Deconstructing Reconstruction: 
Through Two Case Studies in West Central Georgia

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The term reconstruction is defined by Webster as, “the act or process of building something that was damaged or destroyed again; the process of putting something (such as a country) back into a good condition.” From 1865 to 1877, the American South was under what has come to be known as Reconstruction. The object of reconstruction will be at the root of this paper, and I will examine how places experience and progress during reconstruction, and how their experiences vary depending on their geographic location. My focus will be on how this theory relates to two cities in Georgia called Columbus and LaGrange. While both of these cities in west central Georgia were locations for battles or conflicts in the American Civil War, there were many other areas across the State of Georgia that also were affected by military conflicts. These two towns were so close, and one would think that because of this the way that each town reconstructed and the progress that was shown during this time would be the same for both places, but that is not the case. Both towns experienced the Reconstruction Era differently and this is not due to the battle or conflicts, but instead the pre-war makeup of the towns are what really made their experiences what they were.

Booker T. Washington was on to something when he said to “cast down your bucket where you are.”1 This notion to look at where we are, like the historiographical approach of local history, allows us to understand the bigger picture. That is exactly what the examination of these two case studies does, and it does this by deconstructing the term reconstruction. The idea that two cities, located less than 50 miles apart, had different experiences of Reconstruction proves that Reconstruction is not a term that can be used universally thought-out the south. There are many factors that played into this, but by studying the local history of these towns we understand why their experiences were different. The geographical location of the two towns consisted of two different types of physical geographies, and because of this the two cities had different infrastructures. These pre war infrastructures are what made the

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local economies what they were, and what the local economies had to offer for the Confederate’s cause in the war led to the amount of damage that was done during the war. Finally, the pre-war economies and cultures that were established before the war are what led to the way that each town progressed or reconstructed during Reconstruction, and why they varied. By looking at the two towns that were established by means of the same treaty, and how and why each experienced Reconstruction, the notion that reconstruction is a monolithic term will be disproven, and instead the term reconstruction will be seen as varying based on spatial geography.

There have been many different events and time periods that have helped to shape the United States of America that we know today, but the most critical and most important turning point in our country’s history is the time period that followed the American Civil War. The war came to an end at Appomattox in the year 1865, but there was certainly a ripple effect that would soon follow due to the fact that almost all of the fighting or conflicts that occurred during the war took place in the south. As a result of the Confederate loss the south was forced to submit and reconstruct itself after the turmoil that had been brought from the war. The era of Reconstruction is constantly called an era of tragedy, and some historians have even gone as far to say, “the Reconstruction period is one of the most controversial eras in American History.” The controversy stems from the fact that there were so many different ways and so many different places that “reconstruction” had to occur. While the south as a whole had to be reconstructed, the reality of reconstruction varied from place to place. The obstacles at each location ranged from physical rebuilding, political leadership changes, economic changes, social hierarchy changes, and many others. All of these factors were vital parts of reconstruction, but the severity of each varied from each state to each town and each town reconstructed differently and at a different pace.

Historians have approached the topic of “Reconstruction” from different schools of thought. The earliest way that historians and scholars approached the time period of Reconstruction is seen as a racist approach today. This particular approach is called the Dunning School, which is also known as the traditional approach that was not really rivaled or challenged until right around the Civil Rights Movements in the 1960’s. Up until this time texts like The South During Reconstruction had been credited with being the traditional viewpoint of Reconstruction. In this text by E. Merton Coulter he shows that he is of the Dunning School of thought, which argued that blacks were simply incapable of many of the political and social duties that were bestowed upon them by radical leadership during the period of Reconstruction. Coulter and the Dunning School thought that the radical politicians expected too much of the Negroes and that their views of radical reform were not put in place because of their genuine love for the Negroes, but instead to gain even more

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of an economic advantage over the south. As Coulter states, “Policies were dictated not by what the Negroes were but by what the conquerors thought they ought to be.”3 This school of thought also believed that the Radical Republicans were not the answer politically to the South’s problems. Coulter even goes so far as to say that once the Radicals won Congress in November of 1866, “reconstruction had now been thrown into a snarl, and one of the most difficult problems which ever confronted the American nation must be settled by a people somewhat less than normal.”4 Along with two issues already mentioned, the Dunning view on Johnson was also unfavorable. They thought he was the man for the job because he was a southern man who knew the way of life, but he failed to “recognize that Congress had a perfect right to insist on legal and constitutional changes.”5 This Dunning School of thought saw Reconstruction as a complete failure other texts like Coulter’s support the Dunning School of thought.

The Dunning School was the first way to approach Reconstruction in a scholarly fashion after the war, and authors like Edwin Campbell Woolley and Clara Mildred Thompson supported many elements of the Dunning School. Both Woolley and Thompson wrote text that focused on Reconstruction in Georgia, and both were a part of the traditionalist generation. Woolley’s book titled The Reconstruction of Georgia was copyrighted first in 1901, and early on in his text he makes it known that the economic struggles that Georgia would be faced with after the war were not all a direct result of the war itself. In chapter two of the text Woolley states, “Slavery, the system which they understood, was gone; they used the new system with little success, all the less because of the restlessness of the Negroes.”6 Like many Dunning School historians Woolley thought of Reconstruction as a great disappointment, and this was mainly because of the vast number of slaves that were given freedom without being able to handle what all comes with being a freed man.

Thompson’s text titled Reconstruction in Georgia: Economic, Social, Political, 1856-1872 was published in the year 1915. Thompson, like the scholars before her, felt that the economy would not recover from the loss of property and that ultimately blacks had been given a chance to be civilized when they were slaves. Thompson shows her belief on ratifying the 13th Amendment claiming, “But if freedom to the Negro meant freedom from work, then land would be worthless and Georgia itself would be ruined.”7 This is only one way

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7 Clara Mildred Thompson, Reconstruction in Georgia, Economic, Social, Political,
in which Thompson shows what school of thought she ascribes to, and this is made well known in the preface when she states, “Anything of fairness or wisdom or truth that this book may contain must be ascribed to Professor William Archibald Dunning of Columbia University, in whom many students of Reconstruction History have found their guide and inspiration.”

