

THE QUESTION OF BLACK LABOR AND  
PLANTER IMMIGRATION IDEOLOGY:

A look at support for Chinese and Italian immigration  
into the South, 1865-1910

by Michael J. Milligan\*

SETTING THE SCENE

W. J. Cash's image of the "solid South" has held strong in the popular mind. Cultural conformity, white homogeneity, "provincialism," "clannishness and narrow social outlook" have generally been associated with the South and Southern mores.<sup>1</sup> The institution of slavery was a major force in defining Southern parochialism. A white "herrenvolk democracy" was achieved on the backs of an enslaved black laboring class — the social chasm between black slavery and white freedom pulled whites together in action, opportunity, and attitude. The slavery question served to unite white Southerners in defense of their "Southern" way of life and against outsiders and outside interference. Slavery in the South, furthermore, greatly discouraged immigrant white labor from settling in the region. The presence of slave labor made free labor unsavory, expensive, and unwanted in the South.

Meagre immigration figures after the Civil War suggest that the Southern desire "to keep the Southern white stock pure" did not

1. Rowland Berthoff, "Southern Attitudes towards Immigration, 1865-1914," *Journal of Southern History*, v. 17, 1951, p. 343.

*\*Michael J. Milligan received his B.A. from the University of Toronto in 1982. He is presently working towards his Masters Degree in History at the University of Virginia.*

diminish with the emancipation of the slaves and the emergence of industrial capitalism.<sup>2</sup> The proportion of foreigners in the South actually declined from 1865 to 1910, from approximately five percent of the total population to two percent. Of more than 13,500,000 persons of foreign birth in the United States in 1910, less than 500,000 were in the South (the eleven former Confederate states and Kentucky).<sup>3</sup> In general, early twentieth-century observers of the South explained the lack of white immigration in two straightforward ways: "the first is that the South does not like" and does not want immigrants and "the second is that the immigrants do not like the South."<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, early observers contended that failed immigration necessarily indicated a lack of will on the part of Southerners for immigrant labor. Writing in 1905, Walter Fleming concluded that "until the early 80's the southern people desired no immigration either from the North or from foreign countries." The planter class and industrialists, Fleming maintained, "preferred negro labor to white." Moreover, they preferred "to hold fast to the old Southern philosophy of living, which would have been disturbed by the advent of numbers of foreigners, strangers to the traditions and customs of the South."<sup>5</sup> Four years later, Caroline MacGill argued that white pride in "their homogeneous population" and confidence in the capabilities of black labor combined to create popular opposition to immigration in the South during the second half of the nineteenth century. She wrote that "up to nearly the close of the last century, the South was content with its own labor supply, and did not want immigration, and the possible immigrants could not or would not compete under the industrial conditions shaped for the negro."<sup>6</sup>

While it is true that immigrant labor was not often enamored with social and economic conditions in the post-war South, it is certainly untrue to suggest that Southerners did not desire immigration. The

2. Walter Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States," *Political Science Quarterly*, v. 20, 1905, p. 276.

3. Berthoff, p. 342.

4. Albert Hart, *The Southern South*, (New York, 1910), p. 54.

5. Fleming, p. 276.

6. Caroline MacGill, "Immigration into the Southern States," *The South in the Building of the Nation*, edited by Walter Fleming, (Richmond, 1909), Volume 6, pp. 584-87.

social and cultural goal of white homogeneity and white supremacy was complicated by economic and political conditions in the South following defeat. The immigration of labor was actually one of several popular schemes advocated by Southerners to restore "prosperity" and "greatness" in the region.<sup>7</sup> In fact, many of the commercial, manufacturing, and agricultural interests of the region perceived immigration as "the great panacea" for the South.<sup>8</sup> Historian R. H. Woody writes that "excluding accounts of the political, financial, and perhaps agricultural condition of the state, one finds more editorials, letters and news items on immigration than on any other single subject discussed in the public press."<sup>9</sup> As the *Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review* declared in 1869, "the great popular mind has fastened upon immigration as the foremost measure of the day."<sup>10</sup>

Southern support for immigration could be seen in state laws, official reports, railroad advertisements, the resolutions of agricultural societies and planters' associations, commercial and agricultural journals, and in the formation of immigration companies and "land agencies." Soon after the war, virtually all of the Southern states moved to encourage immigration through public action and support. From 1865 to 1876, the state of Virginia, for example, passed twelve laws to aid in bringing immigrant labor into the state, including the incorporation of over a half dozen private immigration companies.<sup>11</sup> Committed to laissez faire and retrenchment, the Virginia state administration of James Kemper nevertheless considered immigration to the state important enough to allocate \$10,000 for use by the decade-old state immigration board in

7. "Immigration into Tennessee," *DeBow's Review*, v. 4, November 1867, p. 423.

8. R.H. Woody, "The Labor and Immigration Problem of South Carolina," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, v. 18, September 1931, p. 195; Jack Maddex, *The Virginia Conservatives*, (Chapel Hill, 1970), p. 178.

9. Woody, p. 195.

10. W.L. Trenholm, "The South," *Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review*, July 1869, p. 11.

11. Bert Loewenberg, "Efforts of the South to Encourage Immigration, 1865-1900," *Southern Atlantic Quarterly*, v. 33, 1934, pp. 370-71; see also Henry Booker, "Efforts of the South to Attract Immigrants, 1865-1900," (Ph.D. dissertation, the University of Virginia), 1965.

1876.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the frequent and consistently favorable treatment of the immigration issue in *DeBow's Review* and later the *Manufacturers' Record* helped coalesce an influential portion of popular opinion behind the push for immigration.

It was among the leading members of the Southern community that immigration was supported most vigorously. The Southern prejudice against outsiders that Fleming and MacGill referred to was a profound reality and, along with lagging economic opportunities and wages in relation to the North, influenced immigrant labor to stay away. Yet while the Southern "coolness and suspicion upon newcomers" was felt by many "native residents,"<sup>13</sup> powerful economic actors sought to overcome regional xenophobia in the belief that immigration could help form a Southern economy that they could command. Indeed, it was the people who thought most about what the post-war South would and should be like, those in a position to influence the determination of that society and economy, who were most likely to consider immigration as a beneficial regional measure. "On this question of immigration," Albert Hart observed in 1910, "there is a divergence between the responsible and the irresponsible Whites, or rather between the large property owners and the people who look to the development of the whole section, and the small farmers and white laborers."<sup>14</sup>

"Responsible" planters, industrialists, and editors of progressive Southern periodicals supported immigration for different reasons. Industrialists and editors viewed immigration as part of a general plan of reform and modernization of the Southern economy — simply stated, as a manifestation of the New South Creed. The influx of immigrant labor was not so much a specific economic aim as an assumed feature of a competitive, developed economy. In *DeBow's Review*, for example, the immigrant was usually portrayed as a resourceful German farmer who, by the profitable cultivation of his own plot of land, breaks up staple crop plantation agriculture and

12. Maddex, p. 180.

13. General John Wagener, "European Immigration," *DeBow's Review*, v. 4 July-August 1867, p. 98.

14. Hart, p. 55.

establishes efficient, diversified small-scale farming in the South.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the local industrial development and economic self-sufficiency that advocates of the New South Creed like Daniel Tompkins and others envisioned required a large pool of skilled labor that immigration could help ensure.<sup>16</sup> For both the industrialist and the editor, therefore, the immigrant was to be employed as a small farmer or an industrial worker in a future, superior economic superstructure.

