. He was visited by alleged members of the KKK because he 'informed on some of them who were distilling spirits in violation of the revenue laws.' Although the details vary, it appears he was visited by 10 nightriders and was whipped for his actions.⁶⁴ Attacks like these give the historical basis for the judgment that the KKK acted in moonshiners' interests.

Historians who have viewed the KKK as operating purely for the protection of moonshiners have overlooked much of the evidence. The *Insurrection Report* reveals how many leading citizens perceived a racially motivated KKK to be prevalent. James M. Justice, a resident of Rutherford County and a member of the House of Representatives in 1868, disclosed that he had 'heard of quite a number of Ku-Klux outrages this spring in Buncombe County, some in McDowell, and some in Polk County.'⁶⁵ Moreover, he described an attack on himself by men in white masks which was due to his supposed political course, which was 'most infamous and troublesome to them; that [he] supported negro suffrage and negro supremacy.'⁶⁶ Justice's testimony suggests that the KKK worked to suppress African Americans and those who supported their equality due to fears of black supremacy, much like in other Southern states.

Justice was a Republican, and statements from his testimony suggest that he used the KKK as a way of promoting himself during elections. Republicans often used fear of the KKK to

⁶³ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 237.

⁶⁴ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 105.

⁶⁵ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 138.

⁶⁶ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 118.

increase their votes, exaggerating its presence and brutality to convince Democrat voters who were anti-KKK to vote Republican. In the 1870 election, he ‘charged that all Ku-Klux were democrats’ and admitted that he ‘used a great many bitter expressions against them in [his] public speeches, denouncing them for their crimes, and the trouble and ruin they were bringing upon their section of the State’.⁶⁷ By charging that Klan’s members were exclusively Democrat, any violence he reported was a result of their actions, thereby isolating more liberal Democrat voters. This gives him the motive to exaggerate their presence. It can also be speculated that by reporting an attack on himself, he was heightening his profile and fame as someone who defied the KKK. The accounts of Woodfin and other western North Carolinians should be treated with caution due to political incentives.

Indeed, what Justice described as organised KKK activity carried out by the Democrats in WNC could just be unplanned racial attacks with no Ku-Klux affiliation. In moments of heightened tension, political persuasion was sometimes replaced with a violent racial loyalty. In Asheville, one black man was killed and 18 others were wounded after a white man challenged their voting rights. Violence escalated after ‘one colored man voted the democratic ticket, and some of them [white men] threatened to whip, and others to kill him with their pistols.’⁶⁸ Since the African American who triggered the violence voted the Democratic ticket, it is likely that this was not organised Democrat KKK activity. Indeed, Woodfin recalled an attack in Madison County on a black man named Brookes by two men in masks, but displayed uncertainty over the nature of the attack: ‘whether they belonged to the organization, or were only individuals who disguised themselves and did it, I do not know.’⁶⁹ These events suggest that Justice’s account of organised KKK activity by the Democratic party was just a way of increasing his own political profile while hindering the campaign of his Democrat opponents. Others’ accounts also point to spontaneous racial attacks in WNC rather than organised political violence. Judge Henry, who presided over hearings in McDowell and Madison County, recalled three men who were arrested for whipping two black men; one a Republican and one a Democrat.⁷⁰ It is, therefore, necessary to treat accounts of the KKK with caution due to the political incentives to distort truth.

⁶⁷ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 102, 106.

⁶⁸ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 237-9.

⁶⁹ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 242.

⁷⁰ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 237.