Eric Foner first brought the Dunning School to my attention in his text that was published in 1966 titled, Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877. Unlike Coulter and Thompson, Foner did not see Reconstruction as a complete failure, but instead he saw it as a necessity that had its good attributes and its bad. Foner knows that it was a difficult task to redefine a civilization and the social classes of the day and age, but class-consciousness had to be found. He feels that “the effort produced a sweeping redefinition of the nation’s public life and a violent reaction that ultimately destroyed much, but by no means all, of what had been accomplished.”

Much like Foner, a black historian named John Hope Franklin also saw Reconstruction in the progressive light. In Franklin’s text Reconstruction after the Civil War we know early on that Franklin feels that the Reconstruction Era “was a period when many threads of national political and economic life were woven together in one way or in the south.”

The progressive school of thought believed that the era was a time that was marked by real gains, and should not just be referred to as a “dark era.”

There are other historians that come from either a mold that does not support the Dunning School or just simply choose to ignore it. Mr. Alan Conway wrote The Reconstruction of Georgia in the year 1966, and he did this not to attack the old school approach seen in texts from Thompson or Wooley, but instead to bring a revisionist work to the study of Reconstruction in Georgia. Conway acknowledges the works of Thompson and Woolley in his book and states, “I do not agree with many of the opinions expressed by Miss Thompson, but the present study is no way an attempt to denigrate what is a very good piece of work.”

Even though Conway does not attack the previous works of Conway or Woolley, he does however show throughout the text that his views differentiate. He believes that the reconstruction era allowed for a restructuring of roles for both black and white Americans: “The comparatively short period of Republican Rule in Georgia assisted the racial mold to set quite quickly.”

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1856-1872 (Gloucester: P. Smith, 1964), 40.
8 Clara Mildred Thompson, Reconstruction in Georgia, Economic, Social, Political, 1856-1872 (Gloucester: P. Smith, 1964), xvii.
10 John Hope Franklin, Reconstruction After The Civil War (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), xii.
view is in direct contrast with the Dunning School of thought, which believed that the Radical Republicans of the day and age were motivated by the economic and social shortcomings of the south for their own capital gain and that African-Americans could not successfully reach the goals set for them.

There are also historians who focus on a subject field within history that has almost has become a lost art known as local history. One of the case studies that will be found in this paper is Columbus, Georgia, which was established because of its geographic location on the Chattahoochee River. Nancy Tailfair published A History of Columbus, Georgia 1828-1929. She reminds us “It is more important to know your history than the history of Rome.”13 Even through this local history prism, we can detect Telfair’s influences and discern which historiographical field she followed in terms of race relations during the war and reconstruction. Early on, she acknowledges the economic turmoil caused by 13th amendment and its effects on Columbus and other cities of the day. However, she ultimately claims that, “The abolition of slavery in the south worked a far greater good than harm in the long run.”14 Telfair knew that every local economy would have to change and evolve eventually, and the abolition of slavery only helped to speed up the process of the abandonment of the Old South. This challenges the Dunning’s school belief that there truly was nothing good to come from the time period of Reconstruction. Another local historian named Forrest Clark Johnson challenged the traditionalist view in his text A History of LaGrange Georgia 1828-1900, which was published in 1987. Johnson discusses how LaGrange citizens felt about reconstruction when he states, “They blamed lack of progress on Northern oppression even though they never really lost local political control.”15 This quote challenges the belief that Radical Republicans were only out for their own gain, but as Johnson points out the town of LaGrange did not have to worry about being politically suppressed.

These two different types of historiographies in terms of Reconstruction are drastically different, and we can point to the Civil Right’s Movements of the 1960’s to credit what helped encourage the revisionist movement. Each of these historiographies also contained sub plots like economics, politics, and social hierarchy. Most of the local history texts that will be used to argue that Reconstruction is not a universal term that can be used throughout the state, and especially how it applies to the two case studies, can be classified as non-traditionalist approach. The literature on this topic has changed over the years, but all of these sources will be helpful to prove that Reconstruction is not a term that carries the same connotation throughout the south and especially within the geographical location of west central Georgia.

When establishing a nation, state, city, or county, the geographical location and natural resources of that particular location will play a role in creating the infrastructure that will develop in the area. For the West Central Georgia town of Columbus, the geographical location would prove to be vital for the future of the town. The area that would be known as Columbus had a great advantage in comparison to many early Georgia towns, and that was its location along the Chattahoochee River. State legislature representatives of Georgia recognized this advantage when five commissioners selected the “square or Oblong Square of twelve hundred acres” to be a “planned frontier town on the site of a Creek Indian Village.” Most scholars who have studied Columbus and its origin point out the importance of its location on the Chattahoochee River. Scholars like Stewart Edwards, who wrote his dissertation on Columbus in the Confederacy, feel that it is important to make note of the advantage that Columbus possessed when it was established. While discussing Columbus’ role in the Confederate Army, Edwards highlights that “Columbus’ location on the Chattahoochee River conferred enormous advantages.” When Columbus was founded in 1827 as the seat of Muscogee County, the town’s foundation was based on its geography, and we will see throughout this tale that geography not only played a role in the town’s early years but it would also play a role in its future.

Originally, the town was established as a trading post and had the advantage of being accessible by both land and water. Columbus was directly located at the “head of river navigation,” which is the main reason for its success as a trading center. Not only did the town’s riverfront location present a great opportunity for trade, but it also attracted entrepreneurs who saw potential for industrial growth and were willing to invest. As early as 1827, northerners like W.H. Young commented on Columbus’ industrial promise, and in the following years the town saw Young’s vision come to fruition. In just over a decade, “the Columbus Factory was in operation, spinning cotton yarn and carding wool.” These are some of the early signs that industrialization would be apart of the culture within Columbus, and in the following years leading up to the war growth continued at a rapid pace.

