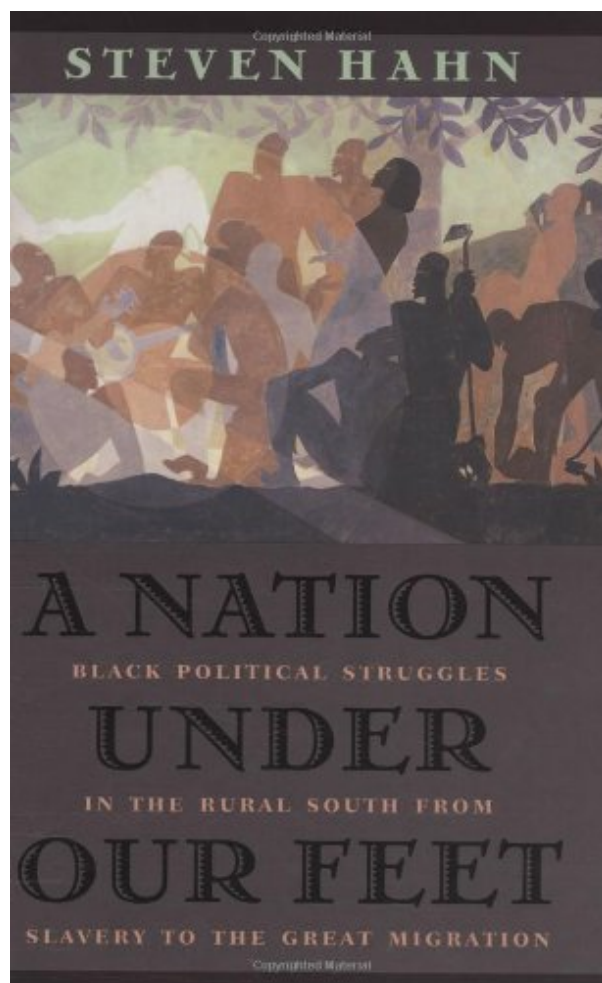
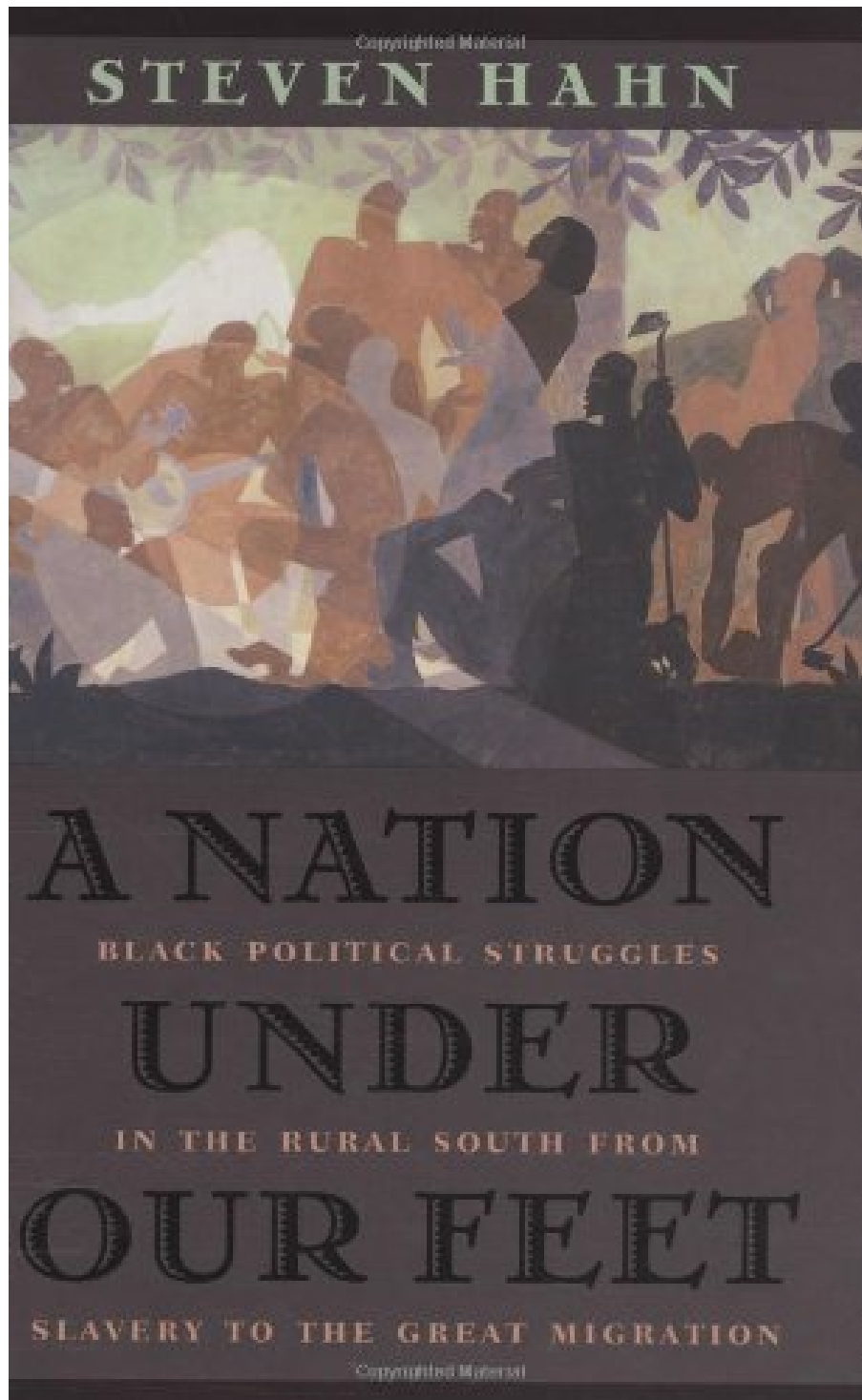


