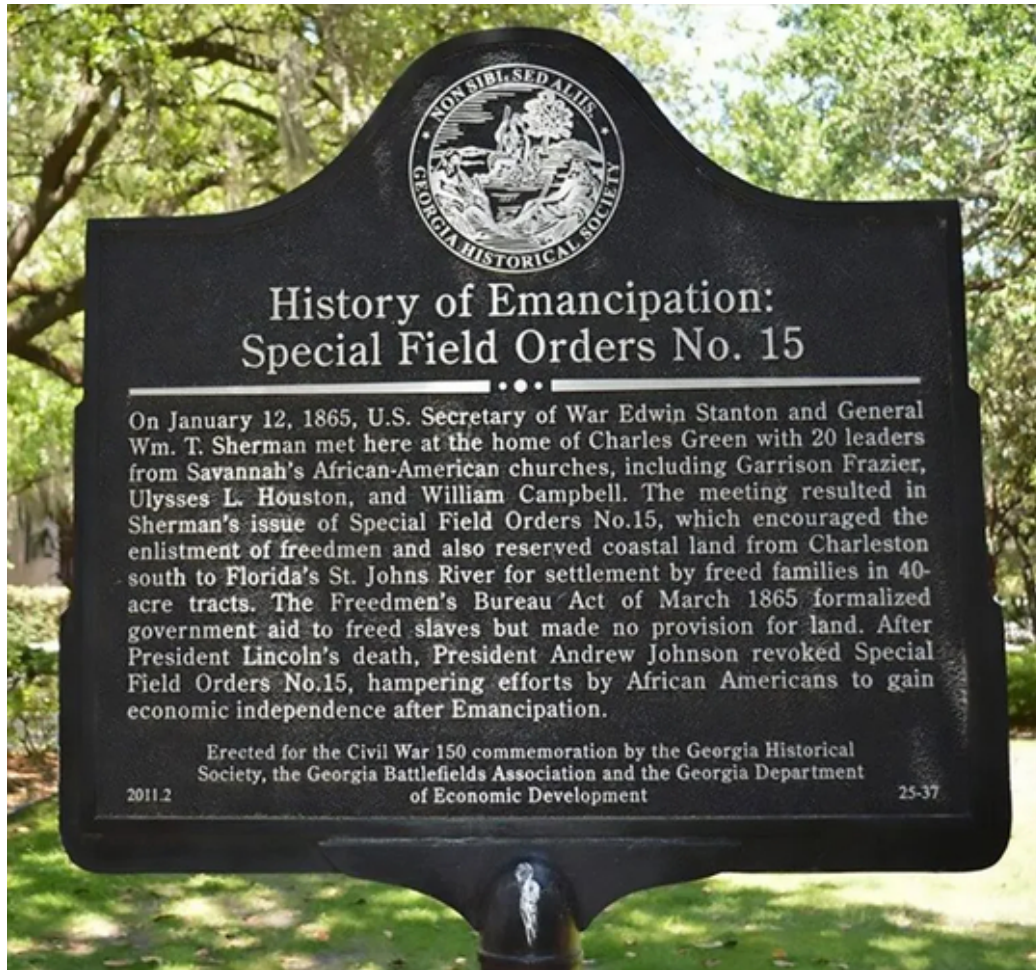




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Confiscation, Reparations and Reconstruction's solution to the 'Elon Musk problem'

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Civil War measure suggests direction to break Big Tech's assault today.

In his famous "March to the Sea" in 1864, during the final phase of the Civil War, Union General William T. Sherman faced a problem.

As his army marched through Confederate Georgia from Atlanta to Savannah, burning down the enslavers' mansions and confiscating their huge plantations, thousands of newly liberated freed people followed right behind the troops for protection from marauding enemy troops.

But this mass of humanity created a supply problem for the general. He contacted

President Lincoln, who sent Secretary of War Edward Stanton to Savannah to discuss the situation with Sherman. The solution was Special Field Order 15, the “40 acres and a mule” order, which is today famous for it being the basis of the reparations’ movement.