16 John H. Martin, *Columbus, Georgia 1827-1865* (Columbus: Thos. Gilbert, Book Printer and Binder, 1874), 5.
18 Stewart C. Edwards, “River City at War: Columbus Georgia, In the Confederacy” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1998), 5.
19 John H. Martin, *Columbus, Georgia 1827-1865* (Columbus: Thos. Gilbert, Book Printer and Binder, 1874), 8.
By 1845, Columbus was starting to make huge strides in the field of commercial advancement, and the war was only sixteen years away. Tons of investors were taking notice of the town during this time period with the Rock Island paper mills, the Muscogee Railroad Company, the Howard and Echols Cotton Factory, and many other industrial and commercial entities being established in Columbus.\textsuperscript{22} Clearly, the foundation for Columbus’ future had already been established before the war began, fortunately for the town. Columbus’ location and natural resources allowed the town to be in better shape than most southern towns as the war loomed, and “by the time the disastrous Civil war laid low the business of the south, the possibilities of Columbus’ natural resources and advantages were established facts.”\textsuperscript{23} All of these factors which played an important role in Columbus’ early promise remained relevant as the town faced the tumultuous war years and their aftermath.

Like most of Georgia, the town of Columbus did not encounter any type of physical battle during the early stages of the American Civil War. However, this does not mean that the trading post town did not play a crucial role in the Confederate cause leading up to The Battle of Columbus in 1865. Thanks to its early commercial success, Columbus could provide a war industry that had “a substantial body of available labor, waterpower from small dams on the river, and a spirit of enterprise that encouraged new industries.”\textsuperscript{24} All of these characteristics are what led to the town being one of the domestic distribution centers for the Confederacy.\textsuperscript{25} The South knew that in order to be successful in the war, it was going to have to be self-sufficient, and Columbus would play a major part in this. The leaders of Columbus knew that it could be important for the Confederates’ cause, believing the town had the potential to be “the Lowell of the South.”\textsuperscript{26} Many of the entrepreneurs who had started factories and other enterprises in Columbus before the war now saw opportunity to obtain military and government contracts, which would ultimately lead to a boost in the local economy by converting to a war production approach. The Columbus Factory was one of the first enterprises to realize the increase of demand, and it took advantage of this by expanding its production. By the time the war started in 1861 the factory was no longer just focusing on the production of woolen mills, but it also added “a tannery, a shoe factory, a grist mill and a saw

\textsuperscript{22} Nancy Telfair, \textit{A History of Columbus, Georgia 1828-1928} (Columbus: The Historical Publishing Co., 1929), 79.
\textsuperscript{23} Nancy Telfair, \textit{A History of Columbus, Georgia 1828-1928} (Columbus: The Historical Publishing Co., 1929), 79.
\textsuperscript{25} Stewart C. Edwards, “River City at War: Columbus Georgia, In the Confederacy” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1998), 87.
\textsuperscript{26} Stewart C. Edwards, “River City at War: Columbus Georgia, In the Confederacy” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1998), 88.
mill." Other enterprises would follow suit in adapting to the “new” economy within the city, and the citizens of the day were optimistic about the prospect of war. Countless numbers of men were eager to help the Confederate cause, and when secession became a realization in 1861 Columbus military companies like “The Muscogee Rifles, City Light Guards, Columbus Fire Cadets, and the Resistance Light Artillery began training.” Uniforms, shoes, boilers and machinery for gunboats, firearms, and countless other war necessities were all being produced and shipped out of Columbus, Ga.

Columbus avoided warfare during the first four years of the war, and it was not until April of 1865 that the city would truly feel the wrath of Union forces. Fortunately for Columbus, “due primarily to its geographic location, it had managed to escape the greatest scourge war can visit on a city: attack and occupation by an enemy army.”

West central Georgia had not been exposed to total warfare during the early years of the war, which greatly benefited Columbus. Another benefit that the geographical location of Columbus possessed was because the town sat on the Chattahoochee River there were not many ways for an invading force to enter the city. It is fascinating that a town that some saw as the “Lowell” of the South was able to avoid destruction for as long as it did. The fact that Columbus was “the Confederacy’s second-leading overall producer of war material and its largest remaining manufacturing center, combined with the vigorous yet futile defense”, however, meant that eventually the city would have to “face the full brunt of total war.”

The men of Columbus, who had been so enthusiastic to fight for the Confederate forces in 1861, had been dying in the field for the last four years, and this led to decline of the population of fighting-age men in the town. With so many men gone, Sherman’s devastation to other parts of Georgia, and the Confederate resources and economy diminishing, the defense of Columbus would be left up to a defeated leader and a thrown together garrison.

In 1864, Confederate Leaders appointed Colonel Leon Von Zinken to take command of Columbus. He had recently been injured at the Battle of Ezra Church where the Confederates had fought against Sherman’s forces in July of 1864, and “after recuperating from his wounds, Von Zinken was sent orders

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29 Stewart C. Edwards, “River City at War: Columbus Georgia, In the Confederacy” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1998), 92-93.
30 Stewart C. Edwards, “River City at War: Columbus Georgia, In the Confederacy” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1998), 265.
31 Charles A. Misulia, *Columbus, Georgia, 1865 The Last True Battle of the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 171.
32 Stewart C. Edwards, “River City at War: Columbus Georgia, In the Confederacy” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1998), 265.
that read: You are to assume command of (the) post at Columbus.”

As soon as Von Zinken arrived in Columbus he assessed the defenses that had already been prepared, and he was also faced with the challenge of figuring out how he would obtain enough men to stop Union General James H. Wilson’s raids.

The lack of manpower that was at the disposal of the Confederate forces in Columbus led the Mayor of the city, F.G. Wilkins, to issue a proclamation to the Citizens of Columbus that declared all men to protect and fight for their families and the town. The recently appointed major general, Howell Cobb, who was in command of both the Department of Georgia and the Georgia Reserve Force also knew that once he received news that Selma had fallen on April 4th that it was imminent for himself and all available troops to get to southwest Georgia as soon as possible. These two notions about the lack of manpower and the defense mechanisms would go hand and hand when the first federal scouts arrived on April 16th. The discrepancy between the numbers of the two forces was so dramatic that Cobb tells his wife on April 15th that the federal forces have been estimated around “ten thousand- I have three thousand and shall give them a fight.” Due to the lack of manpower the defense strategy was forced to change because there simply was not enough men to hold the outer city defense fortifications. The Confederate troops were forced to abandon the outer fortifications, and bring the line closer to the city to protect the railroad and bridges. This still was a large task for a heavily outnumbered Confederate defense to stand its ground against countless Federal advancements. Eventually the Federal forces not only broke through the Confederate lines, but they also were able to get position on the Girard end of the upper bridge.