Both Broadus Mitchell and Paul Gaston note that the industrialist's cry for immigrant labor was largely bogus, both because of successful efforts to solicit local white labor for cotton mills among pockets of rural white underemployment and the weak overall demand for industrial labor during the New South period.<sup>17</sup> Tompkins boasted that the South had enough white people "to fill factories that would drive England and Germany out of world markets." Mitchell adds that those cotton industrialists who supported immigration into the South in the later decades of the nineteenth century did so mainly because of a recognition of the labor needs of the planter, rather than labor shortages of their own. He writes that "cotton manufactures fell in easily with the...plans of agricultural interests to secure immigration to the South."<sup>18</sup>

The need that the planter felt for immigrant labor following the war was much more intense, immediate, and real than that experienced or envisioned by either the industrialist or the editor. The planter did not attempt to create a new economic order or articulate the characteristics of a capitalist economy, but simply sought laborers to work his land under the established plantation system. It was on the plantation where the shortage of labor was most severely felt. While the planter depended upon the labor of the freedmen, freedmen appeared most reluctant after the war to offer their labor. Furthermore, unlike the owners of manufacturing

15. see General Wagener, "European Immigration," *DeBow's Review*, v. 4, July-August 1867, p. 94.

16. Paul Gaston, *The New South Creed*, (Baton Rouge, 1970), p. 75.

17. Gaston, p. 77; Broadus Mitchell, *The Rise of the Cotton Mills in the South*, (Baltimore, 1921), see chapter 3 entitled, "The Labor Factor."

18. Mitchell, pp. 183, 260.

enterprises, planters felt that they could not count on native whites to help meet the demand for labor on the plantation.

Indeed, while the New South industrialists and editors talked about, and speculated on, the virtues of immigrant labor, planters actively sought to bring immigrants to the South. It was usually the planter who sponsored and organized land agencies, who advertised particular job offers for immigrant labor, and who picked up the labor contracts of incoming Europeans and Chinese. A letter in *DeBow's Review* in 1867 from C.C. Giers, vice-president of the German Immigrant Society in Nashville, Tennessee, pointed out that it was "none of our rich men and capitalists," but "land-holders" who contributed to the society's efforts to attract German immigrants.<sup>19</sup>

If planters most genuinely carried out the immigration movement (at least in the initial post-war years), the labor shortage on the plantation was what the movement sought to redress. As Roger Shugg clearly states in *The Origin of Class Struggle in Louisiana*, "the most pressing problem" facing the South after the war "was who would work the land, not who would rule it."<sup>20</sup> Contemporary observers and periodicals talked incessantly about blacks "quitting" the land and leaving plantations desperately short of labor. In 1867, General John Wagener, commissioner of immigration for the state of South Carolina, claimed that the rural black laboring population in the state had fallen from 240,000 to 100,000 since 1860.<sup>21</sup> In September 1869, the *Merchants' Magazine* observed that the shortage of "field hands" to work the cotton fields "is a serious condition of affairs."<sup>22</sup> In the same year, *Overland Monthly*, a western periodical, estimated that the Negro labor force on the plantation was one third of what it was when the war began.<sup>23</sup>

19. Letter to *DeBow's Review* from a New Orleans planter, p. 469, letter to *DeBow's Review* from C.C. Giers, p. 479, v. 4, November 1867; James Roark, *Masters Without Slaves*, (New York, 1977), p. 166.

20. Lucy Cohen, "Entry of Chinese to the Lower South from 1865 to 1870: Policy Dilemmas," *Southern Studies*, Spring 1978, p. 6.

21. Wagener, *DeBow's Review*, v. 4, July-August 1867, p. 94.

22. "Labor in the South," *Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review*, p. 271, September 1869.

23. Charles Brooks, "The Chinese Labor Problem," *Overland Monthly*, November 1869, p. 407.

At the root of this labor shortage was changing economic relationships on the plantation. Emancipation brought to the freedman a degree of economic choice that he had never experienced as a slave. While the economic options of the freedman were very limited, one option that he and his family invariably took was to reduce the amount of labor offered to the planter.<sup>24</sup> This withdrawal of labor took many forms: a migration of the freedman's family to an urban center or the Southwest, movement of the family from one plantation to another (often simply to exercise that prerogative), a withdrawal of black women and children from field work, or a simple reduction in hours worked per day.<sup>25</sup> It was precisely this withdrawal of field labor that highlighted the declining economic command of the planter over black labor. Without the apparatus and sanction of legal slavery, the planter simply could not make blacks work as hard or as much as he had hoped. According to the perspective of the planter, his status appeared to be changing most dramatically with emancipation. "It was the Master-Employer," MacGill wrote, who "found himself face to face with the problem of maintaining his economic life, and with no power of controlling the conditions upon which the economic structure was based."<sup>26</sup>

As Jonathan Weiner, and Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch convincingly argue, however, the planter certainly did have a good deal of power in controlling the economic conditions around him. Planters' combinations, the legal system, racial prejudice, and the tenancy system were all used to some degree "to keep black laborers in the country" and working the land.<sup>27</sup> Yet while the planter tried

24. Jonathan Weiner, *Social Origins of the New South*, (Baton Rouge, 1978), pp. 39-73; Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind Of Freedom*, (New York, 1977), see chapters 1 and 4.

25. A particularly informative contemporary account of the Negro labor shortage and the reasons behind it is the editorial entitled, "In Lieu of Labor," *DeBow's Review*, v. 4, p. 69, July-August 1867; also see Roark, p. 166; Ransom and Sutch, chapters 1 and 4; and Weiner, pp. 43-47.

26. MacGill, p. 585.

27. Weiner, p. 42; Ransom and Sutch, chapter 4.

a variety of methods to get the Negro to work to his liking, the planter was never quite successful or satisfied. It is in the light of a planter class trying to re-establish the labor conditions of the antebellum period that the initial push for immigration should be considered.