These political motives are particularly clear in the local press with Republican papers taking an anti-KKK stance and Democratic papers supporting them. For example, in Asheville, there was a clear division. *The Asheville News and Farmer*, a Democrat newspaper, concluded one of its segments with the statement ‘Three cheers for the Ku Klux Klan’, describing it optimistically as ‘a powerful and lasting instrument of good’ in Buncombe County.⁷¹ It does not refer to any incidents of violence, thereby reducing the need for the Freedmen’s Bureau’s intervention. By contrast, *The Asheville Pioneer*, edited by Republican congressman A. H. Jones, cautioned any violent action taken against WNC’s ex-slaves ‘for exercising the rights of freedmen [to vote]’ warning ‘they will be reported to the [Freedmen’s] Bureau and strictly dealt with.’ Its motive was obvious, it urged anyone who was being intimidated by conservatives to ‘join the Union League, register, and vote Republican.’⁷² *The Asheville Pioneer’s* statements reveal the importance of the Bureau’s presence for preventing intimidation of Republican voters, using it as a deterrent for whippings and threats. Moreover, it shows how Republicans utilised the fear of the KKK to persuade western North Carolinians to vote Republican, presenting itself as a pro-freedom party.

Although Justice may have used the KKK to his political advantage, the content of his account is supported by other testimonies in the *Insurrection Report* which allude to organised Klan activity. Rollins, a renowned anti-Confederate politician, believed KKK organisation was ‘sufficiently numerous to be somewhat dangerous’ in WNC.⁷³ Rollins’ election campaign was built against the dangers of black suffrage, a concern that would have led him to support much of the KKK’s black intimidation. He, therefore, had little incentive to admit the dangers of the Klan unless he was genuinely concerned about its impact. Furthermore, clerk and senator J. B. Eaves who sat in on many cases in Rutherford County, recorded the confession of 50 KKK members within his county, belonging to 7 or 8 different ‘dens’.⁷⁴ David Schenck, a judge who sat on cases in Buncombe, Madison, McDowell and Rutherford Counties confessed in his diary that he was defeated in his nomination for Supreme Court because of ‘charges in regard to my connection with the Ku Klux’, and condemned ‘the ignorant, vicious negro’ for his loss.⁷⁵ These accounts suggest that the KKK was not only present, but it had members who were in important positions in WNC’s political sphere.

⁷¹ *The Asheville News and Farmer*, 4 Dec. 1868, 1.

⁷² *The Asheville Pioneer*, 20 Aug. 1867, 2.

⁷³ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 241.

⁷⁴ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 173.

⁷⁵ WL: Diary of David Schenck, 1 Jan. 1877 to 31 Dec. 1882, 76-7.

The number of powerful politicians and judges belonging to the Klan prevented African Americans from obtaining justice for any indiscretions against them. Moreover, accounts of freedmen receiving threats or physical beatings for testifying against atrocities, such as whippings, were common. Most infamously, Arran Biggerstaff, an active black Republican and partisan in elections, was dragged from his home and brutally beaten and whipped.⁷⁶ He was attacked a second time on the way to Charlotte, one of North Carolina's largest cities, to be a witness before the United States Commissioner against a whipping in Rutherford. A rope was placed around his neck, and he was threatened with death if he proceeded.⁷⁷ The Biggerstaff case is verified by multiple testimonies and it reveals that the KKK operated in a similar way as in the plantation South, opposing black political freedom and intimidating witnesses to racial and political crimes.

The conditions that African Americans suffered were maintained by pressure from the KKK on any white members of society who tried to aid their situations. Vigril Lusk, a solicitor in Buncombe County, was on the receiving end of a Klan attack in 1869. He was involved in a highly controversial incident in Asheville where Randolph Shotwell, editor of a local paper and an alleged KKK leader, was shot by Lusk. He recalls that he was bludgeoned by Shotwell for sending a bill of indictment against the KKK's members for 'Ku-Kluxing some local Negroes', leading him to shoot Lusk in self-defense.⁷⁸ He claimed, in his memoirs, that the Klan was used to intimidate voters and those who might testify against the KKK. He described how law-abiding citizens were visited at the dead of night and 'dragged out of their beds and unmercifully scourged,' forcing people to sleep in the woods such was their terror.⁷⁹ This intimidation had no relation to the economic issues of labour or plantations, but was purely racial, preventing the increase in the socio-political standing of African Americans in the face of concern for white supremacy.

