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# The 1868 St. Landry Massacre: Reconstruction's Deadliest Episode of Violence

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THE 1868 ST. LANDRY MASSACRE: RECONSTRUCTION'S DEADLIEST  
EPISODE OF VIOLENCE

by

Matthew Christensen

A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in History

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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Major Professor

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Graduate School Approval

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## ABSTRACT

### THE 1868 ST. LANDRY MASSACRE: RECONSTRUCTION'S DEADLIEST EPISODE OF VIOLENCE

by

Matthew Christensen

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2012  
Under the Supervision of Professor Robert S. Smith

The St. Landry Massacre is representative of the pervasive violence and intimidation in the South during the 1868 presidential canvass and represented the deadliest incident of racial violence during the Reconstruction Era. Southern conservatives used large scale collective violence in 1868 as a method to gain political control and restore the antebellum racial hierarchy. From 1865-1868, these Southerners struggled against the federal government, carpetbaggers, and Southern black populations to gain this control, but had largely failed in their attempts. After the First Reconstruction Act of March, 1867 forced Southern governments to accept universal male suffrage, Southern conservatives utilized violence and intimidation to achieve their goals, which escalated as the 1868 presidential election neared. Violence was nearly omnipresent in Louisiana during the presidential canvass and was the primary reason behind the Democratic victory in the state.

This violence not only succeeded in its initial goal of securing a victory for the Democratic Party during the 1868 presidential election, but long term consequences also arose. Louisiana responded to the violence with a series of election laws, one creating

the Returning Board on Elections, a potentially corrupt committee that could decide elections in the state by invalidating votes it deemed to be obtained by fraud. Nationally, the First Enforcement Act protected black voters and rights granted by previous reconstruction legislation. St. Landry Parish illustrates the local shift of power after 1868, where an instance of conservative boss rule occurred and the parish Republican Party was unable to fully recover for the remainder of Reconstruction. By 1874, conservative Democratic control was so complete in St. Landry that it became home to Louisiana's first White League. Although 1868 was the peak of Reconstruction Era violence, conservative Democrats resorted to force when other attempts at regional control failed for the remainder of the period.

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Major Professor

Date

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## Chapter I

### Early Power Struggles in the South During Reconstruction

The St. Landry Massacre of 1868 was not an isolated incident. Instead, the events in St. Landry serve as both a case study in and a precursor for the violence that would come to earmark the Reconstruction Era. This violence emerged out of the struggle between former Southern confederate loyalists, Southern black populations, Republican politicians in the South, pejoratively known in the region as carpetbaggers, and the federal government in deciding the scope and scale of freedmen's rights after emancipation. White Southerners, who were overwhelmingly Democrats, generally preferred a return to the antebellum racial hierarchy while Republicans promoted steps towards equality for the freedmen. Southern attempts to control the freedmen labor force, including labor fraud, economic sanctions, and legislation, largely failed by 1868 and forced changes in Democratic strategies. These failures, when combined with poor economic conditions, legislative setbacks, and an upcoming presidential election in 1868, led Democrats to champion violence and intimidation as means to acquire political victories.

While these tactics did not lead Democrats to a national victory in the 1868 presidential election, they did win Louisiana and were able to secure a long-term power base in localities that could not effectively curtail large scale collective violence directed at Republicans, white and black alike. St. Landry Parish, being the center of the largest racial massacre during Reconstruction, was one of these locales, where no Republican organization was present that could threaten local Democratic superiority for the

remainder of the period. Democratic control was so secure that Thomas C. Anderson, a state Senator, was able to consolidate power in the parish after the massacre. By 1874, St. Landry became the home of the first Louisiana White League, a Democratic paramilitary organization designed to remove Republican officeholders from their positions. To understand why the massacre occurred, economic, social, and political realities of St. Landry Parish and Louisiana as a whole must be examined first.

After the Civil War, the Southern economy was in shambles. In Louisiana, capital and credit starved planters often struggled to make ends meet and natural disasters in both 1866 and 1867 crippled production levels on farms. To complicate the situation, many Southerners lost significant portions of their wealth due to the emancipation of their slaves, who now required pay. The ensuing struggle to determine the system of labor and rights granted to the freedmen existed on the national, state, and local levels. The Freedmen's Bureau and Union Leagues attempted to aid the freedmen in their transition from slavery to freedom while Southern conservatives, led by multiple failed presidential vetoes, attempted to prevent any measures of reconstruction. These federal organizations also attempted to prevent methods of freedmen labor control by Southern conservatives, including labor fraud and economic sanctions. Southern states passed repressive Black Codes in 1865 and 1866, measures that were mostly counteracted by the Civil Rights Act of 1866. By March, 1867, universal male suffrage became inevitable with the First Reconstruction Act and violence became a strategy for controlling the South's black population. This violence escalated as the 1868 presidential election grew near and resulted in the utilization of large scale massacres to control the black vote. The 1868 massacres occurred as part of a progression of the sectional conflict over what



reconstruction should entail and only occurred after previous Southern attempts failed to wrest control from "Congressional usurp(ers)."<sup>1</sup>

Reconstruction began early in Louisiana. In April 1862, General Benjamin F. Butler captured New Orleans, leaving Vicksburg as the last Southern stronghold on the Mississippi at this point of the Civil War. Given on January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation freed all slaves in areas that were still in rebellion. Because Louisiana produced the vast majority of the nation's sugar and its production could not be replaced without importation, the federal army took control of sugar parishes within the state, which excluded slaves in this area from the Emancipation Proclamation. However, federal control did not reach throughout Louisiana, leaving many parishes in the northern and western areas of the state disputed. St. Landry Parish fell in the area outside of federal reach and was not fully secured until the war's end. In the federally controlled region, blacks were forced to remain at work on plantations under contract with army supervision, although corporal punishment was outlawed as a means to control labor. Planters conflicted often with both regional blacks and the Union army. By this point, the slaves, realizing they were on the precipice of freedom, began to assert rights such as a Saturday holiday. The Union army confiscated crops, property, and was often blamed for poor crop yields after occupation; the common Southern belief being that if slaves were not induced to work, productivity would fall drastically. Louisiana's constitutional convention of 1864 was able to abolish slavery in the state after Confederate General

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<sup>1</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 5/16/1868.

Nathaniel P. Banks suffered multiple defeats in the Louisiana Red River campaign, but sufficient support for universal suffrage was still absent at this time.<sup>2</sup>

Louisiana contained a distinct black Creole demographic labeled as *les gens de couleur libre*, or “the free people of color,” a group mostly contained within New Orleans. These free people of color were of African and European (mainly French or Spanish) origin, and enjoyed many rights not accorded to other black individuals in the state during antebellum years, including property rights. Property rights, education, and a desire to be considered distinct from the other black populations in the United States allowed for this free population to hold slaves and become prosperous. After the Civil War, however, many members of this group did not fare well, as they “had not only lost their slaves, farm machinery, livestock, buildings, and personal possessions, but their land as well.” While a large amount of the free people of color lost much of their antebellum status and wealth during the Reconstruction period, some maintained influence. One of these influential free people of color was Louis Roudanez, the founder of the *New Orleans Tribune*, a Radical paper that occasionally came into conflict with moderate Republican leadership.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the Civil War, St. Landry Parish contained much of southwestern Louisiana, ranging from the current Texas-Louisiana border with the Sabine River in the west, the Gulf of Mexico to the south, bordered by Point Coupe and St. Martin parishes to the east, and Rapides and Avoyelles parishes to the north. In 1840, Calcasieu Parish

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<sup>2</sup> John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1862-1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 33-51; Carolyn E. DeLatte, "Reconstruction in St. Landry Through 1868" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, McNeese State University, 1972), 8-21, hereafter cited as DeLatte, "Reconstruction."; U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Agricultural Yearbook, 1923* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924), 220.

<sup>3</sup> Loren Schweningen, “Antebellum Free Persons of Color in Postbellum Louisiana,” *Louisiana History* 30, no. 4 (Autumn 1989), 345-364.

formed out of western St. Landry Parish. By 1860, St. Landry's northern border experienced minor changes and on the southern border Vermillion and Lafayette parishes were created. By the start of the Civil War, St. Landry Parish contained 1,405,000 acres of land and multiple bayous, the most important two being Bayou Courtableau and Bayou Teche. St. Landry contained multiple types of soil and land, allowing for a diversity of agricultural ventures. Alluvial soil was found near parish waterways and was suitable for both cotton and sugar production. The parish also contained prairie land that was confined to its western reaches, where livestock became the primary commodity. In the central and northern areas of the parish, away from the hilly region near Opelousas, black prairie soil was found and used for cultivation of corn and cotton.<sup>4</sup>

In the early 1740's the first French traders appeared in Opelousas, the eventual parish seat of St. Landry Parish, during a time where western Louisiana was considered to be a frontier and later a gateway to Mexico for the Spanish. The land traded hands between the French and Spanish several times during the remainder of the century, until the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 transferred control to the United States. During its early years under European control, St. Landry's economic staples consisted of cattle and fur. The population of the parish remained small until American control, numbering only 2,453 in 1803. By 1820, cotton had received extended attention, contributing to a sharp population increase to 10,085, numbering 5,368 free whites, 3,951 slaves, and 756 free persons of color. With increasing cotton production and further settlement west,

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<sup>4</sup> E.W. Hilgard, "Report on the Cotton Production of the State of Louisiana, With a Discussion of the General Agricultural Features of the State," U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census, Report on Cotton Production* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 22-24; Keith Sheldon Hambrick, "The Social History of St. Landry Parish, 1850-1860" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, McNeese State University, 1971), 1-4.

