
Contents

Prompt Three	1
Prompt	1
Response	1

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Prompt

In reference to the portion of the film *Gone with the Wind* (1939, Victor Fleming) viewed in class, write an essay on the film's viewpoint regarding the period of Reconstruction, paying close attention to the issue of race and class. What is the film's perspective of the Northerners? Southerners? Freed slaves?

Response

In the Antebellum South, the average wealthy white man was indeed a plantation owner. For him, it would be cheaper to pay slaves to do his work, as he did not have to worry about labour laws and overall treatment of his subjects. Once the Civil War was over, there was a massive paradigm shift when it came to morality. Southerners were being told that their viewpoint and more importantly their livelihood could no longer be sustained. This quite obviously pissed off many Aristocrats of the time. In response to this move by the North, there was a clear and distinct anger and resentment towards the leaders enacting change. We can see this in how the filmmakers portray Northerners as people who can intrude into Southern plantations and take what they please. Many times these people are called Yankees, which is a term that originated from the British to describe American Colonists. This connotation implies that they are these people who were not "worthy" to be called members of the Crown of England. Southerners on the other hand are portrayed as the victims in all of this. To them, their lives drastically changed because some higher power is telling them they can't practice their moral values. In the film, however, we can see that in fact the way they defend their argument is quite weak. There is a complete contradiction to how treatment of slaves is portrayed. To the slaves, it is heartbreaking to think about being separated from their masters. This is illogical as Blacks in this time period were seen as degenerates and inferior to the White race. How can it be that Blacks in the film are equals and stand up citizens when the creators of this film do everything they can to prevent such progression of Black culture? We also see one of the plantation owner's give a freed slave a watch, something of monetary value that was one of the deceased character's prized possessions. Here Blacks are seen to be apart of a family unit, grieving for the loss of a member. In reality, slaves would be glad to see a death in the plantation's family as it one less person who hates their existence. There is also

an odd juxtaposition when prisoners are hired to cut wood in very unsafe conditions to the masters freed slaves. These prisoners are treated as some sort of subhumans and we can hear the owner of the business say that she would never put her slaves in these kind of work environments.