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SOUTH FROM SLAVERY TO THE GREAT  
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From Publishers Weekly

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# **A NATION UNDER OUR FEET: BLACK POLITICAL STRUGGLES IN THE RURAL SOUTH FROM SLAVERY TO THE GREAT MIGRATION BY STEVEN HAHN PDF**

This is the epic story of how African-Americans, in the six decades following slavery, transformed themselves into a political people--an embryonic black nation. As Steven Hahn demonstrates, rural African-Americans were central political actors in the great events of disunion, emancipation, and nation-building. At the same time, Hahn asks us to think in more expansive ways about the nature and boundaries of politics and political practice.

Emphasizing the importance of kinship, labor, and networks of communication, *A Nation under Our Feet* explores the political relations and sensibilities that developed under slavery and shows how they set the stage for grassroots mobilization. Hahn introduces us to local leaders, and shows how political communities were built, defended, and rebuilt. He also identifies the quest for self-governance as an essential goal of black politics across the rural South, from contests for local power during Reconstruction, to emigrationism, biracial electoral alliances, social separatism, and, eventually, migration.

Hahn suggests that Garveyism and other popular forms of black nationalism absorbed and elaborated these earlier struggles, thus linking the first generation of migrants to the urban North with those who remained in the South. He offers a new framework--looking out from slavery--to understand twentieth-century forms of black political consciousness as well as emerging battles for civil rights. It is a powerful story, told here for the first time, and one that presents both an inspiring and a troubling perspective on American democracy.

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## From Publishers Weekly

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The Shoulders on Which We Stand

By Gimme Good Reads

Hahn did an extraordinary job collecting this information that gives us a glimpse into the transformation of the formerly enslaved (and silenced, in the case of free blacks) into self-actualization. Here's just one factoid to whet your appetite: in the last year of the Civil War, the Union Army was more than 10% people of color. The total number of people of color-- including some from other nations-- who fought: 209,145.

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

## Engaging history of black politics before and after the Civil War

By cs211

I suspect that Steven Hahn's "A Nation Under Our Feet" (ANOUF) was originally and primarily intended for a collegiate-level academic audience, perhaps in a history course studying slavery in the United States and its aftermath. However, it almost certainly received a much wider than intended audience when it won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize in History. Indeed, that is the reason I read the book, as I try to read the Pulitzer Prize winning history book every year, to expand upon the very minimal grounding in history that one receives in today's U.S. educational system. So, the "non history major" perspective is the one from which I am reviewing this book.

Although ANOUF is pretty dense and does resemble a typical academic tome, with long paragraphs and voluminous footnotes, the compelling subject matter and Steven Hahn's prose elevate it far above the typical sleep-inducing history book that only finds a home on dusty college library shelves. I can surmise several reasons why the Pulitzer panel chose to honor it: the importance of the subject matter (black politics from before emancipation to the great migration north); the painstaking research that Hahn put into the project (by reading this book, you get the condensed wisdom from what appears to be hundreds of other books and documents that Hahn studied); and the quality of Hahn's writing, which manages to present detailed descriptions of events in a fairly engaging manner. It's not the page turner that "The DaVinci Code" is, but the subject matter is far more important.