The planter's assessment of freedmen labor, moreover, influenced his approach to immigration. Planters were undoubtedly aware that for the meantime, at least, freedmen labor was the only labor that they could procure for the plantation. Because native white labor refused to engage in "nigger work" on the plantation, foreign white laborers were not expected to do so either. Thus, planters were usually careful not to dismiss offhand the quality and suitability of Negro labor as state immigration officials tended to do.<sup>28</sup> As James Roark explains in *Masters Without Slaves*, planters were as much or more concerned with the quantity of freedmen labor as with its quality. A great many planters believed in the particular fitness of the Negro for plantation work and concentrated on gaining a full black labor force. Those planters who supported immigration did not necessarily feel that black labor was undesirable, only that there was not enough labor to go around. Roark adds that "planters who had black laborers did not like them, and those who did not have them wished they did."<sup>29</sup> In sum, the planter was very ambivalent towards freedmen labor largely because of the tight labor market offered to him. Immigration support, therefore, emerged among planters who were dependent on black labor that was increasingly autonomous and unavailable.

While planters wanted a labor force that they could control and that would be adequate, what determined the kind of immigration that they supported? Although it seems reasonable to assume that planters desired cheap labor with the intention of exploiting as much as they could of the laborer's product, did they want quality, efficient labor or a docile, manageable quantity of labor? What would be the immigrant's role in Southern society and his

28. General Wagener, "Department of Immigration and Labor — South Carolina," *DeBow's Review*, v. 4, p. 357, October 1867.

29. Roark, p. 165.



relationship with freedmen labor? The immigration question was shaped primarily by the planters' perceptions of economic and social realities in the South. He pushed for immigration that he thought was possible and faithful to serving his self-interest. Economic and social perceptions and realities, in turn, influenced the planters' assessment of the freedman and the utility of his labor. An examination of the push for Chinese immigration into the South in the late 1860's and early 1870's and then a glimpse at the widespread lauding of Italian agricultural labor around the turn of the twentieth century will reveal the planter immigration ideology and methodology in action and with the passage of time.

### THE PUSH FOR CHINESE IMMIGRANT LABOR

The push for Chinese immigration into the South occurred in the background of a desperate planter demand for labor; a demand so severe that freedmen exercised some degree of economic leverage on the planter. The refusal of freedmen to work on gangs for wages in the late 1860's was one manifestation of this labor-scarce situation.<sup>30</sup> As freedmen withdrew some of their labor with the advent of emancipation, planters found themselves in an untenable position — as the supply of agricultural labor fell, planters became increasingly dependent on freedmen who were less willing to work. No matter how unbearable it seemed to them, planters were, in a fundamental sense, “at the mercy of the negro for labor.”<sup>31</sup> Throughout the Lower South, one Mississippian noted, planters were “just crazy about the niggers — crazy to get hold of ‘em.”<sup>32</sup> A western Mississippi planter expressed the planters' anguish over freedmen labor,

The cry on all sides is for laborers, and the negro finding himself master of the situation instead of availing himself of the high

30. Ransom and Sutch, chapter 4.

31. Robert Futrell, “Efforts of Mississippians to Encourage Immigration, 1865-1880,” *Journal of Mississippi History*, v. 20, 1958, p. 68.

32. J.T. Trowbridge, *The South: Its Battlefields...*, (Hartford, 1866), p. 365.

rates and advantages offered prefers to make use of his power to reduce his labor rather than increase his compensation.<sup>33</sup>

In respect to the shortage of labor and the Negro's adjustment to freedom, "the negro was often quite conscious of the value of his labor to the white man and therefore [was] difficult to control."<sup>34</sup>

Planters were hardly in a position to do anything about the quality of Negro labor until the quantity of agricultural labor had greatly increased. Although planters and other advocates of immigration often complained about the various flaws of Negro labor, they were, nevertheless, mindful to encourage freedmen to stay on as field laborers. That the Negro was intended and suited because of his race to toil as a farm hand was almost universally acknowledged.<sup>35</sup> J.B. Killebrew's support of immigration in the late 1860's was rather typical among non-planters. Writing in *DeBow's Review*, Killebrew argued that European immigrant land-holding would initiate a proliferation of small yeomen farming throughout the South. While advocating small land-holding, Killebrew added that planters should continue to have the "kind of labor" they desired. Significantly, he noted that, "with some drawbacks," the Negro "is a very efficient laborer."<sup>36</sup> General Wagener, who was also a supporter of "a system of small farms" effected through immigration, insisted that the freedman was "an excellent plantation hand" who would and should remain with the planter with the influx of white immigrant labor.<sup>37</sup>

Virginian Edward Pollard's article in *Old and New* magazine in March 1872 was extraordinary for the degree to which the author went to cajole the Negro into remaining in the South as an agricultural laborer. While proposing the immigration of Northern

33. Loewenberg, p. 366.

34. Woody, p. 199.

35. see "Negro Agrarianism," *DeBow's Review*, v. 5, February 1868, p. 134-38.

36. "Immigration into Tennessee," *DeBow's Review*, v. 4, November 1867, p. 423.

37. Wagener, "European Immigration," *DeBow's Review*, v. 4, July-August 1867, p. 94.

Europeans "to buy and operate a small piece of land" in the South, Pollard assured his readers that "the negro is sufficient for the present labor demands of the South more sufficient than he ever was in slavery." Pollard's contention that white European immigrants were not actually laborers at all, but rather small capitalists bringing capital and entrepreneurial skills into the South, was common in the pro-immigration argument. Moreover, Pollard clearly voiced the sentiments of most planters who realized that the most practical solution to rural labor shortages in the South lay with the freedmen. Pollard's fear of the South losing freedmen labor indicated further the dependence and desperation felt by planters. He wrote that, "so important does the writer consider the negro labor of the South, that as the preface to all material prosperity there, he would have special exertions made to conserve it, and secure it for all time."<sup>38</sup>

Determined to keep Negro agricultural labor in the South, immigration advocates often spoke of the white landowner's responsibility to serve his black laborers.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, immigration supporters tended to place the onus on the planter class to solve the labor problem and entice the freedman to stay on the farm. After all, the planters of Summerville, Alabama, concluded in 1868, "the interests of the whites and blacks are identical" on the plantation.<sup>40</sup> In 1871, N.A. Gregory, a Virginia hillcountry farmer, declared at a local agricultural club meeting that it is as much "a duty" of the landowner "to look to the condition of our laborers as it is to the farm itself." Gregory added that he considered himself "a special benefactor of the negro" who "sought honestly to better his condition." Agricultural improvements initiated on his farm were not strictly "money-making" measures, but "a means of procuring" and

38. Edward Pollard, "New Virginia," *Old and New*, v. 5, March 1872, pp. 286-88; also see "Memorial of the Virginia State Agricultural Society on Immigration, Presented to the General Assembly of Virginia," January 10, 1872, pp. 3, 15.

39. Trenholm, "The South," July 1869, p. 11, and "Labor in the South," October 1869, p. 274, *Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review*; see also "Discussion of the Labor Question," *The Southern Planter and Farmer*, November 1871, pp. 656-660.