Opelousas and St. Landry Parish increased in population throughout the antebellum years.<sup>5</sup>

By 1860, at 23,104 inhabitants, St. Landry was the third most populated parish in the state, behind only Orleans and Rapides. Of these, 11,436 were slaves, 10,703 were white, 965 were free people of color, and one person was unlabeled. As sugar and cotton were the most profitable goods produced in the parish at the time and each required distinct systems of labor, the evolution of labor in the parish was correlated to their presence. In 1860, cotton (2.7% of the statewide yield) was produced on a larger scale in the parish than sugar (1.6%) and cane molasses (2.5%). These goods, along with corn, were produced along St. Landry's waterways and in most of the parish outside of its western reaches. Other goods produced include cheese (19%), tobacco (12.8%), wool (9.6%), Indian corn (4.8%), and insignificant quantities of beans, beeswax, butter, hay, honey, peas, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, rice, and varied manufactured goods. Prairie land in western St. Landry was far from its population centers of Opelousas and Washington, but provided significant portions of Louisiana's cheese and wool production.<sup>6</sup>

Louisiana in the nineteenth century contained two important economic staples, sugar and cotton. Sugar was mostly confined to southeastern Louisiana while cotton dominated the northern reaches of the state. St. Landry Parish was located on the outskirts of the sugar region, so while cotton remained the predominant crop sugar still

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourth Census, 1820* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1821); Winston DeVille, *Opelousas: The History of a French and Spanish Military Post in America, 1716-1803* (Cottonport, Louisiana: Polyanthos, Inc., 1973), 14-34.; Hambrick, 1-19.; Francois Xavier Martin, *The History of Louisiana From the Earliest Period* (New Orleans: A.T. Penniman & Co., 1829), 205.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of Agriculture, 1860* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of Population, 1870* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872).

held influence. However, the importance of sugar dwindled in the parish prior to the Civil War. St. Landry produced 5,950 hogsheads<sup>7</sup> of sugar cane (2.6% of total statewide production) and 317,970 gallons of cane molasses (2.9%) in 1850, but 1860 saw a decrease to only 3,437 hogsheads of sugar cane (1.55%) and an increase to 339,610 gallons of cane molasses (2.5%). St. Landry's sugar production recovered when comparing parish output to the statewide yield in 1870, with 1,988 hogsheads of sugar cane (2.5%), and 118,110 gallons of molasses cane (2.6%), but natural disasters, deterioration of capital, and labor issues all stunted total production after the Civil War. Sugar did not experience recovery approaching prewar numbers until the 1880's, aided by improved technology and more reliable labor. This reliable labor force was gradually obtained through concessions made by planters as Reconstruction progressed, as federal agencies and legislation forced planters to realize that a full return to the antebellum racial hierarchy was impossible. In the 1880 census returns, St. Landry Parish produced 2,877 hogsheads of sugar (1.7%) and 190,937 gallons of cane molasses (1.6%). The shift from sugar to cotton in the parish was drastic, as Louisiana produced 21,128 (2.7%) bales of cotton during the 1860 census year while the 1870 returns show a yield of 14,305 (4.1%) bales. By 1880, St. Landry Parish produced 23,148 bales of cotton (4.6%).<sup>8</sup>

In St. Landry Parish during Reconstruction, sugar was unable to overtake cotton as the predominant crop and held limited significance in regard to statewide production. By the 1870 census, 78% of total farms in the parish were under fifty acres, suggesting dominance of small land holdings that correspond with sharecropping, as opposed to the

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<sup>7</sup> One hogshead usually equaled 1,000 pounds when dealing with sugar.

<sup>8</sup> *Eighth Census of Agriculture, 1860*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of Agriculture, 1870* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Compendium of the Tenth Census, 1880* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1885); H. Niles, ed., "Culture of the Sugar Cane," *Niles' Weekly Register* 49 (September, 1835 – March, 1836), 10/24/1835, 129.

large, centralized plantations usually used for successful sugar planting. But, sugar's presence in the parish cannot be ignored, as unique labor formations intrinsic to sugar planting impacted the regional effectiveness of violence and intimidation, where sugar laborers were often more protected against attacks due to their proximity to one another compared to the isolated nature of tenant farmers in the countryside.<sup>9</sup>

After the Civil War, "King Cotton" had not lost its importance in the South and northern Louisiana parishes were no different. Cotton was generally planted annually around March. During the summer months, the process of thinning took place, removing inferior plants until the remaining plants were about twelve to fourteen inches apart. August marked the start of picking season, and laborers picked cotton until around the new year. During the picking season, cotton was continuously transferred to the gin house for refinement. As with any crop in the nineteenth century, cotton was vulnerable to environmental catastrophes. Floods, droughts, early frosts, the cotton worm, and tornados were some of the calamities that could befall a crop. Frequent repair of ditches and canals were necessary to prevent flooding. But, due to the length of the picking season, less of a need for centralized and coordinated labor, and the relatively low startup cost when compared to sugar, cotton was the preferred crop in Louisiana during the immediate post-war years. Soil prepared for cotton planting could also be used for corn, with both requiring the same process, easing the economic troubles many planters found themselves in after the Civil War. These factors allowed for the creation of tenancy, also known as sharecropping, and played a role in increased violence in country parishes

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<sup>9</sup> *Ninth Census of Agriculture, 1870.*

during Reconstruction, as military intervention and federal control were limited outside of New Orleans and areas easily accessible by river.<sup>10</sup>

After failures of alternative methods of labor management on cotton plantations, including wage labor, planters settled on sharecropping. Here, tenants planted on tracts of land owned by planters in exchange for what usually amounted to 1/3 to 1/2 of the crop. Planters provided lodging, clothing, food, and often seed for those unable to provide their own, deducted from the tenant's share of the final product. This practice allowed planters to spread risk among their laborers, as pay was directly related to the price received for the crop and the total yield. But, especially in poor crop years, tenants could end up in debt and vulnerable to exploitation by the planters. Planters exploited labor by charging tenants for costs incurred during the crop year, such as food, clothing, and other necessities, often charging exorbitant amounts and crippling laborers financially. Poor comparable conditions were evident by 1869, when Southern black sharecroppers earned an average of \$200 per year, while those working under wage labor in the sugar region earned from \$325 - \$350 per year. Not only were sharecroppers earning less than those under wage labor, they often found themselves isolated apart from one another in the countryside, making them more vulnerable to violence, an important aspect that contributed to greater violence in cotton regions during Reconstruction.<sup>11</sup>

To secure a successful sugar crop, planters faced obstacles not present with cotton. Sugar required meticulous care of the growing plants and a very strenuous rolling

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<sup>10</sup> Donald J. Millet, "Some Aspects of Agricultural Retardation in Southwest Louisiana, 1865-1900," *Louisiana History* 11, no. 1 (Winter, 1970), 37-61.; Charles S. Davis, *The Cotton Kingdom in Alabama* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1974), 61-65.

<sup>11</sup> Ralph Shlomowitz, "The Origins of Southern Sharecropping," *African American Life, 1861-1900: From Slavery to Sharecropping*, ed. Donald Nieman (New York: Garland Publishing, inc., 1994), 199-217; Rodrigue, 73-75, 150.

season during which the crop was harvested. Sugar crop seasons also overlapped, where one fifth of the crop was saved for the following year, a practice that would present problems after the war when planters were forced to compensate their labor force. Experience played a large role in determining the success of a sugar crop, as the planter could increase the quality of cane produced by allowing it to ripen longer, but by doing so the chances of a frost ruining the crop also increased. Sugar was processed on the plantations, a practice integrated with planting and harvesting in Louisiana on a large scale until the 1880's. Because of the on-site processing, portions of the plantation's labor force cut the lumber necessary for this procedure and operated the refinery machinery. In 1822, a steam powered sugar mill became available, replacing the less efficient kettle furnaces. By 1861, nearly eighty percent of Louisiana plantations used steam power to process their sugar. Under strictly regimented slave labor in the antebellum years, this process ran relatively smoothly, barring any developments from nature.<sup>12</sup>

To prevent work stoppages during the rolling season, coordination between field and mill labor was necessary. Due to this required coordination, quality differences based on ripeness of the cane and the skill of labor both in the fields and mills, the quality of sugar produced varied greatly even within the yield of a single plantation. Because of these factors and differing seasonal tasks required in sugar production, planters realized that a centralized system was required to provide for an acceptable, profitable crop. In the immediate postwar years, freedmen desired a system of labor that deviated from the gang labor prevalent under slavery. Early labor experiments in the sugar region found broad success only under wage labor, as planters were able to obtain the coordinated,

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<sup>12</sup> Rodrigue, 13-20, 128; J. Carlyle Sitterson, *Sugar Country: The Cane Sugar Industry in the South, 1753-1900* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1953), 138-139.



reliable labor force necessary if the freedmen felt that they were treated fairly and allowed some mobility.<sup>13</sup>

### Recovery of Cotton and Sugar Prices During Reconstruction

Louisiana Cotton Production After the Civil War <sup>14</sup>			Louisiana Sugar Production After the Civil War		
Year	Bales	Price/Pound(cents)	Year	Hogsheads	Price/Hogshead
1866	131,000	32.16	1866	39,000	\$137.50
1867	167,000	24.54	1867	37,647	154.00
1868	248,000	28.64	1868	84,256	137.80
1869	351,000	25.31	1869	87,090	140.00
1870	567,000	17.04	1870	144,881	102.26
1871	337,000	21.88	1871	128,461	97.16
1872	503,000	20.22	1872	108,529	91.68
1873	454,000	17.29	1873	89,496	86.50
1874	536,000	15.67	1874	116,867	95.82
1875	689,000	13.10	1875	114,146	95.90
1876	564,000	11.89	1876	169,331	83.00
1877	586,000	11.17	1877	194,964	95.50

Wartime production levels were poor throughout the Confederacy, as the destruction of infrastructure by Northern armies, occasional planter substitution of sustenance crops in the place of cash crops, and chronic labor shortages all contributed to the low numbers. The fact that Louisiana's sugar economy was under federal control made little difference. These low yields resulted in inflated prices that would begin to experience a consistent decline as production increased after the crop failures of 1866 and 1867. After the Civil War, economic prospects improved but not significantly, as capital used in gathering and refining of both crops was dilapidated, labor was transitioning from

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 59-77, 84, 93, 120-125.