While our class celebrates Black History month, defying arch-racist “King Trump’s” executive orders, it’s important to note that the idea of land seizures embedded in Article 15 came not from Sherman or Stanton or even Lincoln. It came from 20 Black leaders, all of them ministers, many of them just freed from slavery, who sat down with Sherman and Stanton in Savannah on January 12, 1865.

This was indeed an unprecedented and historic moment.

When asked what the freed people wanted after the war, the Black leaders gave a simple answer: Land! The chosen leader of the group, Garrison Frazier [said](#):

“The way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land, and turn it and till it by our own labor ... and we can soon maintain ourselves and have something to spare ... We want to be placed on land until we are able to buy it and make it our own.” And when asked next where the freed slaves “would rather live — whether scattered among the whites or in colonies by themselves,” without missing a beat, Brother Frazier (as the transcript calls him) replied that “I would prefer to live by ourselves, for there is a prejudice against us in the South that will take years to get over ...”

The order that was composed set aside 400,000 acres of confiscated coastal land between South Carolina and Florida for the freed people, divided into 40-acre plots. Four days later Lincoln approved the order.

By June, 40,000 freed people settled on “Sherman’s land.”

But during the fall of 1865, ex-enslaver President Andrew Johnson, who took power

after Lincoln was killed, rescinded Field Order 15 and returned this land to the former slave owners.

This was a terrible setback for the 3.8 million Black people liberated from slavery. And it has provided the impetus for the righteous movement for reparations to their descendants for the centuries of their unpaid labor from the government and particularly from Wall Street for the “seed money” for U.S. capitalism.

Radical Republicans fight for confiscation

Before the Civil War, the slave owners exercised tremendous political power, dominating the levers of government power in all its branches. That power came from the tremendous wealth produced on the slave plantations from cotton, sugar and tobacco. It should be noted that the slave owners’ power also was increased because the original Constitution stated that three out of every five slaves were counted in the census to increase the number of Representatives in Congress and to increase their number of electoral college votes for president. Of course the enslaved people could not vote.

After the Civil War, the 15th Amendment, giving the freedmen the vital right to vote, erased the three-fifths clause, but it did little to stop the former slave owners from using their land to regain their iron rule over the freed Black families.

In March 1865, Representative Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania [proposed](#) that all planter lands in the former Confederacy be confiscated and redistributed to ex-slaves and poor whites in forty-acre tracts. This was modeled after General Sherman’s Field Order 15. Stevens argued that with the money from the sale of the remaining confiscated land, the U.S. government could pay off its war debt and finance pensions for Union soldiers and their families, as well as eliminate the power base of the enslavers:

We especially insist that the property of the chief rebels should be seized and [used for] the payment of the national debt, caused by the unjust and wicked war they instigated...

The whole fabric of southern society must be changed, and never can it be done if this opportunity is lost. Without this, this government can never be, as it has never been, a true republic...

Steven's proposal was never passed. The rising industrial and banking ruling class would not allow the idea of the government seizing wealth producing property and turning it over to the people, particularly Black people, to take hold, even from the slave owners that started the brutal war.

The dominance of the former slave owning class was indeed restored in 1876 by the U.S. withdrawing troops from the South and ending Reconstruction. Southern planters and their KKK minions imposed on the Black population the atrocious rule of Jim Crow, of sharecropping, of prison work gangs, of lynchings and much more.

Nevertheless, the idea of defeating a sector of the capitalist class from seizing complete control of the government, which is precisely what our class faces today from Musk and Big Tech, by confiscating their wealth-producing property is certainly now worth considering.

Government data belongs to the people, not the billionaires

For many decades the federal government has gathered and stored vast amounts of personal data, first on paper, and then on computer systems. Various laws have been passed to protect the people's information contained in government files, including the [1974 Privacy Act](#), which has been updated multiple times.