40. *DeBow's Review*, v. 5, February 1868, p. 212.

improving black labor. An interesting contrast to Gregory's fatuously noble paternalism was the reply of "Mister Horner." Horner suggested that "we must get labor that will work without all this persuasion and attention."<sup>41</sup>

According to many immigration supporters, recently sluggish Negro labor did not reflect innate deficiencies, but was "the legitimate result of his former condition" and indicated a failure on the part of the planter to "instruct and counsel" Negro laborers.<sup>42</sup> In numerous articles on the Southern labor condition, *DeBow's Review* chose not to blame the Negro himself for the unreliability of his labor in the post-war period. "Radical influences," archaic agricultural practices, and the "fearful effects" of sudden liberty were J.D.B. DeBow's major reasons for undisciplined freedmen labor.<sup>43</sup> In 1869, the *Merchants' Magazine* called for landowners to treat the labor of the freedmen practically:

Whether the blacks become more and more valuable each year, or whether they deteriorate in a proportionate ratio, depends mainly on whether the landed proprietors of the South are willing to accept and master the situation as they find it.<sup>44</sup>

Planter mastery over the labor situation implied that they still had the ability and the "right to appropriate" Negro labor.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the practical considerations of an enormous deficit of labor and an indigenous, be it not so reliable, black labor force motivated planters to endeavor to woo the freedmen back to the land.

The campaign for Chinese immigrant labor illustrated the

41. "Discussion of the Labor Question," *The Southern Planter and Farmer*, November 1871, pp. 658-659.

42. "Labor in the South," *Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review*, October 1869, p. 274.

43. see, for example, *DeBow's Review*, v. 4, July-August 1867, p. 69 and October 1867, p. 364.

44. "Labor in the South," *Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review*, October 1869, p. 274.

45. Trowbridge, p. 229.

planters' simple and heartfelt need for agricultural laborers. Significantly, active support for the movement was confined to planters and entrepreneurs in the Mississippi Delta region, where the plantation system had been widespread in the antebellum period and the Negro flight after the war was most pronounced. In the mid and late 1850's, two influential Southern editors, Daniel Lee of the *Southern Cultivator* and DeBow of *DeBow's Review*, discussed the merits of planters using Chinese "coolie" labor. Both concluded that although the South needed field hands (mainly because of the high price of slaves), the Chinese were not the answer to the region's problem. Lee and DeBow desired the importation of African "laborers" more than the Chinese because the former would not exacerbate racial tensions the way the latter would.<sup>46</sup> Social stability and order in the South, therefore, were considered to be of greater importance than increased economic prosperity and growth. DeBow, furthermore, condemned the inhumanity and immorality of the coolie trade and took delight in exposing the apparent hypocrisy in the anti-slavery but pro-coolie policy of the British government.<sup>47</sup>

With a profound deterioration in an already bad labor situation in the South with defeat and emancipation, however, attitudes toward Chinese labor changed considerably. Condemnations of "coolie" labor were now confined to the actual transportation of coolies to their laboring destination; the fundamentally inhumane practice of bonded, "coolie" labor itself was generally free from criticism.<sup>48</sup> Analysts of the Chinese immigrant labor question spoke of a compelling sense of economic determinism in the Chinese coming to America. The influx of Chinese is inevitable, *Overland Monthly* commented in 1869, "let us control what we cannot prevent."<sup>49</sup>

46. Daniel Lee, "The Future of Cotton Culture in the South," *The Southern Cultivator*, v. 16, March 1858, p. 91; J.D.B. DeBow, "The Coolie Trade," *DeBow's Review*, v. 27, September 1859, p. 317.

47. *DeBow's Review*, v. 27, September 1859, pp. 304-17; Cohen, pp. 8-9.

48. "Proposed Importation of Coolies into the United States," *The Commercial and Financial Chronicle*, October 6, 1866, pp. 418-19; also see Brooks, "The Chinese Labor Problem," *Overland Monthly*, November 1869, pp. 410-17.

49: Brooks, *Overland Monthly*, November 1869, p. 412.

Not only do our economic laws demand that free labor find its highest bidder, but it appears that "the intention of the Power [God?]" has willed for the Chinese to enter the United States as laborers.<sup>50</sup> A.P. Merrill observed that "the laborers of all countries are slaves to those who enjoy the fruits of labor," and that the proposed use of "China labor" would not and should not be any different.<sup>51</sup> The burden of "racial mixing" was apparently going to be assumed by Southerners in the mad post-war scramble for rural labor. Even DeBow admitted in 1866 that there were real "advantages" to the use of Asiatic coolie labor in labor-troubled economies like that of British Guiana and Trinidad, although he held adamantly to his belief that the Chinese would hinder rather than help Southern agriculture and economic development.<sup>52</sup>

In supporting Cuban efforts to import Chinese coolie laborers from the West Indies into the Lower South, Mississippi Delta planters sought to recover the "lost ground" that emancipation brought.<sup>53</sup> Undoubtedly, in the minds of the planters, what was lost was Negro labor and bodies to work the plantations. Although only about 1200 Chinese laborers entered the Delta region by the mid-1870's, planters and other advocates of Chinese immigration had hoped that the Chinese would provide the vast quantity of labor that landowners and capitalists thrived on. Supporters of Chinese immigration seemed convinced somehow that behind the first trickle of Chinese immigrants lay an unlimited supply of laborers in Asia waiting anxiously for the chance to enrich America.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, Chinese labor was particularly plentiful and useful because it was cheap. In 1869, the *Merchants' Magazine* stated that, more so than anything else, the South and the nation needs cheap labor, "labor in the lowest grade" and in the greatest abundance, to develop its resources

50. Frank Norton, "Our Labor System and the Chinese," *Scribner's Monthly*, v. 2, May 1871, p. 62.

51. A.P. Merrill, "Southern Labor," *DeBow's Review*, v. 6, July 1869, pp. 591-92.

52. *DeBow's Review*, v. 2, August 1866, p. 216.

53. James Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), p. 22.

54. see Brooks, *Overland Monthly*, November 1869, p. 409.

and work the land.<sup>55</sup> While many planters felt that the introduction of Chinese laborers would have a good influence on the quality of Negro labor, the primary virtue that planters saw in the Chinese lay in mitigating the labor quantity problem.

Advocates argued that the nature of the Chinese worker made him ideally suited to fill a good portion of the South's rural labor demands. While "intelligent," "skillful," "industrious," and teachable," the Chinese worker, nevertheless, sought only to be employed in agricultural labor.<sup>56</sup> He had no intention of owning land or of working for himself.<sup>57</sup> As a "cotton-picker" and a plantation hand, the Chinese did fine work and was well-suited for the tasks.<sup>58</sup> Most important, the Chinese was "very tractable" and content with his meagre economic lot in America. The Chinese people were naturally servile and had proved to be "faithful to a remarkable degree to those for whom they labor."<sup>59</sup> According to those who defended Chinese immigration in several prominent periodicals in the late 1860's and the early 1870's, therefore, the Chinese offered the kind of reliable, docile, menial labor that planters needed desperately.