<sup>14</sup> Numbers differ for both sugar and cotton production in the varied government reports and other sources, sugar moreso than cotton. For information regarding sugar, historians Joe Gray Taylor and John C. Rodrigue have both accepted numbers presented by the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* on an annual basis every September 1. Due to this historical acceptance, I will be using these numbers combined with census data from aggregate reports in applicable years; Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed, 1863-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 370; The standard conversion is 500 pounds/bale of cotton. Cotton data compiled from "Statistics on Cotton and Related Data," *Statistical Bulletin 99* (Washington D.C., 1951), 51,53,55,150.

slave to free, and ever-important levees were often in shambles. During the post-war period, sugar production experienced an increased recovery time when compared to cotton, not nearing antebellum numbers with regularity until the 1880's, while cotton was able to approach these numbers by the early 1870's. The primary differing factor in the sugar and cotton industries that contributed to sugar's slow recovery was that cultivation of a successful sugar crop required more capital than cotton. Due to issues with capital, many planters were initially unable to continue operations on sugar plantations, switching to other crops. In 1866, the *Opelousas Courier* noted that only five or six sugar planters out of one hundred seventy in St. Landry before the war would be planting. Regardless of the accuracy behind those numbers, the decline of sugar as a profitable crop in the early post-war years is noteworthy.<sup>15</sup>

Although the state of capital, labor, credit, and infrastructure all played roles in decreased yields, crop failures in 1866 and 1867 were primarily caused by natural disasters. Early frosts, flooding, tornados, droughts, and harmful insects were examples of problems that could beset a planter in nineteenth century Louisiana. These problems were not new, but when combined with regional changes after the Civil War, credit and labor starved planters were often crippled when a natural disaster struck. Early frosts could destroy entire crops. Many levees were in poor repair after the Civil War and floods became a common concern throughout Louisiana. In 1866, the *Southern Sentinel* found that it was "safe to predict an almost universal destruction of the crops" in areas of the state in which the Red or Mississippi rivers flowed. Multiple tornados occurred during this time period, wreaking havoc on crops and infrastructure wherever they

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<sup>15</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 11/17/1866; *Statistical Bulletin 99* (Washington D.C., 1951), 51,53,55; Sitterson, 231-232.

appeared. Insects also whittled down crop numbers, none more than the dreaded cotton worm, also known as the army worm. Cotton worms appeared late in the summer, causing heavier damage the later the crop was cultivated.<sup>16</sup>

Disease was a common regional problem in subtropical, swampy Louisiana, including but not limited to cholera, yellow fever, and small pox. Yellow fever was particularly devastating and widely feared, as regional outbreaks could tear through an entire community if left unchecked. In 1853, a massive yellow fever outbreak consumed St. Landry Parish, resulting in an ordinance that enforced quarantine procedures. But, these procedures were not as effective as was hoped and resulted in many citizens deserting Opelousas to avoid contamination. The next large outbreak occurred in the late summer of 1867, in the midst of regional crop failures, a destroyed Southern economy, and a contested transition from slave to free labor. On August 10, the Opelousas Board of Police revised the 1853 quarantine ordinance to remove any infected individuals from the town limits, prohibit shipping through waterways, and prevent any travel or trade with the town of Washington, where the disease was declared to be an "epidemic." The Opelousas Relief Association formed on October 6 to combat the disease, which was composed out of the St. Landry Police Jury and included prominent Democrats that would play a role in the 1868 massacre, such as Charles Thompson, a local businessman, and Felix King, later to become the mayor of Opelousas. Despite the optimistic claims of the *Opelousas Courier* that the city of Opelousas remained relatively unscathed, reports of yellow fever deaths appeared with regularity. In fact, just as in 1853, many in charge of enforcing the quarantine and operating the Opelousas Relief Association simply fled

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<sup>16</sup> *Southern Sentinel*, 6/2/1866; *Opelousas Courier*, 7/27/1867, 2/1/1868.

the town to a safer area, leaving the citizens without adequate protection from the disease.<sup>17</sup>

Internal improvements were a constant concern for residents of St. Landry Parish, but goals regarding upkeep were rarely realized due to problems such as labor shortages and funding deficiencies. Inadequate protection against fire was a common complaint of parish residents, who had experienced over a dozen fires during the previous decade. The Opelousas Fire Company reformed in late 1865 after several years of no operation. However, fears had not been alleviated by the reappearance of the fire company, as one parish resident called for an investigation of dwellings within the city limits of Opelousas. This resident believed that improperly placed stoves and chimneys posed an "imminent danger" to the safety of the inhabitants within. Fire safety was not the only concern regarding parish infrastructure, for parish roads and bridges were often in poor condition and greatly hindered travel.<sup>18</sup>

Proper upkeep of roads and bridges was necessary for intra-parish travel and for the transportation of goods to New Orleans, as the inability to get goods to market could spell disaster for planters. St. Landry had trouble maintaining its roads before the Civil War, but by the final stretches of the conflict more issues became apparent. In early 1865, the *Opelousas Courier* complained about how the devaluation of Confederate currency reduced the tax revenue to 1/20 of pre-war levels. Poor levee repair increased regional flooding, which in turn washed out and destroyed many roads and bridges. Road overseers, appointed to maintain roads, and plantation hands were often sent as labor for this work under threat of a fine, but their effectiveness was not permanent and was

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<sup>17</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 5/12/1866, 9/21/1867, 9/28/1867, 10/12/1867, 10/19/1867, 10/26/1867, 11/9/1867, 11/16/1867; *Opelousas Journal*, 11/23/1867; DeLatte, "Reconstruction," 94-96; Hambrick, 71-75.

<sup>18</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 12/2/1865; *Southern Sentinel*, 1/27/1866; Hambrick, 64-66.

usually limited to roads benefiting the planters that provided the labor. Conditions had not improved by 1867, with one local newspaper declaring that only the "rash adventurer" would dare to traverse the muddy road between Opelousas and nearby Washington, located six miles north. Bridges necessary for travel within the parish were also in constant need of repair. In 1867, the St. Landry Toll Bridge Company was created to maintain multiple bridges within the parish and installed a toll system for funding. This company was led by influential men in the parish, including Elbert Gantt, president of the police jury, Yves D'Avy, parish recorder, and Thomas C. Anderson, a state senator from 1864-1866 and 1868-1877 who was able to consolidate power in St. Landry after the 1868 massacre.<sup>19</sup>

Levees along the Mississippi and Red Rivers had also gone largely neglected during the Civil War, causing floods that destroyed infrastructure and a significant number of crops. After the war, ventures to repair these levees were often short-term and poorly done, as funding and adequate labor were difficult to obtain. In 1866, a Louisiana Board of Levee Commissioners was created to oversee levee works. Fear of floods caused by levee breaks and anticipation of successful repairs permeated newspapers during the 1860's, but how and by whom the repairs would be completed presented a problem for poorly funded local and state governments. Due to the intense labor required to maintain and repair the levees, many freedmen required higher pay to do these jobs. Some freedmen that desired increased mobility without a binding contract became

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<sup>19</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 2/4/1865; *Southern Sentinel*, 2/17/1866, 5/4/1867, 5/25/1867; Hambrick, 68-71; DeLatta, "Reconstruction," 45-48.

jobbers, taking work at plantations that regular hands did not want, such as levee maintenance and woodcutting.<sup>20</sup>

Although economic hardships, disease, and natural disasters were all influential in the lives of Southern whites, the fate of the newly emancipated slaves was their foremost concern. Along with the threat of black suffrage, the most significant change facing planters and freedmen during the initial post-war years was the transition from slave to free labor. The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands was created in 1865 to aid freedmen in the transition from slavery to freedom by providing legal protection, schooling, medical aid, and relief for indigent citizens. The Freedmen's Bureau also provided planters with farming implements and seed in exchange for a crop lien, oversaw labor contracts, and controlled apportionment of confiscated land. However, President Andrew Johnson's leniency with the defeated Confederate landholders limited the Bureau's effectiveness; many of these apportionments were returned to the previous Confederate owners, discouraging freedmen who had hoped for the fulfillment of "forty acres and a mule." The Bureau also suffered from a chronic lack of adequate funding, as evidenced by their inability to provide relief during the winter of 1866-67. Additional funds to the indigent citizens of Louisiana were discontinued on August 20, 1867, leaving many without support in the face of another crop failure.<sup>21</sup>

After emancipation, freedmen generally desired increased autonomy and rights in the workplace while planters wanted increased control similar to that which they held in the antebellum years. Compromise and struggle between freedman autonomy and planter

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<sup>20</sup> *Acts of Louisiana, 1866*, 35-38; *Southern Sentinel*, 5/5/1866, 7/7/1866; *Opelousas Courier*, 4/14/1866; Rodrigue, 91-92

<sup>21</sup> Howard A. White, *The Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 69-72.

control became the norm during Reconstruction, from which multiple strategies evolved in order to attain results. Economic advancement by the freedmen was seen by Southern Democrats as disastrous to the preferred antebellum social hierarchy and attempts to prevent this were central to Southern actions. The total labor force decreased after emancipation, as women generally left the fields and tended to matters at home.

Freedmen in general proved reluctant to return to the plantation, especially under gang labor, and after the Civil War Southern cities experienced a large influx of those who wished to earn a living without working the fields. Due to the decreased labor pool and freedmen resistance to working similar hours to what they worked as slaves, a labor shortage plagued the South in the post-war years, leading to planter competition for the scarce resource. If one planter offered better pay or living conditions, freedmen would often leave their prior employer, an act that could prove crippling to total production if the crop was ready for harvest.

This led to planter resistance and even an act passed by the Louisiana legislature on December 21, 1865 to prevent labor enticement by rival planters, enforced by a fine and potential prison time. Legislation such as this constituted the Black Codes, enacted in 1865 and 1866. The Black Codes were an attempt to control labor by restricting the freedmen's movement and limiting their economic opportunities. Louisiana's Black Codes reflected white fears and desires regarding the newly emancipated slaves.

Freedmen were to remain unarmed, vagrancy laws passed circumscribing freedpeople's movement, compulsory apprenticeship measures were enacted for children whose parents were deemed unfit, and measures were taken to limit labor enticement. Some of these laws, especially regarding vagrancy, were influential in forming the convict lease system

that would plague the South in the latter part of the century, stating that if the offender could not pay the fine, lawmen could "detain and hire out a vagrant for a period not exceeding twelve months." The primary function of the Black Codes was to create a reliable labor force comprised of freedmen. Codes installed by individual states were often vague, not specifically mentioning freedmen as their targets, attempting to be discreet and avoid Northern suspicions. But, Southern states had indeed become the masters of former slaves and local governments were often more direct in their approach to compelling black labor.<sup>22</sup>

In Opelousas, some of the most extreme measures nationwide in controlling the black labor force were found. On July 3, 1865, the Opelousas Board of Police approved an ordinance pertaining to rights of freedmen within the city limits. The restrictive ordinance required freedmen to acquire passes from their employers if they were to enter the city, set a curfew at 10:00 p.m., and forbade freedmen to take up residence in town, carry firearms, or hold public meetings. The clauses pertaining to the freedmen's rights to carry firearms and hold public meetings highlighted concerns held by the Southern whites that would come to the forefront in Radical Reconstruction. In 1865, and through Reconstruction, a primary desire held by planters was to get the freedmen back to work on plantations, preferably under the same terms as slavery. The *Opelousas Courier* found these measures to be necessary, citing "indolence and idleness bordering on vagrancy" of the freedmen and an uncertainty in regard to whether the freedmen would change employers once they had the opportunity to do so. Due to a national outcry, represented by a mention in Carl Schurz's *Report on the Condition of the South* and

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<sup>22</sup> *Southern Sentinel*, 1/27/1866; *Acts of Louisiana, 1865, Extra Session*, 16-20; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 198-210; Theodore Brantner Wilson, *Black Codes of the South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1965), 77-80.



attacks by T.W. Conway, Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana, the ordinance was never enforced. As the political landscape changed with the 1866 Civil Rights Bill and the beginning of Radical Reconstruction in early 1867, many state governments were forced to abandon some of the more discriminatory sections of the Black Codes. Hence, planters searched for alternative means to remedy the "labor problem."<sup>23</sup>