But with Trump's election and the creation of the unofficial "Department of Government Efficiency" (DOGE) headed by super-billionaire Elon Musk, all these

data from all government agencies have been opened up to and seized by Silicon Valley's Big Tech monopolies. Along with that, tens of thousands of government workers, many of whom are union members, tasked with guarding and maintaining this data, have been summarily fired.

This gives enormous economic, social and political power to these billionaires, unchallenged by any statutes or regulations.

Already they have created their own money - cryptocurrency. They are using that to swindle people out of their incomes of real money so as to raise capital and build their dream project - Artificial General Intelligence (AGI).

Of course, these digital titans already exert huge control over the national and international economy. For example, Jeff Bezos' Amazon makes more money from its ownership of its vast array of computer servers managing global financial transactions than it does from its sweatshop warehouses.

Shortly after taking office, Donald Trump announced the Stargate Project, a \$500 billion project to develop U.S. AI infrastructure, and struck down a Biden executive order on regulating AI.

It was not these rich parasites who developed these computer systems. It was an army of research workers, many of whom evidently do not share their bosses' vision of total social dominance and control. Marc Andreessen, a Silicon Valley billionaire venture capitalist, **told** an interviewer from the New York Times about the transformation of their highly skilled workforce of research workers:

The most privileged people in society, the most successful, send their kids to the most politically radical institutions, which teach them how to be America-hating communists.

When Andreessen calls these well-educated workers "communists," he means that

they are reluctant to build a computer system that poses as much or more danger to society as the Manhattan Project's development of nuclear weapons. Other digital titans call their own workers "snowflakes."

On February 18, Trump's VP J.D. Vance, who was also a Silicon Valley venture, or more accurately, "vulture" capitalist, [lectured](#) European leaders about not standing in the way of the U.S. going full speed ahead in developing this technology and made a not-so-subtle threat:

The Trump administration is troubled by reports that some foreign governments are considering tightening the screws on U.S. tech companies with international footprints.

Now, America cannot and will not accept that, and we think it's a terrible mistake, not just for the United States of America, but for your own countries.

These billionaires are using king Trump to open the gates to their takeover of all government function, to implement their AI-empowered agenda to maintain their profit streams by slashing every hard-won government benefit since the New Deal and the Civil Rights movement, to attack working people and oppressed people here and around the world, to maintain their faltering global hegemony.

They hope to implement a drastic austerity program, lowering our living standard and filling their coffers, all with a few computer keystrokes.

And since the core of this coterie of rich parasites consumed by their vision of total dominance are apartheid South Africa emigres like Elon Musk and Peter Thiel, they relish implementing Trump's neo-Nazi program attacking DEI, migrants, LGBTQ+ people and unions.

Reconstruction offers a revolutionary solution

Big Tech is conducting its ongoing coup by seizing control of the vast collection of the people's data. They have captured the people's property and converted it to their wealth-generating private property.

King Trump and Elon "muskrat" Musk have sparked a growing movement of resistance. From the courts to social media to the streets, more and more of our class have made their voices heard in protest.

Of course, every aspect of resistance is valid. Every demand for reform is essential, whether to protect migrants, to demand equal rights for transgender people, to protect Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security, to assert justice and reparations for the oppressed communities, to have our children taught the true history of the struggles by people of color, and much more.

This resistance movement is bound to grow stronger, perhaps to the point where a general strike will shut the system down. That would be historic.

But now is the time for the left to inject the idea proposed by those 20 Black ministers to General Sherman in the waning days of the Civil War and raised in the halls of Congress by the Radical Republicans during the revolutionary period of Reconstruction - confiscation of wealth producing property.

We can and should propose that these Big Tech monopolies should be, in modern terms, expropriated, and turned into public non-profit utilities. Then they can be managed by the "communist" research workers and be operated for the benefit of all rather than the small band of billionaire parasites.

Of course, to do that will require a new kind of government, a new kind of state, one controlled by and for the benefit of the actual wealth producers of society, the workers and oppressed communities.

Source: [Fighting Words](#)