Because of the absolute shortage of labor working the land in the South, Chinese immigrant labor was intended as an addition to the freedmen force, not a replacement. Immigration supporters maintained that a chronic scarcity in the South of two of the factors of production, labor and capital, explained the region's economic woes. An influx of labor, by increasing the productive capacity of the region, would actually benefit native labor because of the economic expansion that it would effect. Indeed, the presence of the Chinese laborer, *Overland Monthly* predicted, would "supplement"

55. "The Chinese Again," *Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review*, September 1869, p. 216.

56. Brooks, p. 415.

57. Merrill, *DeBow's Review*, v. 6, July 1869, p. 589.

58. Brooks, p. 415; New York *Evening Gazette* quoted in *DeBow's Review*, v. 4, October 1867, p. 362.

59. Norton, *Scribner's Monthly*, v. 2, May 1871, p. 69.

rather than "supplant" American laborers.<sup>60</sup> Like American Negroes, the Chinese were to be the lowest menial laboring class in American society. By engaging in the most degrading and burdensome physical labor in the economy, Chinese labor would liberate and "elevate all of our present white laboring classes" just as black slaves had done in the antebellum South.<sup>61</sup> Further, planters hoped that the Chinese laborer would toil in the South as the slave had done with a minimum of social rights and no political rights to protect him.<sup>62</sup>

While the general consensus in America at that time was that the Chinese were an alien, inferior race from a backward, heathen culture,<sup>63</sup> it is telling that the planter willingly allowed the Chinese in his white homogeneous society. That the planter was prepared to add the yellow race to the black and white indicated both the extraordinary need for rural labor in the South and the planter's faith in racism and racist practices to clearly delineate economic, social, and political roles in a racially stratified South. The planters hoped, for example, that the "apolitical" nature of the Chinese displayed in California would, in turn, rub off on the increasingly politically-minded black in the South.<sup>64</sup> That racist and paternalistic ideologies and tactics were used to justify and effect exploitation was seen in the "Christian" influence that planters were said to provide for Chinese laborers. A convention of manufacturers and planters devoted to the Chinese immigration question held in Memphis, Tennessee, in July 1869, described the Southern "Christianizing" mission:

whilst we avail ourselves of the physical assistance these pagans are capable of affording us, endeavor at the same time to bring to

60. Brooks, p. 408; editorial entitled, "Immigration," *Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review*, July 1869, p. 40.

61. Brooks, p. 402.

62. Loewen, p. 23.

63. Stuart Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882*, (Berkeley, 1969), p. 152.

64. Norton, *Scribner's Monthly*, May 1871, p. 70; Loewen, p. 23.



bear upon them the elevating and saving influence of our holy religion, so that when those coming among us shall return to their own country, they may carry back with them, and disseminate the good seed.<sup>65</sup>

Southerners chose to cover the predominantly economic motives behind Chinese immigration in the garb of beneficence.

A begrudging toleration by the planters of the "alien" Chinese for economic reasons also revealed a necessarily open-minded approach to the possibilities of Negro labor. The planter tried to accommodate for, and make use of, black and Chinese labor because he felt he had no other choice. Efforts by planters in Mississippi and South Carolina to bring about the migration of Negroes into their states hardly indicated planter rejection of Negro labor. In Mississippi alone from 1877 to 1881, eleven thousand Negro laborers entered the state from the South Atlantic states through the initiative of planters. If many of the state's whites opposed the immigration of Negroes into Mississippi on political grounds, planters apparently laid aside the goal of political white supremacy for selfish economic considerations. In 1875, the angry editor of the *Forest* (Mississippi) *Register* wrote that, "every negro who comes into the state of Mississippi is a curse, every one that leaves a blessing," but "men's cupidity, not their judgement, prompts them to call for negro immigration."<sup>66</sup> Similarly, in an address printed in *DeBow's Review* in 1867, J.B. Killebrew warned of the dire social and political consequences when Tennessee landowners encouraged "an influx of black population from every point of the compass."<sup>67</sup>

With the defeat of the Confederacy came a fundamental change in the nature of agricultural labor in the South. The manageable, available labor force that the planter's economic and social position depended upon was slipping out of his grasp. Ironically, while the increasing autonomy exercised by the freedman was a major cause

65. Miller, p. 173.

66. Futrell, p. 75.

67. "Immigration into Tennessee," *DeBow's Review*, v. 4, November 1867, p.

for planter desperation, the planter reluctantly realized that the freedman was also his most practical hope for restoring planter-dominant plantation agriculture. Ambivalence, therefore, characterized the planter's attitude toward the freedman — he did not want him in his white society and he did not particularly like his free labor, yet practical economic considerations compelled him to seek freedmen labor. Caught in a transition of agricultural systems with little indication as to how agriculture would be carried out in the future, planters appealed to the Negro to return to the good old days.

Indeed, there was a perverse kind of optimism, an optimism of necessity, in the immediate post-war approach of the planter to the rural Negro laborer. As the *Merchants' Magazine* suggested in 1869, landowners and field laborers had to work hard together "in harmony" in order to reach the goals of agricultural prosperity and continued planter control.<sup>68</sup> The planter would succeed only with, and because of, the uplifting and laboring advances of the freedmen population.<sup>69</sup> Planters, thus, because of their close economic links with the black laborer, envisioned freedmen achievement as a necessary pre-condition for the projected achievements of their own class.

The push for Chinese immigration occurred in this time of "darkness" for the planter.<sup>70</sup> The planter saw in the Chinese a docile, reliable agricultural worker and, moreover, an eventual source of endless quantities of labor. The Chinese was not intended to displace the freedman from the land, but rather his presence, planters hoped, would encourage the Negro to return to the land and the palm of the planter. The positive effect that Chinese laborers would have on the rate of freedmen participation on the plantation was a major objective of Southern immigration supporters. In many

68. Trenholm, *Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review*, July 1869, p. 14.

69. see Lewis Blair, *The Prosperity of the South Dependent Upon the Elevation of the Negro*, (Richmond, 1889), see the initial chapters in particular.

70. Kathleen Wheaton, "Virginia's Failure to Attract Immigration, 1865-1880," (Master's Thesis, University of Virginia), 1973, p. 11.

respects, a "Negroization" of the Chinese occurred as contemporary literature, observations, and laws consistently associated the "Chinaman" with the Negro of old. Chinese laborers were not going to be a new and distinct form of labor in America, but the servile, apolitical "Sambos" of antebellum days.<sup>71</sup> Significantly, in *The Land of Gold*, Hinton Rowan Helper berated and burdened the Chinese with unsavory negative stereotypes just as he had the Negro. The presence of the Chinese, Helper lamented, would make the state of all "subordinate" races more established in America.<sup>72</sup> A British consul in New Orleans in 1873 commented on the characteristic tendency of early post-war Southern immigration advocates to seek Negro-like, slave-like immigrants. He reported that to Southern planters "a labourer is a labourer...whether he be French or German, Italian or Norwegian, British or Chinese, he is to be housed, fed and treated just as the black race used to be."<sup>73</sup>

#### THE ITALIAN LABORER AND SOUTHERN IMMIGRATION

The last two decades of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth were a period of prolonged agricultural stagnation and hardship for the Southern rural economy. If uncertainty, anticipation, and desperate makeshift arrangements described agriculture in the immediate post-war period in the South, this later period was marked by general lethargy and dissatisfaction in a system that was established and not working. The leverage that freedmen labor exercised ensured that the old plantation gang system would never come back, but was insufficient to provide widespread landownership among the black and the white races. While the new crop lien system allowed the sharecropper and tenant family to work its "own" plot of land with little supervision, Southern agricultural practices remained shackled by the traditional concentration on the

71. See a very informative and interesting article, Dan Caldwell, "The Negroization of the Chinese Stereotype in California," *Southern California Quarterly*, v. 53, June 1971, pp. 123-31.

72. Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Land of Gold*, (Baltimore, 1855), p. 96.

73. Berthoff, p. 331.

cotton crop. The difference was the use of free labor under the crop lien, labor that was free to go into debt and free to starve one's self and one's family. Planters and agricultural reformers alike apparently considered efficient production to be more important in this later period because the sharecropper and the tenant farmer shared his crop with the landowner. Efficiency and diversified farming, therefore, were the focus of a clamor for agricultural modernization by rural interests around the turn of the twentieth century. Effectively tying black rural labor to the land no longer satisfied the planter and, moreover, often got in the way of the prosperity that the planter desired most.

Unstable and dynamic describe the Southern rural labor condition in the final decades of the nineteenth century. The most important change in agricultural labor by the end of the century was the increasing employment of whites in landless and land tenancy "nigger" jobs. As C.Vann Woodward points out, whites as well as blacks experienced the horrors of crop-lien tenancy.<sup>74</sup> While blacks operated 60 percent of the South's tenant farms in 1880, a higher percentage of white tenants were sharecroppers than black tenants.<sup>75</sup> Together whites and blacks pushed up the rate of tenancy with the passage of each decade after the Civil War to the point where in 1910 over half of the farms in eight Southern states were operated by tenants.<sup>76</sup> In addition, the rising rate of tenancy exacerbated a credit shortage preventing most farmers from establishing themselves on a self-supporting basis.<sup>77</sup> Walter Fleming maintained in 1905 that there were "plenty" of Negro laborers for the black-belt planter to choose from, "but each year they become less efficient."<sup>78</sup> The continued migration of Negroes into towns and the Southwest states prompted a contemporary, William Brown, to

74. C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, (Baton Rouge, 1951), pp. 178-81, 206.

75. 81% of white tenants and 69% of black tenants operated under a sharecropping tenant basis in the South in 1880. See Ransom and Sutch, pp. 104-5.

76. Woodward, p. 407.

77. Gaston, p. 71.

78. Fleming, p. 291.

say that there was "more work to do nowadays than ever before in the South, and relatively fewer negroes to do it." Moreover, Brown observed "a tendency" among whites "to displace the negro farm-hand and the negro tenant in regions where it cannot be attributed to a voluntary withdrawal of the negroes."<sup>79</sup> With strong white participation in the crop lien system from the bottom up, it appears that planters were significantly less dependent on the agricultural labor of the Negro than immediately following the Civil War.

Emerging industrialism indicated further neglect and a declining need for black labor. The white assumption of traditionally Negro rural work and skills also occurred in the urban economic sphere.<sup>80</sup> Two byproducts of nascent Southern industrial capitalism, the convict lease system and restrictionist white labor unions, endeavored with some success to block laboring opportunities for the free black.<sup>81</sup> With very few exceptions, cotton mills employed only whites. Indeed, Broadus Mitchell suggests that a major objective behind the "cotton mill crusade" was to develop a sense of economic self-worth among the native poor whites in relation to the Negro.<sup>82</sup> In general, the growth in industrial and urban employment increased the proportion of the region's labor force vying for wage employment and the proportion of unemployed blacks. White women and children, for example, joined the wage labor market seeking employment in the personal services sector and in cotton manufacturing.<sup>83</sup> The industrial, manufacturing sector also provided an alternative enterprise other than agriculture for the planter to forge his economic and social position in New Southern society.<sup>84</sup>

An overpowering desire to circumscribe severely the political and social role of the black in Southern society more than matched a

79. William Brown, "The White Peril: The Immediate Danger of the Negro," *North American Review*, v. 179, December 1904, p. 832.

80. Brown, pp. 826, 829; Alfred Holt Stone, *Studies in the American Race Problem*, (New York, 1908), pp. 165-70.

81. Woodward, pp. 228-29, 215.

82. Mitchell, p. 132.

83. *Ibid.*, chapter entitled, "The Labor Factor;" Stone, p. 199.

84. Dwight Billings, *Planters and the Making of A 'New South,'* (Chapel Hill, 1974), see chapter 4.

tendency to push the Negro out of the Southern economy. Negro disfranchisement and legalized segregation were not simply "political" measures carried out by a cunning, vigilant Democratic ascendancy, as Morgan Kousser's *The Shaping of Southern Politics* implies.<sup>85</sup> Disfranchisement and segregation manifested a grotesque, yet widely held, belief in the deficiency of the black race in which whites sympathetically explained lynching by the bestial nature of the Negro. In the late 1880's and afterward, white "scientific" racist ideologies, legislative action, and racial violence combined to impress upon the Negro that his race could contribute little of worth to white society. "Negrophobia" was rampant as influential contemporaries spoke of the "moral degeneracy" and innate unfitness of the black man. Social Darwinism described the impending extinction of the Negro race caught in a losing death struggle with the superior, progressing white race. Southern Negrophobia seemed to be part of a general nativist temper in America at the time. George Fredrickson in *The Black Image in the White Mind*, for example, notes the similarities between the Southern movement to deport the Negro and the Northern cry for immigration restriction.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the prevailing accommodationist approach among the Negro leadership, seen most clearly in the "industrial education" philosophy of Booker T. Washington, appeared to sanction and encourage further white persecution of the Negro.<sup>87</sup>

In light of a competitive labor market and severe Negrophobia, it is not surprising that the planter and other Southern whites had "lost patience" with the Negro laborer by the end of the nineteenth

85. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, (New Haven, 1974), see introduction.

86. George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, (New York, 1971), see specifically, p. 265, generally, chapters 8 and 9.