Another method taken by planters to control labor was through contract fraud. Initial labor contracts bound freedmen to the plantation for the planting year, but these were generally resisted. Freedmen and their allies desired monthly payment schedules, which were attained as planters realized that some form of accommodation was necessary in order to secure a profitable crop. Radical papers such as the *New Orleans Tribune* promoted these short contracts, preaching that long contracts were "intended by the employer to renew a servitude or bondage." One planter was astonished when a freedman complained that it was "not like freedom" and a breach of contract for his cabin to be entered with the intruder telling him to "get up." These contracts often limited mobility, created economic sanctions for missing work, and sometimes provided measures for the planters to keep the freedmen in perpetual debt. General stores on plantations, owned by planters, were often exploitative by charging freedmen egregious prices for goods. In both sugar and cotton regions, a portion of wages were typically held until the end of the year to ensure freedmen labor throughout the year. Federal

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<sup>23</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 7/8/1865, 7/29/1865; *Senate Executive Documents*, 39th Congress, 1st Session, No. 2, Carl Schurz, "Report on the Condition of the South," 92-94; White, 19-21.

organizations such as the Freedmen's Bureau and Union League combated this contract fraud and frustrated planters in the process.<sup>24</sup>

An important role of the Freedmen's Bureau was to help freedmen avoid fraudulent labor contracts. Although the Bureau focused on the welfare of freedmen, it was also cognizant of Southern post-war realities in that planter cooperation was necessary. During its lifetime, the Bureau attempted to secure fair contracts while providing the stable labor force desired by planters. On December 4, 1865, the Louisiana Freedmen's Bureau set regulations on labor contracts for the state. These regulations stipulated that all binding labor contracts pass Bureau inspection, set standards of ten hour days and twenty-six day work months before overtime pay, reserved Sundays for religious observation, and included the requirement of monthly pay schedules. Labor was to be provided with housing, food, and clothing. If desired by both parties, food and clothing could be purchased from a plantation store at "usual market rates" to prevent price gouging. To provide a secure labor force for planters, the local Bureau agent set and enforced economic sanctions for labor that refused to work. To supplement limited funding received by the Bureau, five percent of all payments to labor would be appropriated to Bureau schools. Although these regulations made it more difficult for planters to exploit the labor force through contract examination and labor dispute arbitration, they were not comprehensive due to limited Bureau funding, manpower, and the vast amount of complaints received.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 7/18/1868; *New Orleans Tribune*, 12/12/65; Michael W. Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South: Politics and Agricultural Change During Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 145, 149-150, 162-163.

<sup>25</sup> *The Southern Sentinel*, 1/3/1866; White.

By 1866, the Freedmen's Bureau required an extension to continue operations in the South, as the original bill only stipulated for a year of existence. However, President Johnson vetoed this bill on February 19, citing unconstitutionality and an increase in federal power that was unnecessary during a time of peace. Johnson's decision to veto an extended life for the Bureau was received with shock and represented continued disaffection between Radical Republicans and the president. After the second Freedmen's Bureau Bill successfully passed over Johnson's veto on July 3, the Civil Rights Act of 1866 faced a similar struggle. The primary function of the Civil Rights Act was to grant freedmen citizenship and equality before the law. However, the bill did not include suffrage rights, a prospect that was not possible until early 1867. The Civil Rights Act passed through the House and Senate in early April 1866, but was returned after a presidential veto. Johnson and his conservative supporters' main argument behind this veto was its alleged unconstitutionality, in that it "establish(es) for the security of the colored race safeguards which go indefinitely beyond any...for the white race." Defying Johnson's stance on the bill, Congress passed it a second time. With Southern newspapers now decidedly pro-Johnson and many moderate Republicans siding with the Radicals as a result of the two 1866 vetoes, the split between Congress and the President would only widen by the official start of Radical Reconstruction with the Reconstruction Acts of March, 1867.<sup>26</sup>

Illustrating Southern resistance against reconstruction measures, two large scale instances of violence occurred in 1866, both involving local white police forces and black Union army veterans. The first major act of collective violence in the Reconstruction Era

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<sup>26</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 39th Congress, 1st Session, 1755-1760; *Southern Sentinel*, 4/14/1866; Mark Wahlgren Summers, *A Dangerous Stir: Fear, Paranoia, and the Making of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 205-210; Foner, 243-252.

occurred in Memphis, Tennessee. In April, 1866, tension rose in Memphis as discharged black Union troops returned home, resulting in scattered cases of violence between these troops and the local police force.<sup>27</sup> By the end of the month, violence instigated by the white, mostly Irish, police force escalated to the point where it was not safe for a black person to leave the safety of their home. On May 1, a group of freedmen gathered and exhibited "riotous and disorderly" behavior, but did not cause any harm to those around them. But, the group erred in shooting their guns in the air after chasing a group of Memphis policemen, resulting in a small skirmish. The House report on the Memphis Riot found the threat of rioting by the local black population to be gone after May 1, but on May 2 a white mob formed and "commenced an indiscriminate robbery, burning, and slaughter" of freedmen and their property that lasted three days. The House report found that forty-six freedmen and two whites had died, large property damage incurred, and several rapes had been committed. Violence against freedmen in an effort to exert control was more economically viable to planters after the Civil War, as emancipation had eliminated their value as property.<sup>28</sup>

Shortly after the Memphis Riot, on July 30, 1866, New Orleans experienced a similar outbreak of violence. This conflict was the result of a power struggle between Governor James Madison Wells and the so-called "Rebel Legislature" of Louisiana. Elected in 1865, this Louisiana legislative body contained large numbers of ex-Confederates, enough to make an impact on politics in the state. To emphasize the

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<sup>27</sup> Tennessee formed black regiments after Union occupation in 1863.

<sup>28</sup> *U.S. House Reports*, 39th Congress, 1st Session, no. 101, U.S. Serial Set No. 1274, "Memphis Riots and Massacres," 1-8, 35-36, 64, 156-157, 194-195, 245-246; Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, "Reports of Outrages, Riots and Murders, Jan. 15, 1866 - Aug. 12, 1868," National Archives Microfilm Publication M999, roll 34; Ida Waller Pope, "Violence as a Political Force in the Reconstruction South" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1982), 12-39.

political inclination of this legislature, an excerpt from the *Opelousas Courier* (Dem.) reads: "the (ex-Confederates) who had been ejected from their offices by the Governor since the war, were and are the choice of the people." To regain control, Governor Wells attempted to reconvene the convention of 1864 to disenfranchise the ex-Confederates and to institute black suffrage. There was no quorum on the first attempt to reconvene, June 26, and the second attempt fell on July 30. On the morning of July 30, fearing white resistance to the proposed tenants of the convention, around two hundred black Union veterans marched to the Mechanics Institute, where the convention was to be held. By this time a large crowd had gathered outside on the streets. Many of these black veterans entered the building and barricaded the doors after the local police force shot at them. Policemen then fired into the building, killing numerous freedmen. A House report estimated for there to have been thirty-eight deaths. Investigative committees seem to have been generally low in their estimates of casualties, as bodies were often disposed of or buried by those close to the victim in secrecy. The same investigation found evidence of premeditation, where the mayor of New Orleans was "determined...to break up this convention by armed force."<sup>29</sup>

Both of these massacres were related to the return of black Union soldiers to hostile environments, but the focus of violence shifted after the summer of 1866. Republican discontent with Andrew Johnson had risen drastically after the Freedmen's Bureau Bill and Civil Rights Act vetoes of early 1866. If black populations were able to vote, to the dismay of most white Southerners, the South could conceivably be controlled

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<sup>29</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 5/12/1866; *U.S. House Reports*, 39th Congress, 1st Session, no. 16, "Report of the Select Committee on the New Orleans Riots" (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1867), 1-17, 32-36, 176; James K. Hogue, *Uncivil War: Five New Orleans Street Battles and the Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 31-52; Pope, 39-73.

by the will of its black citizens. After the New Orleans Riot of 1866, and especially after the First Reconstruction Act, racial violence focused on controlling the political sphere. Methods of controlling black labor had largely failed to this point and the chance of the president restoring the "white man's government" was becoming less plausible with an increasingly radical Congress. In late 1866, Johnson went on a campaigning tour of the North, known as the "Swing Around the Circle," during which he fomented political hostility. At one point during the tour he blamed Congress for the New Orleans Riot and failed to mention the Fourteenth Amendment, proposed in July but facing difficulties in ratification. These speeches only bred additional Republican discontent towards the president. 1866 was the turning point in Johnson's presidency and his Swing Around the Circle marked the unofficial end of Presidential Reconstruction.<sup>30</sup>

On March 3, 1867, the first of four Reconstruction Acts passed. With the First Reconstruction Act, Radical, or Military, Reconstruction officially began. The bill organized five military districts to keep order in the South, with Louisiana and Texas forming the fifth under General Philip H. Sheridan's command. Current state governments were deemed to be provisional until new state constitutions were formed that allowed universal male suffrage. Until the new state constitutions were accepted as adequate, Southern states were not allowed to reenter the Union. Supplements to the First Reconstruction Act stipulated registration and constitution convention election deadlines and guidelines, clarified power held by district commanders, and closed off loopholes present with the prior acts, such as registering but abstaining from voting in the convention ratification elections. The Reconstruction Acts faced massive Southern

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<sup>30</sup> Foner, 264-266.

opposition and the first act was vetoed by President Johnson, but Congress passed over the veto without hesitation.<sup>31</sup>

In the Union League, an organization created during the Civil War, membership exploded after the passage of the Reconstruction Acts in March, 1867. Leagues across the South held public meetings for the political education of the freedmen, examined labor contracts for fairness, and provided other essential services to the mass of uneducated ex-slaves. The main purpose of Union Leagues was to serve as a "Radical caucus," and focused much more extensively on political affairs than the Freedmen's Bureau. Along with the Freedmen's Bureau, Union Leagues aided in the evolution of free labor during the postwar years by attempting to secure fair contracts while providing the stable labor force desired by planters. As freedmen became more politically informed, their desire for political office also rose, creating conflict between planters and Union Leagues across the South. The mere thought of an ex-slave in a position of power evoked disgust in many paternalistically oriented Southern minds. Many Southerners also blamed organizations such as the Union League and Freedmen's Bureau for instilling illusions of upward social movement in the freedmen and inciting insurrection. Union Leagues worked particularly well in sugar parishes, as the laborers were in much closer proximity to one another in comparison to cotton parishes using sharecropping. The peak of League influence lasted until the 1868 presidential election, where violence largely destroyed its structure and greatly diminished its effectiveness for the remainder of Reconstruction.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *United States Statutes at Large* XIV, 428-429; *United States Statutes at Large* XV, 2-5, 14-16, 41.