There is reason to doubt Lusk's memoirs as he fully admits there is a motive for his writing. Lusk's autobiography was written 'to contradict any false declaration made about the matter' and effectively clear his name.⁸⁰ Although the purpose is obvious, it is likely his account is

⁷⁶ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 238, 16.

⁷⁷ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 336.

⁷⁸ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 94-5.

⁷⁹ V. Lusk, 'This is a true statement of my controversy with R. A. Shotwell', as quoted by Gordon McKinney, 'The Klan in the Southern Mountains: The Lusk-Shotwell Controversy', *Appalachian Journal*, Vol. 8 (1981), 93.

⁸⁰ Lusk, 'This is a true statement of my controversy with R. A. Shotwell', 101.

correct because there are multiple testimonies against Shotwell in the *Insurrection Report*. Justice believed that Shotwell was the chief KKK member of Rutherford County and ‘regard[ed] him as a man of disreputable character’.⁸¹ J. B. Eaves confirms Shotwell’s position, recalling how the affidavits in a Rutherford KKK trail he oversaw all mentioned Shotwell as the Klan’s ‘chief in the county.’⁸² The confirmation of Lusk’s account reveals the very real threat of standing up for African Americans in WNC.

Indeed, evidence from agents of the Freedmen’s Bureau supports the *Insurrection Report* and shows how the KKK not only operated along racial lines but that they were rarely brought to justice. The Freedmen’s Bureau was established in 1865 by Congress to help former black slaves in the aftermath of the Civil War and sent agents out to report back on the conditions they faced. In 1868, Assistant Commissioner Robert Heiner recorded two separate incidences in Jackson County where freedmen Samuel Hicks and Dick Horew were dragged from their homes with ropes around their necks and whipped. Despite both attacks being carried out ‘by the same parties. . . no steps [were] taken by the authorities to punish the perpetrators.’⁸³ By this time, the KKK was in control of WNC’s justice system and the black population was suffering in a similar manner as other Southern regions.

The case of Henry Matthews further demonstrates the marginalisation and powerlessness of freedmen in WNC because of the KKK. Matthews was a freedman who was accused of stealing a pistol from another African American named James Common. According to Common’s affidavit, members of the community were not satisfied with Matthew’s punishment believing a jail sentence was not enough, with one vowing ‘if the Ku Klux did not take him out of jail that night and kill him he would so.’ Despite being warned by Judge Henry that taking their own action was illegal, Matthew’s was ‘taken from jail that night by a gang of men and driven from town.’⁸⁴ See Appendix D for the full affidavit. The district commissioner George Hawley, in a letter to his colonel, reported that the attackers ‘beat him [Matthews] severely, turned him loose, and drove him from town, throwing rocks and beating him as he ran.’ The court and local authorities had ignored the case. It was only at Hawley’s command that the Sheriff

⁸¹ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 147.

⁸² USC, *Insurrection Report*, 173.

⁸³ North Carolina Freedmen’s Bureau Assistant Commissioner Records, 1862-1870 (hereafter NCFBACR), *FamilySearch*; citing NARA microfilm publication M843, Robert G Heiner, 22 June 1868. [<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:V61R-219> accessed 25/03/2017]

⁸⁴ NCFBACR, *FamilySearch*; citing NARA microfilm publication M843, James Common, 23 June 1868. [<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:V61B-8VX> accessed 25/03/2017]

arrested these men, however, they were released on bail.⁸⁵ The records do not mention any further punishment of the criminals, while Plato Durham, a lawyer from Rutherford, stated ‘that the sheriff of that county had made no effort to arrest those men because he was afraid of them.’⁸⁶ It is, therefore, unlikely that any punishment was implemented against these men.