87. David Hellwig, "Black Attitudes Toward Immigrant Labor in the South, 1865-1910," *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, v. 54, April 1980, pp. 163-65. Hellwig's article is useful in articulating a surprisingly supportive attitude towards white immigration schemes among many blacks, especially Booker T. Washington.

century.<sup>88</sup> With the presence of white competition and agricultural retardation in the South (particularly in areas with a high concentration of blacks), the case against Negro labor was abundantly clear to white Southerners. The one-time ambivalence towards the freedman had become a simple and direct indictment of Negro labor. Alfred Holt Stone, a Mississippi planter and well-respected economist, wrote in 1907 that "the inability of the negro...to hold his own in competition...has been demonstrated so often and in so many ways, that it is no longer a debatable question."<sup>89</sup> In 1905, in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Robert Ward described the anti-Negro mood of the white South,

Probably the most important factor in the Southern immigration situation is the negro himself. There is in the South to-day a widespread and decided reaction against the negro....He is charged with being less efficient than before the war; with incapacity, irresponsibility, and instability; with unfitness for and dissatisfaction with his work; with demanding too much pay and requiring too many holidays.<sup>90</sup>

Knowing how the Negro is today, the *Southern Workman* observed in the same year, "no one, after reading that book [Frederick Law Olmsted's travel journal of the antebellum South], would be surprised to hear that the blacks of the South were shiftless."<sup>91</sup>

Shiftless, careless, unintelligent, inefficient, brutish, and unreliable, the Negro was said to possess every negative characteristic that the planter imagined and feared he might have. Moreover, in a time of proud *laissez faire* and Spencerian self-interest, planters pinned on the Negro the greatest flaw conceivable — his actions did

88. Robert Ward, "Immigration and the South," *Atlantic Monthly*, v. 96, November 1905, p. 613.

89. Alfred Stone, "Italian Cotton-Growers in Arkansas," *Review of Reviews*, v. 35, 1907, p. 209.

90. Ward, p. 613.

91. "How Italians Can Help Negroes," *Southern Workman*, v. 34, April 1905, p. 202.

not follow the laws of economics. After conducting a five year experiment in which he compared the productivity and profitability of Negro tenant farmers with that of Italian tenant farmers on a Mississippi Delta cotton plantation, Stone concluded that the Negro's behavior has "no logical or reasonable basis." Concerning the experiment, Stone wrote in *Studies in the American Race Problem* that "these Negroes signally failed to respond to the influence of the most favourable economic conditions with which it was possible for a plantation to surround them."<sup>92</sup> A failure to follow economic self-interest, Stone maintained, was the root cause of all the Negro's negative character traits. The Negro's unreliability as a tenant and sharecropper, for example, resulted from his failure to "realise the remotest casual relation between stability and prosperity."<sup>93</sup>

There are several significant features apparent in the planters' condemnation of Negro labor around the turn of the century. The first is that, unlike the immediate post-war period, the quantity of Negro labor was not a major issue of concern for the planter in the late New South period. The black was not criticized because he did not provide enough of his labor, but because he offered it so carelessly. The inferior quality of Negro labor, in turn, led a great many immigration-supporting planters, at last, to abandon the Negro. The planter reached his gloomy verdict on Negro labor, however, with the security that there was a reasonably adequate supply of labor available to him. With an air of triumph, Stone repeatedly told the Southern public that cotton farming could, in fact, carry on and carry on more productively without "negro toil."<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, a similarity in planter perceptions was the importance placed in both periods on the labor question in determining regional economic well-being. While planters in the earlier period were convinced that the participation of freedmen labor made possible economic recovery, planters in the later period were equally convinced that the performance of Negro labor was the main

92. Stone, *Studies*, pp. 144-45.

93. *Ibid.*, 131.

94. Stone, "Arkansas," p. 209; Stone, *Studies*, p. 175.



"hindrance to progress."<sup>95</sup> While primarily a response to Negro labor in both periods, immigration support assumed a very different character in the later period.

Early post-war immigration efforts concentrated on alleviating the deficiency in labor in the rural South with the ultimate aim of rebuilding plantation agriculture. Later immigration support was fundamentally committed to the more effective use of vastly underutilized Southern resources with a prosperous, progressive agricultural system as the goal. Planter immigration schemes, in other words, were defensive and status-quo oriented in the early period and activist and progressive later on. Turn-of-the-century Southern immigration supporters concerned themselves both with placing regional agriculture on the path of economic efficiency and self-sufficiency and with solidifying white supremacy. Immigrants to the South could no longer be simply bodies working the land. Planters yearned for reliable, independent-minded white farmers who would enrich and improve the soil by their agricultural expertise—skilled farmers who "will introduce new methods" and new directions in Southern agriculture.<sup>96</sup> Further, immigrants had to be economically rational beings, willing and able to gain profits by their efforts. Immigration advocates distinguished between "undesirable" and "desirable" immigrants; between degenerate, burdensome, "ignorant" labor and "strong," "thrifty," and economical farmers. In 1905, the commissioner of agriculture in a Southern state warned that "our people will forego whatever advantage might come from immigration of the better class, if this is to be coupled with that of the slums of the cities" — the "undesirable" East European immigrants flocking to Northern cities at the time. In the same year, Ward counselled that "where unskilled labor is needed it should be sparingly introduced, under careful supervision by the State."<sup>97</sup>

95. Fleming, p. 279.

96. Walter Fleming, "Immigration and the Negro Problem," *The World Today*, January 1907, p. 97.

97. Ward, pp. 614, 617.

A preoccupation with the racial make-up of the immigrant made necessary this sharp distinction between undesirable and desirable immigrants. Unlike thirty years earlier, the Southern "race question" tyrannized white economic decisions and judgements. For basically the same reasons that Negro labor was pronounced to be brutish and inferior, Southern immigration advocates agreed to the social necessity of prohibiting colored, non-European immigration. Stated simply, many white Southerners "looked forward to" white immigration as "a solution of the race problem."<sup>98</sup> An influx of intelligent, productive white workers would not only bolster the South's economic performance, but it would, moreover, "dilute" the Negro threat to white civilization.<sup>99</sup> Chinese immigrant labor, once the panacea for desperate planters, was not "tolerated" at the end of the nineteenth century "for fears of possible race complications." Immigration, once designed for Negro labor to cooperate with the planter, was, in this later period, directed "toward securing a class of independent farmers who will do their own work, dispensing with the Negro."<sup>100</sup>

Although there was some doubt over whether the Italian was "white" enough for the South,<sup>101</sup> the Italian laborer generally fit the criteria for a desirable immigrant. Emily Fogg Meade's "Italian Immigration into the South" published in 1905, characterized much of the contemporary periodical literature devoted to uncovering the moral and racial qualities of the Italian. In her one-sided assessment of Italian labor and personal habits, Meade reached to defend white only immigration and virulent Negrophobia. The flip side of Negro vices were the "corresponding virtues" of Italians — Negro "indolence," "intemperance," "immorality," and "lack of thrift" matched against the "frugal, moral and industrious" character of the

98. Fleming, "Southern States," p. 281.

99. Fleming, "Negro Problem," p. 97.

100. Fleming, "Southern States," pp. 291, 282.

101. Ward, p. 612; see also Henry Cabot Lodge, "Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration," *Northern American Review*, v. 152, May 1891, pp. 602-12.