<sup>32</sup> Fitzgerald, 37-62, 116, 208-224, 234-5.

With the passage of the Reconstruction acts, freedmen became more aggressive in asserting their rights and planters were forced into attempting different methods of control as regional Republican power grew. Freedman participation in the political sphere increased with the coming of universal suffrage and Democratic rhetoric changed as a result. Freedmen occasionally missed work in order to attend political meetings and rallies, angering planters greatly. Southerners were beginning to feel as if "the world (was) all armed against" them. Southern conservatives targeted Radicals for giving "incendiary speeches" to incite freedmen into an uprising.<sup>33</sup> In late 1867, the *Opelousas Courier* printed an article claiming that "leaders are familiarizing the minds of these negroes with the idea of blood, firearms, confiscation, robbery, and plunder...Their teachings are calculated to make the negroes dissatisfied with honest labor and the white race." The fact that freedmen formed militias and performed armed drills, a practice criticized by Union League officials in fear of a white response, only increased racial tension. White fear of a black insurrection was a powerful driving force behind many actions taken in the era and would occasionally end in what perpetrators believed was preventative violence. Southern Democrats attempted several methods to control the black population in politics and in labor, including through economic intimidation.<sup>34</sup>

To create uniformity in practice and solidarity amongst themselves, planters regularly held meetings. In early November 1867, planters from Avoyelles and Rapides parishes, both bordering St. Landry Parish to the north, adopted a resolution regarding labor. These planters preferred flexible wages, where rates were set and labor was paid

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<sup>33</sup> During Reconstruction when a Southerner referred to someone as "Radical," they generally meant someone with Republican tendencies that favored black suffrage, including carpetbaggers, Bureau officers, and League officials.

<sup>34</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 7/6/1867, 10/26/1867; Fitzgerald, 10.



upon sale of the crop instead of on a monthly basis. They also refused to hire labor that voted the Republican ticket or joined a Union League, arguing for such men to "exhibit a hostile purpose to our interest." Republican labor in cotton regions usually experienced lesser stability than in sugar regions, as cotton production was less intensive than sugar year-round and a higher turnover rate was less damaging to overall yield. Southern white Republicans were also targeted economically and boycotting was especially effective due to the relatively low white Republican presence in the region. Michael W. Fitzgerald, the prominent Union League scholar, found that freedmen still joined Union Leagues and voted Republican, regardless of economic repercussions.<sup>35</sup>

Planters also attempted to control the labor force through conversion to the Democratic Party. Rhetoric directed at freedmen often reflected paternalistic values while directly attacking Republican organizations and Southern Radicals, who had "poisoned" the minds of freedmen against planters and Southern Democrats. Judge Cullon of Avoyelles Parish produced a series of letters during the summer of 1867 "To Colored Voters" that were reproduced in regional Democratic papers. The function of these letters were to "instruct you and protect you from designing men" who had slandered Democrats and fabricated information about the Democratic desire to return to slavery. Instead, Judge Cullon claimed, the Democratic Party fully supported the "general welfare" of the freedmen. Democrats also held mass meetings and barbeques "without distinction to race or color" preceding political events to garner votes. However, these attempts at conversion often refrained from mentioning or lied about key tenants of the Democratic Party, such as their stance on racial equality.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 12/7/1867; Fitzgerald, 207-211.

<sup>36</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 5/25/1867, 7/6/1867, 7/13/1867, 11/30/1867; *Opelousas Journal*, 7/25/1868.

One Democratic solution to the question of labor was immigration. After the end of the Civil War, planters proposed immigration to supplement the labor force, often focusing on Asian immigrants, derogatorily referred to as "coolies." The *Opelousas Courier* printed a sample contract for coolie labor in late 1865, requiring the laborer to "bind" themselves for 5 years for whatever task their employer desired, abide by work days and hours according to the "custom of the region," and face fines for work missed, while planters provided food and shelter. Planters were generally discontented with the status of freedmen labor and coolies were targeted next, most likely due to reports of success from California. Although immigration as a solution had been present in Louisiana during the early Reconstruction years, the movement took off after the beginning of Radical Reconstruction. By early 1868, the Immigration Society of St. Landry Parish formed for the purpose of attracting immigration broadly, without a mention of racial guidelines. That same year the *Opelousas Journal* printed a series of geographical descriptions of the parish, focusing on its "bountiful" wealth and availability of resources, articles designed for those not living in the region. Unsurprisingly, Asiatic labor immigration to Louisiana was not successful on a large scale, as harsh working conditions generally served as a deterrent. Overall foreign immigration was unsuccessful as well, as St. Landry Parish contained 305 people who were foreign born in 1860 (1.3% of total population in the parish), 518 in 1870 (2.0%), and 529 in 1880 (1.3%).<sup>37</sup>

Under the guidelines of the Reconstruction acts, from September 27-28, 1867, a vote was held to decide if Louisiana should have a convention and to elect delegates

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<sup>37</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 12/9/1865, 12/23/1865, 6/6/1868; *Opelousas Journal*, 3/28/1867; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of Population, 1860* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864); *Ninth Census of Population, 1870*; *Compendium of the Tenth Census, 1880*; Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

should the first vote prove successful. These elections took place in the midst of a regional yellow fever outbreak, a distraction that may have limited total votes cast. Voter turnout on the Democratic side was low, as regional blacks were expected to vote for the constitution and for Republican candidates, resulting in low projections for a Democratic victory. The vote for a convention was an overwhelming success for Republicans in Louisiana, with St. Landry Parish realizing a 2,351-33 vote in favor. The election of delegates was a Republican victory in terms of representation, with 86 of the total 98 delegates being Republican. Louisiana's black population was also represented, as a convention in June 1867 stipulated that half of the delegates were to be black. Radical James G. Taliaferro was elected president of the convention, the man who would oppose Henry Clay Warmoth in the gubernatorial election of 1868. In St. Landry, the list of delegates featured most of the influential Republicans in the parish, including George H. Jackson (freedman), Auguste Donato, Jr. (*homme de couleur*)<sup>38</sup>, Michael Vidal (white, editor of the *St. Landry Progress*), and J.G. Drinkard (white, local druggist).<sup>39</sup>

By the end of 1867, blacks and Radicals both in the North and South were optimistic about future prospects. Universal suffrage was imminent, conditions at work had improved, and the men in charge of shaping Louisiana's new state constitution were overwhelmingly supportive of their wants. As the education of freedmen increased with the aid of federal agencies after Radical Reconstruction began in 1867, wages and working conditions also improved. Strikes began to appear with more regularity and planters were forced into necessary concessions in order to secure a reliable labor force,

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<sup>38</sup> Since the entire black population eventually gained freedom, when discussing events after emancipation an individual in the *les gens de couleur libre* demographic will be labeled as *homme de couleur* ("man of color") and a group as *hommes de couleur* ("men of color").

<sup>39</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 10/5/1867; F. Wayne Binning, "Carpetbaggers' Triumph: The Louisiana State Election of 1868" *Louisiana History* 14, No. 1 (Winter, 1973), 30-31.

such as a broader acceptance of monthly pay schedules. After the Reconstruction acts, progress in labor conditions for freedmen was consistently seen for the remainder of the period.

However, Democrats and most white Southerners had not only encountered defeat at the hands of those now reorganizing the South, but many had lost a large portion of the wealth they had accumulated in antebellum years. After two devastating crop failures, many planters who had relied on crop liens were deep in debt. As a result, black labor in constant danger of not being paid by unwilling or unable planters during these hard economic times. Political reverses had changed Democratic newspaper rhetoric to that of a defeated nation and exhibited a fear of subjugation at Northern hands. 1868 would fare no better for these Southerners, as a Republican governor was elected in Louisiana, their presidential ally in Andrew Johnson was rendered mostly powerless and was nearly impeached, the Fourteenth Amendment passed, and universal suffrage would be realized. To this point, Democratic attempts at labor control, through legislation, contract fraud, economic intimidation, and conversion had all largely failed. 1868 featured the first national election of Reconstruction and a Southern hope that a Democratic victory would return the region to the antebellum status quo. To secure these results, violence and intimidation were used as means.

## Chapter II

### The Redemption of St. Landry Parish

The First Reconstruction Act of March, 1867 represented a considerable setback in Southern aspirations to return to the antebellum racial hierarchy. As prior attempts by Southerners had been largely unsuccessful in gaining this, new approaches were attempted. Democratic secret societies began to form in mid-1867 with the purpose of restoring the "white man's government" and preventing further reconstruction measures. Setbacks to Southern ambitions occurred on the national level in 1868 with the near-impeachment of President Andrew Johnson, the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, and the completion of many constitutional conventions that provided universal male suffrage. With increasing frequency but escalating as the 1868 presidential election neared, these secret societies utilized violence and intimidation to elect a Democratic president who would support Southern desires.

Throughout the South, but primarily in Louisiana and Georgia, large scale collective violence occurred in 1868 from late September through the November 3 presidential election that often crippled the regional Republican Party. As Republican newspapers were often destroyed during the uprisings and Democratic newspapers generally only explained one side of the story, an army report and testimonies represent the majority of sources available on the pre-election violence and intimidation in Louisiana. From mid-September through the election, Army Lieutenant Jesse M. Lee was sent to Louisiana to investigate the violence, after which he produced a report that detailed large acts of violence and estimated total casualties. In December, 1868 and

May, 1869, a House committee took testimony regarding occurrences during the electoral period. During the election, armed Democratic guards were frequently found at the polls and anyone who voted the Republican ticket often found their life in danger. Violence and intimidation were effective on the state level and provided Horatio Seymour (Dem.) with victories in both Louisiana and Georgia, but Ulysses S. Grant (Rep.) was still able to secure the national nomination. As the largest and arguably the most effective racial massacre for long term Democratic prospects during Reconstruction, the St. Landry Massacre is representative of the change in Democratic strategy experienced after the 1867 Reconstruction Acts.

On March 9, 1868, the Louisiana constitutional convention adjourned and presented a new state constitution, labeled "The Negro Constitution" by the *Opelousas Courier* (Dem.), that followed the regulations set forth by the 1867 Reconstruction Acts. The votes both to accept the constitution and to elect civil officials for the state took place simultaneously, from April 17-18, 1868. The new state constitution, Louisiana's first to include a bill of rights, contained clauses providing for male enfranchisement for those over 21 years old, equal access to state run schools, a requirement for every parish to contain at least one school, and equality in public places and transportation, all "without regard to race, color, or previous condition." However, requirements stipulated by the new constitution were hardly followed. Instead, Southern Democrats attempted to circumvent the requirements and gain control of the black vote through intimidation and violence.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Constitution Adopted by the State Constitutional Convention of the State of Louisiana, March 7, 1868* (New Orleans: Republican Office, 57 St. Charles Street, 1868); Taylor, 151-153; Ted Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction: War, Radicalism, and Race in Louisiana, 1862-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 117-119.