Confederate forces were now forced to try and rush to the bridge before the Federal Forces came across, but it would only be a matter of time before the Federals sheer numbers would outmatch Columbus's defense. Once Federal troops gained “control over the only avenue into the city” the battle was essentially over. The battle that had begun at 8:00 PM on Sunday April 16th was over

33 Charles A. Misulia, *Columbus, Georgia, 1865 The Last True Battle of the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 41.
34 Charles A. Misulia, *Columbus, Georgia, 1865 The Last True Battle of the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 33.
35 *Columbus Daily Sun*, April 12, 1865. (This comes from Charles A. Misulia's book: *Columbus, Georgia, 1865 The Last True Battle of the Civil War*, 61.)
36 Charles A. Misulia, *Columbus, Georgia, 1865: The Last True Battle of the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 54.
37 Howell Cobb to Mrs. Cobb, 15 April 1865, *Cobb Papers*. (This comes from Charles A. Misulia's book: *Columbus, Georgia, 1865 The Last True Battle of the Civil War*, 75.)
40 Differ William Standard, *Columbus, Georgia in the Confederacy* (New York: The
Within less than twenty-four hours.

During Wilson's Raids, the Union commander had constantly tried to make sure that his men kept their focus of demolition only on “military and government targets.” He had honored this notion throughout his campaign for the cities that had not mounted much of a defense. In Columbus however, the two days that followed the battle would be “the most tumultuous and destructive two days in its history.” A civilian of Columbus named John Banks, who had fought in the battle, reported that “once the Yankee Army had control of the city they destroyed the government stores, workshops, and exploded the magazine.” This was only the beginning of the destruction that the town faced, and by the time the sun rose on April 17th, “the majority of the townspeople closeted themselves in their homes and left the city to the mercy of the invaders.” In addition to the Union troops, many coloreds and mill workers also took advantage of the chaos that had come to the city, and they used this opportunity to raid “the grocery and clothing stores on Broad Street.” Wilson's men were not satisfied with just harming the town's commercialization assets. These men decided to continue to inflict horror upon the city by harming many of Columbus' residents by means of plundering. Union soldiers who arrived after the initial destruction of industrialization and defense mechanisms of Columbus saw an opportunity to obtain goods for their own personal interest. Federal soldiers at the home of aged War of 1812 veteran General Anderson Abercrombie, near Columbus, exercised this form of plundering by entering the property and searching for food and livestock. The abuse did not stop with seizure of livestock, but Abercrombie also “discovered a party of nine soldiers who had entered the home and were searching for treasure, going through every wardrobe, bureau, closet, etc.” There were many other citizens of Columbus who were treated with the same lack of respect that had been shown to Abercrombie and his possessions. A resident named Emma J. Prescott “recalled how federal cavalrymen raided her parents’ home, terrifying her mother and sisters.” These men stole food, clothes, and even resorted to threats to intimi-

41 Charles A. Misulia, *Columbus, Georgia, 1865: The Last True Battle of the Civil War*, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 171.
42 Charles A. Misulia, *Columbus, Georgia, 1865: The Last True Battle of the Civil War*, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 171.
46 Charles A. Misulia, *Columbus, Georgia, 1865: The Last True Battle of the Civil War*, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 184.
47 Stewart C. Edwards, “River City at War: Columbus Georgia, In the Confederacy” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1998), 282.
date Prescott’s parents. These are only two of many incidents of unrighteous raiding that was implemented in Columbus, and they were only a fraction of the overall damage that was done to the once prosperous city. By the time the Yankee raiders left on the morning of April 18th the town laid in ruins, and the heart and economic means for the city had been destroyed. As one of Wilson's Raiders described it, “Our whole army like a besom of destruction, had swept through one of the fairest cities of the south and left but little of it, and nothing in it.”

Columbus now was forced to pick up the pieces in an effort to rebuild and create another chapter of the city’s history.

After the war came to an end in 1865, every town in the south was forced to “reconstruct.” The theme of Reconstruction was universal, but each town’s most important emphasis within reconstruction varied. For Columbus, Georgia, the process of Reconstruction was not the same as it was for most towns due to a number of different factors, including the infrastructure of the town before and during the war, the fact that an actual battle occurred, who the leader of the Federal Forces was in the Battle of Columbus, and the amount of damage done to the town during the battle. Columbus truly laid in ruins after the war; in fact, “Columbus’s devastation surpassed that of Atlanta: not one factory, machine shop, or mill was left standing.” Fortunately for Columbus, they had a strong group of “forward looking citizens who began at once to rebuild the ruins and to introduce new industries.”

The city of Columbus and its citizens did not pout or sulk about the conditions with which they were faced with during the summer of 1865, but instead they picked up the pieces and quickly rebuilt. Columbus would not evolve over night, but the fact “that there were even the smallest signs of renewal by midsummer of 1865 bode well for the city’s ultimate revival.” Early signs of the city and its citizens attempting to rebuild can be found in the October 6, 1865 edition of the Columbus Daily Enquirer. In this newspaper, the Eagle Manufacturing Company informs the town of an upcoming stockholder meeting scheduled for the 14th of October, which would discuss important business for the future of the company. The fact that companies were already beginning to move forward and make progress just six months removed from the Battle of Columbus exemplifies the amount of resolve that the city possessed. The Columbus Daily Enquirer was one of several news outlets that mention Co-

48 Charles A. Misulia, Columbus, Georgia, 1865: The Last True Battle of the Civil War, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 213.
51 Charles A. Misulia, Columbus, Georgia, 1865: The Last True Battle of the Civil War, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 226.
52 Columbus Enquirer, October 6, 1865.
lumbus’ perseverance after the war, but even “northern news correspondents noted that the town’s commerce was rebounding.”