ANOUF aims to describe how blacks in the South, especially the rural South, practiced politics both during and after slavery. During slavery, of course, they had no legal representation in the formal political system, but Hahn shows how they used various informal means to disseminate information, form community views, and then attempt to change what they could. The most fascinating part of the book, I feel, is the account of politics during and after the Civil War, including Reconstruction and the backlash of Redemption. The Civil War was a far more complex event than the popular four word summary of "Lincoln freed the slaves", and the many parties involved had different views of what the war meant, what they were fighting for, and what it meant when the war was over. To a large extent, when the formal war ended, the fighting continued in other ways, and eventually the Southern whites were able to re-exert their influence. The portrait the book paints of the Democratic Party and its close alliance to the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacist paramilitary organizations is brutal, and one that would shock many modern-day Democrats who don't know the history of their party. But that's just a minor point - this book is far deeper and more nuanced than modern-day party-line politics. In fact, it does an admirable job of showing the true roots of politics, and all the different ways that black people worked together to make their views heard, through a wide variety of means.

If you are interested in learning a lot more than what you are taught in U.S. public schools about slavery; if you want to gain a greater understanding of the background behind contemporary race politics in the U.S.; if you are a Civil War buff; or if you just appreciate a good history book, then I can definitely recommend "A Nation Under Our Feet".

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

A Great Work in the Historiography of Reconstruction!

By RDD

Steven Hahn's "A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South From Slavery to the Great Migration" picks up where Eric Foner's "Reconstruction" left off. Foner sought to counter the Dunning School that, in the early 1900s, condemned Radical Republicans, Northern carpetbaggers, Southern scalawags, and freedmen. Later, W.E.B. Du Bois, in 1935, and Howard Beale, in the 1940s, initiated the revisionist school, which cast Northern policymakers and freedmen in a more positive light. Foner's work used the Dunning School's research methods to argue that African-Americans were actors in Reconstruction

and that racism played a pivotal role. Hahn shifts from the broad-strokes and top-down elements of Foner's work to focus on the ways in which black Americans envisioned and created political identities beginning during the Civil War and ending in the early 1900s.

Land plays a pivotal role in Hahn's argument. He writes, "Whatever their experiences in slavery, it became apparent during the war that freedpeople widely shared the desire to obtain land and use it as a basis for securely planting their families and kinship networks" (pg. 79). While many in the South believed that Northern agitators created the desire for land redistribution, Hahn writes, "Whatever many planters preferred to believe, rural freedpeople did not need tutors or outside agitators to nurture their desire for, or sense of entitlement to, the land" (pg. 135). Even without organized land redistribution, the threat of the idea offered a form of political power as freedpeople could hold "off from signing contracts until the new year," thereby creating "a temporary labor shortage" that "weakened the landowners' attempts to tie them down and dictate the terms" (pg. 156). In the end, these conflicts demonstrated the problems with Presidential Reconstruction. Beyond the acquisition of land, Hahn focuses on the role of literacy. African Americans who escaped to Union lines during the Civil War took advantage of opportunities to learn. Hahn links this with the creation of political agency writing, "The wartime military, by its very nature, thus provided the sort of basic political educations that enslaved people had found almost impossible to come by" (pg. 97). Describing the role of printed matter in promoting colonization, Hahn writes, "We can see in this process the extension and vitality of a new popular culture of belief and verification tied more closely to the printed or written, rather than the spoken, word" (pg. 326).

Finally, Hahn argues that women gained more political agency in the wake of Reconstruction. Though women could not vote, they could help shape votes within their communities. Hahn writes, "Manipulating gender conventions and the expectations of courtship and sexual favor, they both shamed reluctant menfolk into performing their political duties and wreaked the most intimate and humiliating vengeance on those who strayed from the fold" (pg. 228). The shift in the focus of African American political life in the early 1900s toward the church, school, and home offered other opportunities, though men continued to dominate. As Hahn writes, "There was, in other words, not so much a stepping back of the men and a stepping forward of the women as a necessary redeployment to terrain in which both had recognized roles and authority, although the roles and authority still tilted power and leadership toward the men" (pg. 463).

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