The vote for the new state constitution passed with ease in April, at 66,152-48,739. During the Reconstruction era, voting practices usually went along color lines, as white men generally voted Democrat while black men punched the Republican ticket. Of the parishes that experienced large scale collective violence preceding the November elections of 1868, Caddo, Orleans, and St. Landry parishes held majorities against the constitution while Bossier and Jefferson parishes realized small victories for the constitution. As the St. Landry Republican Party formed in April, 1867, most whites who had been in the parish for any significant amount of time favored the Democratic Party and opposed further reconstruction measures. The results of the vote for the new constitution in April, 1868, illustrated this opposition, where only 32 whites voted in favor compared to 358 black votes against. These votes were important, as turnout for the vote consisted of 2,635 black men and 2,298 white men. The vote for the constitution failed in St. Landry, 2,624-2,309. In Louisiana, Republicans emerged victorious in the vote for the constitution and in the April elections for public officials, gaining a majority in the state's legislature. But a Democratic victory on the local level in St. Landry Parish foreshadowed the political turmoil that would envelop the parish later that year. This local victory also stood as a clear indication that Democrats - former Confederate political leaders, soldiers, and sympathizers - had not relinquished their cause.<sup>41</sup>

During the April elections, Democrats had little hope of a victory on the state level, as newly enfranchised freedmen were expected to unanimously vote Republican and Democrats could not expect the same political solidarity among the whites, especially in New Orleans, where the federal presence was more stable. At the time,

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<sup>41</sup> Donald W. Davis, "Ratification of the Constitution of 1868 – Record of Votes," *Louisiana History* 6, No. 3 (Summer, 1965), 301-305.

Louisiana contained nearly equal white and black populations, by the next census counting 362,065 whites and 364,210 blacks. With suffrage, this large black population represented a new and immediate threat to advocates of white political supremacy. Ill-prepared for universal male suffrage, the Democratic convention refrained from choosing a ticket due to both what one Democratic newspaper called "a want of organization for the Conservatives throughout the state" and a general feeling that the Republicans would win easily.<sup>42</sup>

Even with no Democratic ticket, the Republican Party split into two factions, one backing Henry Clay Warmoth and the other James Taliaferro. In St. Landry Parish, the split occurred along two lines, within the *Progress* and the black population. Roudanez, the *homme de couleur* editor of the Radical *New Orleans Tribune*, desired Taliaferro as a candidate and drew the support of Casimier Edme Durand, the French editor of the *St. Landry Progress* (Rep.). The Taliaferro faction won the support of the local *hommes de couleur* and ran against Henry Clay Warmoth, who was supported by Emerson Bentley and the local freedmen. Warmoth won convincingly, with 64,941 votes to Taliaferro's 38,046. In St. Landry Parish, Warmoth received 2,514 votes, Taliaferro 649, and Joshua Baker (Dem.), the previous governor, received 1,187.<sup>43</sup> As an example of the era's brilliant efforts at racial democracy, Oscar J. Dunn, a *homme de couleur*, secured the position of Lieutenant Governor. Democrats mostly swept St. Landry Parish, in part due to the Republican split, although most Republican votes seem to have gone to the *homme*

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<sup>42</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 4/25/1868, 5/2/1868; Emerson Bentley Journal, Edith Garland Dupré Library, UL-Lafayette: *Ninth Census of Population*, 1870; McTigue, 285-290.

<sup>43</sup> Although Baker is not on any official returns, he appears to have been voted for by conservatives who were not willing to vote for either the relatively moderate Taliaferro or the Radical Warmoth.



*de couleur* candidate over freedmen or white Republicans in hopes of defeating the Democratic nominees.<sup>44</sup>

St. Landry Parish was located in the Third Congressional district of Louisiana, consisting of Lafayette, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, and Vermillion parishes, which elected two Democratic state senators in 1868. St. Landry sent four Democrats to the state House, leaving Republicans with no representatives from the parish in either the Louisiana House or Senate. One of the men who won a state senatorial seat was Thomas C. Anderson (Dem.), whose narrow victory over local Republican *homme de couleur* leader Auguste Donate, Jr. was traced by one historian as the base on which Anderson built his local power structure. The positions of district and parish judgeships, sheriff, recorder, district court clerk, assessor, and coroner all went to Democratic candidates in St. Landry, albeit by slim margins. While their power on the statewide level had diminished, the April elections proved to be beneficial to the long-term success of the Democratic party in the region. After the state elections, the *Opelousas Courier* (Dem.) described the upcoming presidential election as crucial, calling all voters who opposed Radical "Congressional usurpation and negro supremacy" to vote the Democratic ticket.<sup>45</sup>

After emancipation, freedmen lost their status as valued property that they previously held as slaves. Consequently, violence was prone to occur at much higher rates against freedmen, as evidenced by the Memphis and New Orleans riots of 1866. While freedmen were murdered with regularity throughout the Reconstruction period, incidence rates increased after the First Reconstruction Act passed in early 1867. After

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<sup>44</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 4/25/1868, 5/2/1868, 5/9/1868, 5/16/1868; Emerson Bentley Journal: John Rose Ficklen, *History of Reconstruction in Louisiana (Through 1868)* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Johns Hopkins Press, 1910), 201-202; Binning, 36; McTigue, 285-290.

<sup>45</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 4/25/1868, 5/2/1868, 5/9/1868, 5/16/1868; McTigue, 280-287.

the Reconstruction Act, universal male suffrage was imminent and Southern Democrats realized that in order to secure political victories, the black vote had to be influenced in some way. As previous methods of enticement away from the Republican Party had largely failed, Democrats increasingly turned to violence and intimidation to secure Democratic political superiority. Democratic newspapers generally did not mention these acts of violence and local law enforcement was apathetic for the most part, leaving the relatively rare Republican newspapers to reveal these crimes.

On August 3, 1867, the *St. Landry Progress* (Rep.) posted a list of murders and other violent acts against freedmen in the parish. A revised list complete with refutations from the *Opelousas Courier* (Dem.) was published on August 24.<sup>46</sup> 32 incidents were found in these issues, most involving the murder of freedmen, and according to the *Progress*, "in no case, those crimes were avenged by Justice." The *Courier* cited an absence of charges in multiple cases and claimed a lack of knowledge in others, in one instance stating that "no clue has yet been arrived at." The *Progress* retorted with "nor no clue could be obtained until diligence is used." An unwillingness to prosecute offenders both in the local courts and with local law enforcement proved to be an effective weapon in the Southern white arsenal during the Reconstruction Era, especially in country parishes where military intervention was unlikely.<sup>47</sup>

Republican editors like Emerson Bentley were common targets for this violence and intimidation, as these men often became local leaders for the Republican Party. Bentley was born on July 15, 1850 in Columbiana County, Ohio. His father was a soldier in the Fourth Wisconsin Regiment and became a dentist in New Orleans after the war. A

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<sup>46</sup> No copies of the *Opelousas Courier* were located between the dates of 8/3/1867 and 9/18/1867, their rebuttals to the 8/3 claims of the *Progress* are found in the 8/24/1867 issue of the *Progress*.

<sup>47</sup> *St. Landry Progress*, 8/3/1867, 8/26/1867.

precocious youth, Emerson exhibited an early interest in journalism and politics. From 1860-1863, Bentley procured an apprenticeship at the *Jefferson County Republican*, a small Wisconsin newspaper. After the paper became defunct in late 1863, he returned to Ohio as a compositor for the *Salem Republican*, remaining there until the end of the war. After the Civil War, still in his mid-teens, Bentley made his first appearance in Louisiana. While in Louisiana, Bentley was forced to relocate often, as his radical tendencies did not mix well with the predominantly white Democratic communities.<sup>48</sup>

In 1866, Bentley was employed as a compositor for the *New Orleans Tribune*, where he remained until he returned to Ohio for school later that year. In 1867, Bentley returned to Louisiana permanently as a Freedmen's Bureau agent assigned to be a schoolteacher in St. Mary Parish. Emerson's brother, Linden, was also a Freedmen's Bureau agent, sent to Opelousas. However, Emerson's assignment in St. Mary Parish was short-lived, as the cotton worm destroyed a large portion of the crop. Due to this crop failure, planters were either unwilling or unable to pay labor. As wages for Bureau agents were provided by a tax on wages received by labor, Bentley was not paid and subsequently quit.<sup>49</sup>

While working for the *Tribune*, Bentley met Michel Vidal, a Frenchman. Vidal was experienced as an editor, having worked in numerous French-Canadian newspapers, the *New York Messenger*, and the *New Orleans Tribune*. In August, 1867, Vidal formed the *St. Landry Progress*, a Republican paper owned by black stockholders. While at his post as a teacher in St. Mary Parish, Bentley wrote several articles for the *Progress*. Due to his acquaintance with Vidal and with Linden's insistence, Bentley became its editor

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<sup>48</sup> Emerson Bentley Journal; *House Miscellaneous Documents*, 41<sup>st</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, December 6, 1869-July 15, 1870, Document No. 154, Serial 1435, "Report on Louisiana Contested Elections," 416.