The sources analysed in this chapter have shown how leading historian’s assumptions about the KKK in the mountains are not based on evidence. Although the KKK did sometimes operate to protect moonshiners, Trelease’s dismissal of WNC’s mountains for his study is erroneous. The KKK operated to protect white supremacy as it did in the plantation economies of the South. However, this was exclusively due to a fear of black political supremacy, with the labour problem being of no concern to the KKK in WNC. This conclusion allows, and indeed necessitates, future studies of the KKK during Reconstruction to use WNC when discussing its motives and actions. Further study of the Southern mountain regions will prevent Reconstruction narratives from being influenced heavily by generalisations about the goals of the KKK; specifically, as Weiner and Foner argue, that they worked to achieve the economic objectives of the planters.

⁸⁵NCFBACR, *FamilySearch*; citing NARA microfilm publication M843, James Common, 05 June 1868. [<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:V61T-JJJ> accessed 25/03/2017]

⁸⁶ USC, *Insurrection Report*, 339.

Conclusion

Studies of African Americans during Reconstruction have taken Southern states collectively, basing their conclusions on areas where ex-slaves were most populous: the plantation Black Belt. Although these works have shed much light on the conditions which freedmen suffered, they have neglected the Southern Appalachian Mountains due to the belief that there were no black people there because the topography suited neither plantations nor industry. The views put forward by the likes of Belcher and Campbell have persisted to the extent that studies such as Waters' *Life Beneath the Veneer* have still not been referenced in the mainstream history. Historians have continued to base their analysis on the Reconstruction narratives of great historians such as Foner. As a result, they have over-emphasised the importance of labour in the marginalisation of African Americans during Reconstruction. Chapter 1 of this study has conclusively proven the existence of WNC's antebellum slavery and its significant post-war black population. Although slavery operated on a smaller scale, with slaves better integrated into family life, it still existed and reveals the necessity for WNC and the Southern Appalachians to be included in mainstream accounts of Reconstruction.

This study has argued that paternal and familial attitudes towards slaves soon dissipated when a concern that African Americans' freedom might challenge white supremacy. Such a conclusion necessitates the reconsideration of two generalisations made commonly by grouping Southern regions together in studies. Firstly, that fear of black supremacy was only present in areas with large black populations; where their numerical advantage made them a threat. WNC reveals that by simply using their freedom, despite their relatively small numbers, African Americans posed a threat to white supremacy which resulted in their maltreatment. Secondly, that emancipated slave's ostracism was not an attempt to suppress their freedom and force them to work on plantations for little or no fee. Since WNC was never dependent on slave labour, nor did it have large plantations, suppression of black rights was not related to the 'obsession' with the labour problem that Foner argues 'defined' Southern society. WNC's challenge to these generalisations shows the importance for future studies to not treat the South as a homogenous unit and instead look for regional variation in the Reconstruction period and its immediate aftermath.

Finally, Chapter 3 demonstrated that WNC was not exceptional in terms of the KKK's undertaking. Historians of the KKK, such as Trelease, have excluded WNC from their analyses

because of the longevity of conclusions made by Campbell and Belcher, arguing that the KKK did not work primarily to protect white supremacy in the mountains. However, evidence overwhelming suggests that the KKK operated to suppress black freedom due to the fears of black supremacy shown in Chapter 2 and 3. This again illustrates the need for WNC to be incorporated into conventional accounts of Reconstruction. Taken together, these arguments exemplify a need to consider regional variation in studies of Reconstruction. Furthermore, they point to a necessity for more studies of Southern Appalachia and other mountain ranges in the South. These areas can contribute to a more accurate understanding of African Americans' lives during Reconstruction and the different regional reasons for their marginalisation.