Just a year after the war’s conclusion, we truly see the vision of reconstruction already being carried out in the city. There was one particular company that was established by a northerner before the war that recovered sooner than others. “The Eagle Manufacturing Company was reorganized under the management of W.H. Young in 1866, and had begun operation” in the same year. They would not only reorganize, but they even changed their name to The Eagle and Phoenix Manufacturing Company. The reason for the name change was to signify the phoenix arising from the ashes much like Columbus did. Even people who traveled to the town during the early years after the war noticed the great fortitude that the town of Columbus had shown following The Battle of Columbus. A traveler visiting Columbus in June of 1867 stated, “Tis true that evidence of the devastating hand of war are [sic] visible on every side, but never the-less your city, phoenix like, is rising from its ashes again.” This was only two years after Wilson and his men had inflicted such great harm on the city, but the town’s ability to recover in such a timely manner is remarkable. The Atlanta Constitution commented that what W.H. Young had accomplished was remarkable, and in an article from the year 1880 they make note of just how far and how fast The Eagle and Phoenix Manufacturing had progressed after the war. The newspaper noted that, “The Eagle and Phoenix Company began operations immediately after the war, and at a time when all enterprise was dead and everything at sea, so to speak….”, building their first in 1866 expanding by completing their second in 1869. The article was written in 1880, but the author wanted to truly show how quick the process of reconstruction and re-industrialization was for the riverfront town of Columbus. The Eagle Phoenix Manufacturing Company’s progress did not slow down, and by the year 1870 “the company’s capital stock had exceeded one million, and the company had an unlimited credit.” You cannot adequately explore the rebuilding of Columbus’s industrialization in the years following the war without

54 Nancy Telfair, _A History of Columbus, Georgia 1828-1928_ (Columbus: The Historical Publishing Co., 1929), 170.
56 Quoted in Charles A. Misulia, _Columbus, Georgia, 1865: The Last True Battle of the Civil War_, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 226.
focusing on The Eagle and Phoenix Company, but it was not the last company in Columbus to pick itself up and rebuild.

Other local plants followed The Eagle and Phoenix’s lead in resuming operation after Wilson’s Raids. “Foundries, lumber plants, and textile mills” were opened throughout Columbus in the years immediately following after the war. Another company that had been established pre-war began to rise from the ashes in 1866. It only took three years for The Columbus Factory to get back on its feet, and by 1869 it “reopened with 4,000 spindles and 116 looms.”

The fact that companies other than The Eagle were progressing after the war shows that the progress was not isolated to The Eagle, but instead progress was occurring throughout Columbus. This progress continued, and “reacupera-


61 John H. Martin, *Columbus, Georgia 1827-1865* (Columbus: Thos. Gilbert, Book Printer and Binder, 1874), 186.

62 John H. Martin, *Columbus, Georgia 1827-1865* (Columbus: Thos. Gilbert, Book Printer and Binder, 1874), 186.

63 Charles A. Misulia, *Columbus, Georgia, 1865: The Last True Battle of the Civil War*, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 225.
ruins from the Battle of Columbus, but it also helped to facilitate the massive industrialization movement that followed the war. The case study of Columbus was unique in the fact that it was able to recover from the war and a battle so quickly, and we will see that Columbus was different than LaGrange before and during the war which led to a less progressive era of Reconstruction.

Another West Central Georgia town named LaGrange experienced both the war years and Reconstruction differently, although it too would see its future affected by its geographical location. LaGrange was officially incorporated on December 16, 1828.64 The establishment of LaGrange was not appointed by the state as a Trading Post like Columbus, but the land that was used to incorporate both towns was obtained from the Creek Treaty of 1825.65 This treaty's land agreements did not go into Alabama, but instead forced all Creek Indians to move west of the Chattahoochee.66 As mentioned earlier, the fact that the treaty went all the way west to the Chattahoochee was vital for Columbus's establishment and its growth, but this also was key for LaGrange as well. The Creek Treaty of 1825 was the beginning of two successful West Georgia towns, but the geographic location and the resources of these towns were different, which led to them experiencing the antebellum years, war years, and even the Reconstruction Era differently.

The location of the County Seat of the newly established Troup County was a heavily debated topic. There were two towns within the county that believed they should hold the county seat when the debate began in 1828. There were five judges who were put in charge of selecting where the county seat would be, and between these five judges, they were split on whether the seat would be located in Vernon “on the banks of the Chattahoochee River” or at a site near “Whitfield Crossing” called Mountville.67 Fortunately for LaGrange, the judges compromised, settling in between these two towns, and because of its central geographical location, LaGrange became the county seat. This was important for the development of LaGrange, and the theme of a town’s infrastructure being influenced based on its geographical location is apparent again.

LaGrange’s early settlers were looking to take advantage of the fertile lands by establishing plantations and they “brought with them into this wilderness, tools, cattle, and slaves.”68 They wanted to establish an agrarian lifestyle because that is what they knew, but they also were known for being people of

64 Clifford L. Smith, History of Troup County, (Atlanta: Foote and Davies Company, 1933), 48.
65 Clifford L. Smith, History of Troup County, (Atlanta: Foote and Davies Company, 1933), 5.
67 Clifford L. Smith, History of Troup County, (Atlanta: Foote and Davies Company, 1933), 48.
68 Clifford L. Smith, History of Troup County, (Atlanta: Foote and Davies Company, 1933), 50.
high merits. People have described LaGrange’s people and their lives by saying that “no town can boast of a population, from its foundation to the present time, possessing greater merits in point of refinement of manners, benevolence of feeling, general intelligence, and moral worth, than LaGrange.” They were also good-hearted men and women who did not focus on the finer things in life, but instead they wanted to be rich by means of education and church life. Because the early settlers were wealthy and had lofty goals for the town, they were able to use their money to help build facilities that helped increase the morality and education of its citizens. This led to plans for building schools and churches, which would both, remain staples of LaGrange society even after the war. This is drastically different than what W.H. Young saw for Columbus’s future, but like Young’s vision, the people of the town would take advantage of what natural resources the town possessed. The first settlers of LaGrange came to the town because of its geographic location on fertile land, and in result of the fertile geography people were attracted to the town that happened to bring their morals, wealth, and lifestyle that would shape LaGrange’s future.