Italian people.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, reports of Italian tenant farming colonies (like Sunnyside Colony in Arkansas) and direct comparisons between Italian and Negro tenantry under similar conditions all pointed to the conclusion that the Italian was an efficient, skillful farmer, whose labor was markedly superior to that of the Negro.<sup>103</sup> Stone praised in particular the degree to which economic self-interest motivated Italian actions and performance. He predicted that the proven reliability of Italian labor would make possible the establishment of "a permanent and assured tenantry" in the South if Italian immigration was accelerated.<sup>104</sup>

In spite of all the talk of the racial, moral, and economic fitness of the Italian, planters showed little interest in the assimilation of their Italian tenants. In real social terms, judgements of superior Italian and inferior Negro labor were meaningless — because the Italian worked alongside the Negro on the planters' land, planters and other white Southerners invariably treated and identified the Italian as non-white labor.<sup>105</sup> The planters' stress on the "economic" qualities of Italian labor, moreover, revealed the primacy and openness of planter exploitation in its use of immigrant labor. Planters were relieved, for example, that Italian labor was essentially migratory because it made their transactions seem more business-like. As George Parker noted in *Forum* in 1892, "there is very little sentiment in this matter of immigration," "it is purely a matter of business."<sup>106</sup> Alfred Stone, in a book allegedly concentrating on race relations, remarked that the question of immigrant labor was for the planter "purely one of abstract economics."<sup>107</sup>

102. Emily Fogg Meade, "Italian Immigration into the South," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, v. 4, July 1905, pp. 218, 21.

103. Alfred Stone, "The Italian Cotton Grower: The Negro's Problem," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, v. 4, January 1905, pp. 42-47; Stone, *Studies*, see chapters 4 and 5; Stone, "Arkansas," pp. 209-13; Fleming, "Southern States," p. 292.

104. Stone, *Studies*, p. 192.

105. Robert Brandfon, "The End of Immigration to the Cotton Fields," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, v. 50, no. 4, March 1964, p. 610.

106. George Parker, "What Immigrants Contribute to Industry," *Forum*, v. 14, December 1892, p. 601.

107. Stone, *Studies*, p. 198.

Italian workers realized only too well the centrality of economic gain in the planter's approach to immigrant labor. Italians deeply resented the harsh, impersonal treatment they received at the hands of planters and immigration agents. Blows from foremen, diseased rations, and dishonest employers prompted the oppressed Italian to conclude "that there are things...dearer than money" — such as simple human consideration.<sup>108</sup> Reflecting on the conduct of the immigration company directing Sunnyside Colony, Italian Mayor des Planches observed that, "The company is a company of speculation. From the settler it tries to draw the greatest profit without caring about his well-being. The Italian at Sunnyside is a human machine of production. Better than the Negro, a more perfect machine but beside him a machine nevertheless."<sup>109</sup> True to the age in which they lived, planters openly admitted that economic self-interest and exploitation were at the root of their interest in immigrant labor. Planters decided that the paternalistic veil for labor exploitation used in the early post-war campaign for Chinese immigration was unnecessary in the later campaign for Italians.

According to Southern immigration supporters, how did the future look for the Negro laborer in the presence of Italian competition? Resolute in the belief that Italian labor was superior to that of the Negro and socially more acceptable, planters and other whites reasoned a marginal position at best for the Negro in Southern society. Protected from white competition by slavery and then the legacy of slavery, blacks finally saw their "monopoly" on Southern labor end with the influx of Italian laborers.<sup>110</sup> With black and white economic and racial attributes clashing in a free labor market, the American Negro found himself confronting "the gravest problem of his life." In cold fatalistic language, Stone declared that the Negro was now being "called upon to prove his right to live, or accept the consequences of failure" in a struggle where economic success was

108. Gino Speranza, "The Italian Foreman as a Social Agent," originally published in June 1903, in Lydio Tomasi edited, *The Italian in America: The Progressive View, 1891-1914*, (New York, 1972), pp. 187-88.

109. Brandfon, p. 610.

110. Stone, *Studies*, pp. 88, 174.

"the only test." At last, Negroes assumed responsibility for their degraded and deficient state and planters fondly predicted black demise. "It would be unwise," Stone counselled, "for the negro to cherish the delusion that he alone of all mankind is to remain forever exempt" from the economic contest of survival. To stave off extinction, planters proclaimed that the Negro himself had to bring about a revolutionary change in his character and attitude. The Southern white could not live the Negro's life for him, nor would economic laws allow this to occur. Stone wrote that, "in its final analysis, it will be his own, not the white man's hand, that closes in the Negro's face the door of economic hope, for only he can keep it open." Why should Southern whites continue to patiently accept the Negro's labor, planters asked, if his replacement by the Italian laborer was of unqualified benefit to their interests and their white society?<sup>111</sup>

In the forty years following the Civil War, planters sponsored various schemes for immigration into the South. While immigration endeavors throughout aimed for a controllable and exploitable labor force, planter schemes changed with changing economic times and social attitudes. In the initial post-war period, planters found themselves facing a horrendous shortage of labor. As the most practical and available source of labor, freedmen were the obvious focus of planter immigration measures. The campaign for Chinese labor to enter the South was designed primarily to persuade the Negro to return to the plantation and to the control of the planter. Chinese immigration, therefore, would influence favorably the quantity of labor offered in the rural South. It would also help re-establish social harmony between blacks and whites in a defeated, distraught region.

The economic situation in the late New South period differed considerably. A stagnant, impoverished agricultural system and an increasingly competitive labor market convinced the planter that his traditional dependence on Negro labor was the root of his economic

111. Stone, "The Italian Cotton Grower: The Negro's Problem," pp. 42-47; Stone, *Studies*, chapter 5; and Ward, pp. 611-17.

problems. A mood of severe Negrophobia among whites helped shape economic conclusions. White immigration, therefore, was one method in which the planter proposed to initiate agricultural progress and prosperity and also push the black out of the picture in the South. Planters viewed the Italian laborer as a satisfactory white replacement for the Negro — able to provide efficient, quality farm labor, but unable to challenge his lowly station in Southern white society.

But planter support for immigration involved more than a response to economic conditions and social moods. The nature of planter immigration schemes revealed planter perceptions of themselves, their power, and their role. When planters concentrated on trying to restore the plantation system in the early post-war period, they nurtured a hope that through economic means their position of ascendancy could be maintained. Their paternalistic approach towards rural labor illustrated a planter sense of social responsibility as well as deceptive exploitation. Conversely, a narrow, overtly economic self-interested approach to immigration in the later period indicated a substantially less influential and less responsible planter role in New Southern society. A pessimistic judgement of the Negro and of the crop lien system on the part of the planter was, in actuality, a recognition that his own ideals and aspirations had failed. While it was not until the Italian immigration campaign that the planter had abandoned the Negro laborer, he had abandoned his position of ascendancy in Southern society a good deal earlier.