<sup>49</sup> Emerson Bentley Journal.

after Vidal left for the state constitutional convention in November. The *Progress* was published in English and French, with Casimier Edme Durand as the French editor.<sup>50</sup>

On March 2, 1867, the same day that the first of the Reconstruction Acts passed, the Tenure of Office Act emerged, and this legislation also became the target of a failed presidential veto. The Tenure of Office Act was designed to prevent the removal of any presidentially appointed government official by the president without Senatorial consent. However, President Andrew Johnson found a loophole in the act by early 1868, where the president could suspend an official while Congress was not in session. In his capacity as Secretary of War, Edward M. Stanton held control of the selection of military officials in the military districting that came as a part of the Reconstruction Acts. In August, 1867, Johnson suspended Stanton from his office while Congress was not in session. This act roused Republican fears, which one historian described as a "fear of a coup, of a new civil war, of rival armies, one serving the president and one serving Congress." On February 21, 1868, Johnson removed Stanton, violating the Tenure of Office Act that he himself had failed to prevent. This action was enough for Johnson's opposition to mount an impeachment campaign, creating yet another source of sectional tension throughout the nation.<sup>51</sup>

Johnson's impeachment trial began on March 30, 1868, containing eleven articles of impeachment. Of these, nine were related to Stanton's removal and the other two dealt with his intransigence towards Congress. The trial hung as a specter over the nation during the spring of 1868 and as time progressed Johnson's position improved. As Johnson had gained the presidency through the death of his predecessor, the president pro

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.; Michel Vidal Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

<sup>51</sup> *Statutes at Large*, XIV, 430-432; Summers, 204.

tem, Radical Benjamin Wade, was next in line. Wade was not a desirable option to many moderate Republicans, which drew votes away from a successful impeachment. On May 16, 1868, the Senate voted on the eleventh article of impeachment, the closest to an all-encompassing summary of charges. The result was thirty-five votes for impeachment and sixteen against, just one vote short of the required thirty-six for a two-thirds majority. On May 26, the session adjourned, giving Johnson a victory and the retention of his presidency. However, by this point any support in Congress had been lost and any hope of effective legislative action by Johnson for the remainder of his term was slim.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to the impeachment troubles for Johnson, the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified on July 9, 1868. Originally passed on June 13, 1866, around the time of the second Freedmen's Bureau Bill and the Civil Rights Act of 1866, the Fourteenth Amendment faced difficulties in the ratification process. In 1866, every Southern state except for Tennessee strongly opposed the amendment and refused to ratify, leaving many issues addressed in the amendment to appear in the 1867 Reconstruction Acts. By 1868, the Reconstruction Acts had largely sapped conservative strength in the South, and on July 9, a three-fourths majority was gained with twenty-eight states ratifying the amendment. The Fourteenth Amendment affirmed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 by granting citizenship to everyone born or naturalized in the country regardless of race. If a state denied a group of citizens suffrage based on race, its representation in Congress would decrease proportionally with the number of those denied these rights. The law also contained a clause excluding those who had "engaged in insurrection or rebellion"

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<sup>52</sup> *Supplement to the Congressional Globe: Containing the Proceedings of the Senate Sitting for the Trial of Andrew Johnson, President of the United States, 40th Congress, Second Session* (Washington: F. & J. Rives & George A. Bailey, 1868), 412-415; Martin E. Mantell, *Johnson, Grant, and the Politics of Reconstruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 88-98; Foner, 333-336.

against the government from obtaining a position in the Senate, House, as the Vice President, or as the President. Although the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment was inevitable by 1868, Southern Democrats realized that universal male suffrage, especially in states like Louisiana that contained large black populations, would lead to defeat at the polls. The *Opelousas Courier* (Dem.) printed a response to the amendment, where "the gravest apprehensions are felt and expressed here by leading men of both parties as to the possible consequences of this usurpation on the part of Congress."<sup>53</sup>

By the summer of 1868, St. Landry Democrats were feeling a sense of hopelessness, given the legislative occurrences since the end of the war. Economic hardships were widespread after crop failures in 1866 and 1867, the Democratic Party had experienced constant setbacks with federal legislation, attempts to control the labor force and return to the antebellum social hierarchy had largely failed, and their presidential ally was nearly impeached and had lost Congressional support. Although a large amount of local positions had been won in St. Landry by Democrats in April, a Republican governor and the signing of the state constitution, which included universal male suffrage, were ominous. Without a successful presidential election, hopes for the future were low. Seemingly without other options to secure their candidate's victory, violence and intimidation became the means to a desirable end for regional Democrats.

During the summer of 1868, violence still appeared to be uncoordinated and random, although frequent. In late June, night-riders shot at but missed a freedmen outside of Opelousas, a "nightly occurrence" in the area. On July 7, masked men killed two freedmen, one child, and wounded two other freedmen. In early July a freedman prisoner was "rescued" from the parish jail but was never heard from again. Also in July,

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<sup>53</sup> *Statutes at Large* XV, 706-707; *Opelousas Journal*, 7/25/1868; *Opelousas Courier*, 8/1/1868.

a freedmen reported the fear of even leaving his house, as he discovered multiple armed men waiting concealed just feet from his door over the course of several nights.

"Outrages" on freedmen such as these were common during the summer of 1868, where intimidation and violence was widespread throughout the South, but were particularly frequent in Louisiana. Due to its relatively large size as a parish and its location outside of federal military reach, St. Landry Parish was among the most afflicted in terms of violence. Republicans felt that without a military presence, "free speech will be dangerous (and) justice at law a mockery" in the parish. Warmoth confirmed this feeling with an August letter to Washington asking for additional troops in order to prevent violence and corruption within the state, a request that was denied.<sup>54</sup>

Newspapers in the South were often circulated to a far lesser extent than Northern papers, as literacy rates and funding opportunities were much lower in the region. To secure funding, patronage was often required, resulting in fierce competition between local newspapers and often leaving some publications with short life spans. Most of these papers were small and issued weekly. After the end of the Civil War, Democratic papers in St. Landry Parish included the *Southern Sentinel* and the *Opelousas Courier*. In April, 1866, the Republican Party formed in St. Landry Parish. By July, 1867, the first Republican paper in the parish, the *St. Landry Progress*, came into existence, lasting until its means of production were destroyed during the massacre preceding the 1868 national election.<sup>55</sup> The *Progress* was the official Republican paper of both St. Landry and

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<sup>54</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 7/11/1868; Emerson Bentley Journal.

<sup>55</sup> Carolyn E. DeLatta's unpublished M.A. Thesis believed that the *Progress* formed in mid-1866, shortly before the *Southern Sentinel* and *Opelousas Courier* merged. However, the first issue of the *Progress* appeared on July 27, 1867, which was confirmed by its editor, Emerson Bentley, in his journal. As for the merge between the *Southern Sentinel* and the *Opelousas Courier*, the *Sentinel* was published until late 1867 until it was reorganized and renamed the *Opelousas Journal*. The *Courier* remained in circulation for the duration of Reconstruction, so no evidence of a merger is present.

Lafayette parishes for its lifetime. The formation of the *St. Landry Progress* led to increased competition for scarce patronage, forcing the *Southern Sentinel* to reform by late 1867 under new direction as the *Opelousas Journal*. Both the *Opelousas Journal* and the *Opelousas Courier* would survive through the rest of Reconstruction, although gaps in publication were occasionally necessary to remain afloat.<sup>56</sup>

At the *St. Landry Progress*, Bentley constantly found himself at odds with the Democrats of the parish as an outspoken Radical Republican. He frequently argued publicly with the editors at the *Opelousas Courier*, where the two papers were used as a forum. Accounts given regarding occurrences at political meetings were common grounds for argument, where one paper would print an article slandering local leaders of the opposite faction and the ideals of their party, followed by the other paper's rebuttal. Topics of articles printed in the *Progress*, whose slogan was "Truth, Justice, Equality," also drew Democratic ire, as universal suffrage and equal rights were regularly supported. Tension grew throughout the summer for various reasons in St. Landry Parish, but all that was needed to break the peace was an article written by Bentley describing Democratic actions at a Republican meeting and procession.

In addition to being the Republican voice of St. Landry Parish, the *Progress* was also unique in its relations with freedmen in the region. An attached clubhouse to the *Progress* office also served as a meeting hall for the local Republican Party, where weekly meetings were held on Sundays and usually contained 200-400 attendees. The office also held Republican membership lists, which would be used by Democrats during the massacre to identify and find local party leaders. Due to his interaction with the black community both as a schoolteacher and as the editor of the parish Republican paper,

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<sup>56</sup> Emerson Bentley Journal; DeLatte, "Reconstruction," 34-36.



Bentley quickly became a local Republican leader. In this position, both in St. Landry and elsewhere during his lifetime, Bentley became the target of Democratic aggression and consequently became ostracized from multiple white communities.<sup>57</sup>

The Knights of the White Camelia (KWC), a secret society similar to the Ku Klux, first formed during the early summer of 1868 in St. Mary Parish under the auspices of Alcibiades DeBlanc, an attorney, and Daniel Dennett, the influential editor of the *Franklin Planter's Banner*. The primary goals of the KWC were to preserve the "white man's government" and to protect the region "against the uprising of the blacks, if necessary." From St. Mary, southeast of St. Landry on the Gulf of Mexico, the organization spread quickly throughout Louisiana with "nearly universal" white male membership in parishes won by Seymour in the November elections of 1868.<sup>58</sup>

St. Landry Parish was no different, as Joel Sandez, the Democratic editor of the *Opelousas Courier*, estimated for KWC membership to be nearly 3,000 in a parish that contained 13,776 total whites, including women and children. This seems to be a conservative estimate, as multiple others claimed for membership to be general, or nearly ubiquitous, among the whites. John C. Tucker, a Republican, testified that he was "elected" into the club during the summer of 1868 by J. Saunders King, a prominent parish Democrat, without his knowledge. Tucker felt the necessity to comply and join both the KWC and the Hancock Guards "in order to preserve my life." Although the organizations were present and there was some intimidation during the summer of 1868, collective violence was not utilized until the fall. The KWC, led by James M. Thompson

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<sup>57</sup> Geraldine Mary McTigue, "Forms of Racial Interaction in Louisiana, 1860-1880" (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 1975), 271; *House Misc* 406-416.

<sup>58</sup> James G. Dauphine, "The Knights of the White Camelia and the Election of 1868: Louisiana's White Terrorists, A Benighting Legacy," *Louisiana History* 30, No. 2 (Spring 1989), 173-190.

and R.A. Littell in St. Landry Parish, would be the central organizing force behind this fall violence.<sup>59</sup>

A primary Democratic complaint during the summer of 1868 was that Republicans were holding armed political meetings at night behind closed doors. They feared that these white Radical "incendiaries," such as Emerson Bentley, would provoke the freedmen into riotous behavior. One of the most common fears was that the freedmen would burn the town and slaughter the white inhabitants within. However, Republican political meetings were generally held during the daytime in public, contrary to some Democratic rhetoric. Due to planter complaints of freedmen missing work to attend meetings, Sundays were often chosen to prevent friction. Although local Republican leaders mostly expressed a desire for attendees of these meetings to arrive unarmed, side arms were generally carried at a minimum. But this was not uncommon, as the region remained relatively unsettled in 1868 and guns were often carried for everyday affairs. There were also incidents of harassment and violence towards freedmen on their way to Republican meetings, so many felt not only the necessity of protection from nature, but also from the local whites. These incidents increased during the summer, with tension between the parties and the races rising as the presidential election neared. To exacerbate Democratic irritation with regional Republicans, the *St. Landry Progress* was given the coveted parish printing contract in early September, 1868.<sup>60</sup>

Also in early September, Bentley found a note posted on the schoolhouse door that read "E.B. Beware! K.K.K." with a "dripping dagger, skull and bones, and coffin painted on." By this time news of the Ku Klux had spread widely, and as there was no

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<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*; *House Misc*, 569-571, 599-605, 611-619; *House Misc, Part II*, 33-46; *Ninth Census of Population, 1870*.