LaGrange and Troup County’s geographic location “was the richest of the new frontier” created by the Creek Treaty. The Chattahoochee River, located less than 20 miles from downtown LaGrange was not irrelevant in terms of LaGrange’s foundation, but it did play a different role for the town’s infrastructure than it did in Columbus. Some of the river’s tributaries wandered through the county, which increased the fertility of the land. This was vital for the town, and because of this, Troup County was at the southern end of Georgia’s cotton belt. The location of the town in a fertile agricultural region, prime for growing the cash crop of cotton, was the main reason that so many people came to LaGrange, and these pioneers were looking to take this new land and cultivate it into plantations. These pioneers from rich counties of Georgia’s eastern piedmont, the Carolinas, and Virginia carried with them many possessions, including large numbers of slaves. They came fully expecting to transplant the “old Virginian Civilization” of cultivating the lands into plantations onto the newly established West Georgian soil.” These resources that the county had inherited from its geographic location allowed for LaGrange to profit “as the geographical center of rich Troup County.”

LaGrange would grow during the antebellum years, and they would do so in many different ways. The early wealthy settlers who were attracted to LaGrange because of its geographic location established plantations and an

agrarian lifestyle. They did this with success, and even during the 1837-1844 depression that ruined surrounding enterprises the plantations of LaGrange remained successful.\textsuperscript{73} These large plantations that had been established in Troup County and LaGrange were self sufficient, and because these plantations were so large they prospered economically during difficult times. This agrarian lifestyle was only one facet of a LaGrangian’s life, and as mentioned earlier they were also very passionate about their education system. The prosperous town of LaGrange supported education, and multiple schools that were established before the war in 1860 were important for many west Georgian lives.\textsuperscript{74} Another part of LaGrange's infrastructure that was established early on was the town's deep passion for religion. The Methodist denomination of Christianity was the most notable form of Christianity in the town. Early Methodist missionary works in LaGrange allowed for it to be the “main base for the multitude of Methodist churches.”\textsuperscript{75} There were other denominations of Christianity that would establish churches in LaGrange, but the Methodist church of LaGrange was “the district headquarters for most of West Georgia Methodism.”\textsuperscript{76} These three aspects of LaGrange society, agriculture, education, and religion were all a product of the geography and its inhabitants. The fertile land of the geographical location of LaGrange attracted the types of people that it did, and in return a notable culture focused on church life and education was created.

Initially, all of the people who came to establish roots in LaGrange and Troup County came knowing that there were rich lands that could be harvested, but this was only one factor that drove the local economy. Another thing that made LaGrange an important town in Georgia leading up to the war was the fact that it became an important center for transportation and trade. In the year 1847, the town of LaGrange had its first railroad incorporated.\textsuperscript{77} This establishment of the railroad not only diversified the economy of the town, but it also expanded it. This railroad was called the Atlanta and LaGrange Railroad, and as a result of the building of the railroad, many citizens in surrounding towns became very interested. The day “the first train came in to LaGrange, all the citizens of the town and the countryside flocked to see it.”\textsuperscript{78} The town of West Point envied the fact that LaGrange had helped its economy by creating

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{73} Forrest Clark Johnson III, \textit{A History of Lagrange, Georgia 1828-1900} (LaGrange: Family Tree, 1987), 31.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Forrest Clark Johnson III, \textit{A History of Lagrange, Georgia 1828-1900} (LaGrange: Family Tree, 1987), 33.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Forrest Clark Johnson III, \textit{A History of Lagrange, Georgia 1828-1900} (LaGrange: Family Tree, 1987), 30.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Forrest Clark Johnson III, \textit{A History of Lagrange, Georgia 1828-1900} (LaGrange: Family Tree, 1987), 30.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Clifford L. Smith, \textit{History of Troup County}, (Atlanta: Foote and Davies Company, 1933), 108.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Clifford L. Smith, \textit{History of Troup County}, (Atlanta: Foote and Davies Company, 1933), 108.
\end{itemize}
a railroad that went to Atlanta, and they too would try to diversify and boost their economy by having the Montgomery Line connect to their town in 1851. The difference was that LaGrange already had advanced their economy by 1851, and their geographic location drew even more trade and commerce. The same investors of the Atlanta and LaGrange railroad even “capitalized on their advantage by extending their rails to West Point in 1854.” LaGrange effectively diversified its economy in the form of transportation because it did not possess a large water mass to pump the growth of industrialization like Columbus did. This is what led to the transportation boom in LaGrange, but the town and its people still based most of their progress on the institution of slavery.

Most southern towns were reliant on the slave population to help drive their economy. This was all dependent on the town’s geographic location, and the natural resources that facilitated the town’s infrastructure. For LaGrange the agrarian lifestyle was important, and as stated earlier most of the pioneers and later citizens of LaGrange possessed vast numbers of slaves. By the year 1840, eighty-three percent of LaGrange’s white families owned slaves. LaGrange used its slave force for not only the agrarian lifestyle, but also some owners would rent out their slaves to do other services. This meant that slaves were performing all types of jobs, and this also meant that they were the staple of the economy. Blacks therefore were “the major source of capital as well as income.”

Unlike Columbus, LaGrange had not created a strong industrial economy to help facilitate the town’s growth for the time period during the war, nor for the Reconstruction Era that would follow. LaGrange had only two signs of industrialization before the war, and only one of those was truly successful. The Troup Factory was built in 1845, and it was prosperous early on. It based its production on cotton manufacturing, which would not help the prospect of its future when cotton production would sky rocket and decrease the value. The production was so great by 1857 that another railroad was incorporated for the sole purpose of handling the products from the factory, but “disturbances due to the impending Civil War prevented its building.” This railroad would never be built, even after the war. The institution of slavery and the agrarian cotton based economy was great for Antebellum LaGrange, but when the town faced war times and the Reconstruction Era, the economy declined and the town struggled.