Appendix

Appendix. A: 1870 populations in WNC's Counties referenced in this study⁸⁷

County	Black Population	White Population	Black Population as % of Total Population
Buncombe	2303	13109	14.9
Burke	2314	7463	23.7
Caldwell	1380	7036	16.4
Haywood	515	7406	6.5
Henderson	1208	6428	15.8
Jackson	274	5698	4.6
Macon	403	6173	7.1
Madison	334	7838	4.1
McDowell	1772	5820	23.3
Polk	978	3341	22.6
Rutherford	2642	10479	20.1
Transylvania	309	3227	9.6
Yancey	363	5601	6.1

Appendix. B: Extract from Freedmen's Bureau agent George Hawley's report to Clinton Cilley⁸⁸

'Col,

I have the honour enclosed herewith to transmit. . . In 2 of the Sub districts, the whites are reported not being willing to deal fairly with the blacks, in the other 2, they are said to be a majority of them willing to deal fairly. I think perhaps, two-thirds of the whites are willing to do well be their former slaves. At least three fourths of the whites are willing to employ the blacks, but not more than two thirds are willing to give them fair prices. The majority of the blacks are willing to work, but at least one fourth of their number live and evidently intend to live by stealing. When I say two thirds of the whites are willing to do well by the blacks, I mean they are willing to do so, under the advice and authority of the Bureau. Hence were the Bureau discontinued the blacks would be no better off than before the war. There are not one hundred men that I know of in this district who would deal out what I call justice to the blacks, unless for the Bureau. The convictions that Blacks have fewer rights that a white man is bound to respect, have not yet been eradicated from the minds of the population, and if not for the

⁸⁷ United States Census 1870.

⁸⁸ *North Carolina Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1863-1872, 1862-1872*, Family Search, citing NARA microfilm publication M1909, C.A. Cilley, 30 Dec. 1868.

presence of the authorities here, these feelings would assent their old way and the blacks suffer accordingly.’

Appendix. C: Extract from Cornelia Henry’s letter to William Henry⁸⁹

‘At home May 27th 1865

My own dear husband,

You have no idea how glad we were to hear from you. . . These nigs are all working for themselves. Sam still here and family. Charlie has come back and working with Sam. Jennie has gone to Jim Henry’s farm, they have nearly twenty negroes there. Mollie has gone to town three weeks ago. Old Andy would not take Fannie unless I gave her a cow and some stock generally. I told him I would not do it, he threatened to report me to the Yankees, but he soon found out the nigs were not such pets with them, so Fannie is still here. George is at the mill still but I am going to rent it till you can come home as it does not keep us in some head, we got no flour at all only some wheat I borrow off Mr B. B. Jones, he has been very kind to me and all the other good rebel neighbours. The Yankees have treated Mr B. L. Jones, Capt. Moore & B. B. Jones badly, taking some bacon, hay, horses and mules. Jones’ negro Richard went with them. Old Andy has gone to Tennessee now and I hope he may never come back again. You have no idea how big the nigs feel. Ole Sam and Lena there is no difference in, but take care for the others. Even Rose feels her freedom. I wish they had went with the Yankees.’

Appendix. D: Affidavit of James Common 23rd June 1868⁹⁰

‘Personally appearing before me E.J. Stillwell an acting justice of the peace. James Common freedman and make oath in due form of law that he was at the trial of Henry Matthews in Hubert on the 28 April 1868 for stealing a pistol that he was convicted and committed. William L. Love solicitor of Jackson County told him that there was no law in the County and advised him to get whips and give Matthews a good whipping and drive him from town. That by so driving him the of keeping him in jail would be saved. That R. M. Henry told him that was not law to take that course. That Love then told W. N. Norwood of Haywood County that he must take Matthews to jail. That Norwood replied that if the Ku Klux did not take him out of jail

⁸⁹ PML: MS020.001I, Henry Letters 5/1865, C. Henry to W. Henry, 27 May. 1865.

⁹⁰ *NC Freedmen's Bureau Assistant Commissioner Records*, Family Search, James Common, 23 Jun 1868; citing NARA microfilm publication M843.

that night and kill him he would so. That Matthews was taken from jail that night by a gang of men and driven from town. That he believes it was done in accordance with the advice of said W. L. Love solicitor. [He was] unable to state whether Matthews was killed or not.

Sworn to and subscribed before me the 23rd day of June 1868

E. P. Stillwell'

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