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82 Clifford L. Smith, *History of Troup County*, (Atlanta: Foote and Davies Company, 1933), 115.
LaGrange and Columbus looked drastically different leading up to the war, but this does not imply that one was more prosperous than the other. Both towns were established based on their geographic locations, and both had thriving economies, even if they were based on different premises. The population of the each town in the late 1850’s looks drastically different on paper. An 1858 article from the Columbus Tri-Weekly Enquirer, put population of Columbus at around ten thousand.\(^3\) LaGrange on the other hand, was said to have only boasted a population of around 1,700 in the year 1859.\(^4\) These numbers can be misleading, because one might think that just because the population of Columbus was much larger than LaGrange during this time period that LaGrange might not have been a very prosperous town. This is not true, as although LaGrange did not have the huge industrial boom like we saw in Columbus, by the year 1860, Troup County was the fourth wealthiest county in Georgia.\(^5\) It also should be noted that there was “no other site within the county that could compete with LaGrange.”\(^6\) LaGrange businesses and industries did not equal the number that was in Columbus in 1860, but it had diversified its economy by means of the railroad. This meant that LaGrange could secure goods and establish a thriving merchant district “nine years after the rails reached LaGrange, there were over thirty-five business firms around the square.”\(^7\) These businesses were established and run by the wealthy plantation owners who lived in town, while their slaves ran their agriculture interests on the outskirts of town. LaGrange was a diverse place, and by the time the war came in 1861, it certainly had a diversified and successful economy. The major thing that made this town different going into the war was that LaGrange had based its economy and capital on the slaves because they were the backbone of the money that the wealthy townsmen of LaGrange possessed, and to the contrary Columbus was thriving because of its industrial growth.\(^8\)

When the Civil War began in 1861, LaGrange was one of those southern towns that still mirrored the image of “Old South.” The geography of LaGrange helped facilitate the infrastructure of the economy, and because of this the people that became LaGrangians were apart of the idealistic “Old South.” The town was home to many good-hearted individuals, and because of its geographic location on the Atlanta and West Point Railroad, it became a Confederate Hospital Center.\(^9\) Like so many other southern towns, during the war, wom-

\(^3\) Columbus Tri-Weekly Enquirer, June 12, 1858.  
\(^4\) Augusta Chronicle, July 26, 1859.  
\(^6\) Forrest Clark Johnson III, A History of Lagrange, Georgia 1828-1900 (LaGrange: Family Tree, 1987), 34.  
\(^7\) Forrest Clark Johnson III, A History of Lagrange, Georgia 1828-1900 (LaGrange: Family Tree, 1987), 45.  
\(^8\) Learned from a conversation with Forest Clark Johnson III on April 4, 2015.  
\(^9\) Forrest Clark Johnson III, A History of Lagrange, Georgia 1828-1900 (LaGrange:
en were left to keep the town afloat. This meant that women were in charge of running the Confederate Hospital in LaGrange, and they also tried to help boost the morale of many of the injured troops who they encountered because they possessed that southern charm. Even though the women tried to put on a façade by having parties and gatherings to help morale, the underlying truth was that the town was really going through a time period of depression and tension. This tension and lack of men at home “caused concern for the defense of LaGrange should invaders or plunderers strike.” Much like Columbus, the geographic location of LaGrange had helped the town avoid the blunts of warfare during the early years of the war, but with the news of Wilson’s raids and Sherman’s destruction approximately sixty miles northeast in Atlanta, tension built and the citizens knew that a defense mechanism for the town had to be assembled.

General James H. Wilson was the man who brought horror to the citizens of Columbus during the Battle of Columbus in 1865, and he would also play a role in LaGrange’s Civil War conflict. The conflict that occurred in LaGrange was different than the battle of Columbus in many ways, and for many different reasons. First, the production in LaGrange for the Confederate cause was much smaller than in Columbus, LaGrange had a company called “Gilbert Forbes who made uniforms and boots on special order for men all over western Georgia.” LaGrange, however, did not produce a mass amount of goods that would be used for war times simply because they did not have the resources like Columbus did based on its geographic location. Secondly, because LaGrange was not as important to the Confederates cause, due to the fact it was hindered by its geographic location in regards to industrial growth, this meant that it would not be as important for Federal troops to attack it. No battle would be held in LaGrange, but a detachment from Wilson’s cavalry would be faced with deciding what to do to the town as they traveled through, April of 1865.

Federal leader Colonel Oscar H. LaGrange (no relation to the town) had defeated Confederate General Robert Tyler at the Battle of West Point on April 16, 1865, and he and his men then headed to Macon to rejoin General Wilson. The town that Colonel LaGrange would pass through on April 17 had set up a much different defense than any that he had encountered to this point. As

Family Tree, 1987), 69.
91 Forrest Clark Johnson III, A History of Lagrange, Georgia 1828-1900 (LaGrange: Family Tree, 1987), 70.
stated earlier, LaGrange’s male population was low during the war years, and because LaGrange was not a vital location for the Confederate’s cause, troops were not sent there to protect the city. This left a group of women soldiers, called the Nancy Harts, to defend the city from invasion. Mrs. J. Brown Morgan led the group, as she was the one who had “suggested that women form a home guard.”\(^{95}\) When Colonel LaGrange “rode through the town that bore his name, the Nancy Harts lined up for action, but surrendered on the promise of the diplomatic colonel to spare the city from looting and destruction.”\(^{96}\) Colonel LaGrange honored the request of the Nancy Harts, sparing personal property, and instead only destroying the railroad tracks, the depot, the tannery, and other things that were seen as potential benefactors for the Confederate’s cause. The damage to LaGrange was therefore minimal, and the Colonel and his men went on to “capture president Davis and the remains of the Confederate government, and the war was over.”\(^{97}\)

LaGrange avoided a battle during the American Civil War, but “desolation and changes brought from by the war greatly altered the economy.”\(^{98}\) The emancipation of the slaves essentially removed the economic base of the wealthy families, the plantations, and the town. Other results from the war and the destruction from Colonel LaGrange the realities that the transportation network was wrecked, business declined, and “industrialism only in its infancy in 1860 was shattered.”\(^{99}\) The town now had to pick itself up like Columbus, but because it geographically did not sit on the Chattahoochee River, the town had not adopted the industrial or merchant economy that would have allowed for it to recover quickly. The slaves were still vital before the war, and even though the town merchants had been successful and the transportation growth in the town had diversified the economy the town was simply not ready to abandon the “Old South” concept after the war. The agrarian lifestyle was what the wealthy people and the slaves of the town knew, and when the war was over many of these people reverted back to the old way of life and the blacks basically became “re-enslaved sharecroppers.” The whites did not have the cash to pay the slaves, so instead they provided the same things that had provided before the war like; food, clothing, housing, and tools.\(^{100}\) This was not


\(^{96}\) Clifford L. Smith, *History of Troup County*, (Atlanta: Foote and Davies Company, 1933), 75.


beneficial for LaGrange, even though the media outlet of LaGrange called *The LaGrange Reporter* supported the idea that an agricultural society was the way for LaGrange to be most prosperous in the post war era. In an article written on December 18, 1868, the editor declared that a section called Farm and Garden would continue to be a staple of the newspaper. The rationale given was “that the farm and garden is of all other businesses in life, the basis of all prosperity and independence.”¹⁰¹ The thought that in order to be prosperous in life you have to be a farmer is one reason why LaGrange struggled to show progress during the Reconstruction Era.

The lack of progress in LaGrange continued throughout the Reconstruction years, and the town “simply failed to advance between 1865 and 1877.”¹⁰² This failure was as much of a result of the prewar factors as it was of the postwar realities. The town stagnated because of the isolated but fertile geographic location that had first attracted the early settlers, the way of life that they brought with them, and the mental aspect of your greatest income being taken away because the capital that drove that income was now gone. In an empowering article written in *The LaGrange Reporter* on January 8th, 1868 the author has a “talk with the people of Lagrange.” The author writes this article not to offend the citizens, but instead to inspire them to grow. The author says to the LaGrangians

> We regret to see the absence of anything like public spirit, as is manifested by our citizens. While all communities, in other parts of Georgia are active with the spirit of enterprise, striving to build up their material interests and the general success of the country, our own people seem to have relaxed every energy, and are satisfied with mere living, as it were from day to day- not caring what is to become of tomorrow or the future, or their posterity. Not a single enterprise of merit has been inaugurated in the town since the war closed-not a factory of any sort- or and effort to do anything that would add to the material interests of the town. People of LaGrange- we are talking to the capitalists and property holders- we say you ought to be ashamed to live in this Rip Van Winkle state.¹⁰³

The article continues with the author listing different areas that the wealthy need to improve the town. This article proves that LaGrange did not advance and recover as fast as Columbus, which is hard to believe considering LaGrange did not face the massive destruction that Columbus did during the war. The fact that LaGrange was not able to advance industrially before the war because of its geographic location and the people who chose to settle in LaGrange

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¹⁰¹ *The LaGrange Reporter*. December 18, 1868.
¹⁰³ *The LaGrange Reporter*, December 8, 1869.
based on fertile lands, in the end hindered LaGrange from leaving the vision of the “old south” and from moving forward during Reconstruction.

LaGrange may not have made rapid strides industrially during this time period, but one thing that was a positive about the traits that the early settlers possessed was that education and religion remained a staple of LaGrange culture. Even after the Southern Female College of LaGrange was accidentally burned at the end of the war, while serving as a confederate hospital, the citizens of LaGrange and the President of the College would not allow for it to close. In the year 1868, the college bought an advertisement in the local newspaper, and stated that the college was being rebuilt “but for the present, the exercises will be conducted in the basement in the Baptist Church.” Additionally, another female college, named LaGrange Female College, was devastated by fire in 1860. Even though the economy of LaGrange was struggling at the time, and the initial reconstruction after the fire was supposed to be completed by slaves, the LaGrange people and the college's board would not let the school close. This particular college still stands today, and if it was not for the frontiersmen who came to LaGrange with strong religious affiliation and a desire to live in Lagrange's geographic location, this may not have been the case. By the year 1874, we get a true look at what LaGrange had to offer in the September 1 edition of The Weekly Constitution. This paper has a section that describes LaGrange’s population as 3,200 and comments on its two female colleges of note, six churches, two railroads, and a “refined society.”

This description just nine years after the war is not much different than what the town was like before the war. The town may have “reconstructed”, but it did so in its old image, and progress towards a new vision was not made in LaGrange as had been in the town that had been established based on the same Creek Treaty of 1865, Columbus.

By using the historiographical approach of local history to examine these two towns in west central Georgia the term reconstruction has been effectively deconstructed. Columbus was established as a trading post because of its geographical location, and in result of this a sustainable economy based on industrialization was established. This brought much chaos to Columbus during the war, but because the economy was able to recover based on the infrastructure before the war, progress was made. LaGrange, on the other hand used the institution of slavery to support the economy because the town's early inhabitants had been attracted to the fertility of the geographic location. This resulted in a wealthy class who flourished before the war, but because the financial support for business in the town came from the institution of slavery,

104 Clifford L. Smith, History of Troup County, (Atlanta: Foote and Davies Company, 1933), 132.
105 The LaGrange Reporter, December 8, 1869.
106 Clifford L. Smith, History of Troup County, (Atlanta: Foote and Davies Company, 1933), 130.
107 Weekly Constitution, Sept. 1, 1874.
Reconstruction was much more difficult. LaGrange was able to reconstruct, but it was not able to progress during this era simply because they did not know how. They knew how to base an economy on the institution of slavery, but when this was taken away they did not know where to turn.

These two case studies are very different, and because they are different we can derive at the notion that Reconstruction was different based on the geographical location of a place. Physical geography played a role in the each town’s infrastructure, which resulted in the experience of both war times and the Reconstruction Era. The story of reconstruction is not something that one can say is monolithic for a region, state, or city, and this is true not only for LaGrange and Columbus, but also throughout the south.
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