<sup>60</sup> Emerson Bentley Journal; *St. Landry Progress*, 9/12/1868.

known presence of the organization in St. Landry in 1868, its signature probably used to instill fear to a greater effect than any other organization's would. Another recipient of this general threat was J.J. Beauchamp, the Republican chairman of the parish board of supervisors, who found two threatening letters signed by the Ku Klux at his home during the course of 1868. To a question asking of his knowledge of the Ku Klux in the region, Beauchamp responded: "I do not know what the name of the organization is, but I am satisfied that there is a secret organization of some kind there." Determined to stop the "incendiary" speeches of the Republicans, Democrats targeted Republican leaders at an increasing rate during the summer of 1868, and when September came the "war of the races" seemed to be imminent.<sup>61</sup>

During the late summer, various reports circulated of two shipments of arms arriving in St. Landry by boat from New Orleans for the purpose of arming the Democratic population. Democrats denied knowledge of the shipments, but interrogators seemed to have known of their occurrence. J.J. Beauchamp (Rep.) claimed to have seen his neighbor preparing cartridge boxes for several weeks before the commencement of the massacre on September 28. The first shipment was said to contain fifty police pistols, or revolvers, and no knowledge was held on the contents of the second shipment. After the massacre, area whites claimed for their actions to be in response to the impending threat of a black insurrection, but the fact that Democratic rhetoric constantly referred to the need for Republicans to gain protection by joining their ranks and due to the timely arrival of arms to the parish, premeditation is not out of the question.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *House Misc.*, 665-668; Emerson Bentley Journal.

<sup>62</sup> *House Misc.* 510-519, 665-668.

On September 13, 1868, a Republican meeting was held in Washington, the secondary hub of St. Landry Parish, located about six miles north of Opelousas. After this meeting, a procession organized and marched to Opelousas, where additional speeches were given. The meeting featured two speakers, Sam Johnson, a black man, and Armstead Lewis, a black preacher. As one of the handful of white Republicans in the area, Bentley was scheduled to speak as well, but he was advised against it by those close to him for his safety from the local Democrats. The week before this meeting, Democrats claim to have heard "colored"<sup>63</sup> speakers declare that they desired for black Democrats to return to the Republican party, "at the point of the bayonet" if need be. Hearing of a large Republican gathering, upwards of 1,000 people, occurring near Washington on the morning of September 13, parish whites went to arms, believing that blacks intended to burn Washington and kill its inhabitants. The resulting confrontation would begin the chain of events that led to the St. Landry Massacre.<sup>64</sup>

In response to the large black gathering, parish whites gravitated towards the towns of Opelousas and Washington in what they believed was a precautionary measure. When the Republican procession arrived in Washington, its members found Seymour Knights "drawn up in line" and in uniform on the street, later in front of the platform where speeches were given. Parish Democrats were often members of multiple secret societies, and the Seymour Knights were another one of these groups. The St. Landry organization was led by Solomon Loeb, a local businessman, and Ferreol Perrodin, the parish deputy sheriff who would become the mayor in early 1869, was second in command. While the Democrats remained peaceful in action during this meeting, the

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<sup>63</sup> The source is unclear whether these speakers identified themselves with the *hommes de couleur* group or with the freedmen.

<sup>64</sup> *House Misc.*, 406-416, 510; *St. Landry Progress*, 9/19/1868.

potential threat was high as individual speakers were threatened and reports of several hundred armed whites, hiding in the nearby woods prepared to take action, were circulated.<sup>65</sup>

Even though the meeting ended peacefully, the armed Democratic presence was not welcome to the Republicans. During the meeting, Loeb and Bentley were seen exchanging "harsh words" with one another. As the Republican procession returned to Opelousas, L. Saunders King (Dem) and Edward T. Lewis (Dem.), a local lawyer who would later lead the St. Landry White League, stopped the Republicans to explain Democratic intentions for appearing at the meeting, which were preventative in nature. During the discussion, a gun was fired from one of the two Republican wagons into the air. King immediately pulled a gun and leveled it at Bentley's head, but as the origin of the shot could not be discerned it was labeled as a misfire and the groups parted peacefully.<sup>66</sup>

The events around Washington on September 13 resulted in two measures taken by both parties in the parish prior to the massacre, a Democratic "interview" of Bentley and a peace treaty signed between the leading Republicans and Democrats of St. Landry. The interview occurred sometime during the next five days and consisted of local Democratic leaders telling Bentley what their intentions were on September 13 and how they should be represented in the *Progress*, or Bentley "would be held personally responsible for it." The peace treaty, signed on September 19, focused on preventing the conflict between Republican and Democrat, black and white, that seemed to be just around the corner. Although Republican and Democratic meetings were reportedly open

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<sup>65</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 12/14/1867; *House Misc.*, 406-416; *House Misc, Part II*, 33-46.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*; *House Misc.*, 406-416, 510-519; *House Misc., Part II*, 33-46.

to all by this point, the peace treaty contained a clause that allowed for the inclusion of all parish citizens. The groups agreed upon provisions that disallowed any form of "incendiary" comments, whether in newspapers or during speeches. Firearms of any sort were not allowed from this point forward at any meeting or procession and alcohol was not to be served at the meetings or nearby their location on the day of. The section about firearms was important, as Democrats often complained about the amount of arms taken by blacks to these meetings and this was a large point of dispute during the events at Washington the week before. The results of the peace conference mostly reflected Democratic fears, where a drunken black uprising would burn their homes and kill their families. However, due to apathetic local law enforcement and greater white armament, Republicans also benefited.<sup>67</sup>

The peace did not last long, as on the same day that the peace conference occurred Bentley's article on the meeting and procession appeared in the *Progress*. Bentley later claimed that he was only attempting to represent the truth behind the events at Washington the week before, but Democrats felt that the article broke the terms of the peace. In the article, Bentley wrote that "the assembly of armed men from all parts of the parish did not indicate peaceful intentions, but a total blindness to the interests of the people." Bentley also wrote of the intimidation present towards certain speakers, where they were forced to refrain from speaking in fear of their lives. Furthermore, Bentley directly attacked Democratic tactics, declaring that Republicans "do not plot in the dark; we do not assassinate inoffensive citizens or threaten to do so; we do not seek the lives of political opponents; we do not seek to array one class against another; but we intend to

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<sup>67</sup> *House Misc.*, 510-519; *Opelousas Courier*, 9/26/1868.

defend our just rights at all hazards." This article was the tinder that started the fire within the parish, left to consume its inhabitants less than ten days later.<sup>68</sup>

At around 10 a.m. on Monday, September 28, 1868, Democrats Sebastian Mayo, John Williams, and James R. Dickson called on Bentley at the schoolhouse when Bentley was teaching. Mayo was a local constable, Williams was a stranger to the area, and Dickson was a lawyer at the time, later to become a district judge. The three men, all Seymour Knights, approached Bentley, declared that he had broken the peace treaty with his article depicting the events at Washington on September 13, and demanded a retraction of that article. Outgunned and outmanned, Bentley signed the retraction but the three men, led by Dickson, gave him a "severe caning" of around thirty blows, causing the children to flee the schoolhouse. During their flight, Mayo was reported to have "pointed his pistol at them." This violent outburst was but a prelude to the chaos that would encompass St. Landry Parish during the upcoming weeks.<sup>69</sup>

The children, upon escape of the schoolhouse, believed that Bentley was killed. Word spread quickly through the parish about the murder of a prominent member of the Radical Republican community. But, unbeknownst to the children, Bentley was still alive. After the attack, Emerson's brother, Linden, found him with a large group of black citizens heading to the office of the justice of the peace to file an affidavit. After filing the affidavit, Bentley was told that there was fighting in Opelousas and if he returned his life would most likely be lost. Injured and in danger, as the massacre commenced,

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<sup>68</sup> *St. Landry Progress*, 9/19/1868; *House Documents, Otherwise publ. as Executive Documents: 13th Congress, 2nd Session-44th Congress, 1st Session* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1877), 183, hereafter cited as *House Documents*; *House Miscellaneous Documents*, 41st Congress, 1st Session, No. 12, "Papers in the Case of C.B. Darrall vs. Adolphe Bailey, Third Congressional District, Louisiana," 3, hereafter cited as *Darrall v. Bailey*.

<sup>69</sup> *House Misc.*, 406-416, 611-619; *House Documents*, 183-185; McTigue, 294.

Bentley hid in a barn behind the *Progress* office until the next morning. On the morning of September 29, Bentley left the barn in fear of a Democratic search and hid in some weeds until the next day. By this time, Bentley had not eaten or drank anything for a period of thirty-three hours and decided to make his escape, where he was "chased by an armed body of white men" across a field and escaped with the aid of friends. Bentley hid in gullies and various safehouses, including John Amrein's (Rep.) barn on the eighth night after the massacre, until he was able to board a skiff to Plaquemines, located east of St. Landry and southwest of Baton Rouge on the Mississippi. These safehouses were usually owned by freedmen, *hommes de couleur*, or white Republicans who personally knew the traveler and were used for short-term protection. The people who aided the fleeing Republicans were momentarily safe from the wrath of the locals, usually through swearing allegiance to the Democratic Party. From Plaquemines, Bentley found a steamer and traveled to New Orleans in an escape that lasted three weeks. While Bentley was able to escape, many Republicans and blacks in the parish were not as fortunate.<sup>70</sup>

As word spread regarding the apparent murder of Bentley on the morning of September 28, local Democratic leaders sprung into action to prevent Republican organization from occurring. The primary men in charge were the head of the local Seymour Knights chapter, Solomon Loeb, and the two leaders of the St. Landry KWC, James M. Thompson and R.A. Littell. Acting immediately after Bentley's caning, L. Saunders King received "an order from (mayor Felix King) to stop all armed bodies coming into the town of Opelousas." Large groups of Democrats mounted their horses, armed themselves, and searched the region for any signs of organization, as their

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<sup>70</sup> *Supplemental Report of Joint Committee of the General Assembly of Louisiana on the Conduct of the Late Elections and the Condition of Peace and Order in the State* (New Orleans: A.L. Lee, State Printer, 1869), 38-40, hereafter known as *Supplemental Report: House Misc.*, 406-421; *House Documents*, 184.



longtime fear of a black insurrection found itself manifested in reports that "a large body of whites had been killed, and that nothing would stop it but extermination." Armed men went from house to house, searching for black people and either arrested them or worse.<sup>71</sup>

Some black men attempted to prevent the impending violence in the first stages of the massacre, such as John Simms, a *homme de couleur*, who collaborated with the Democrats by sending a group of black men back home who were on their way to Opelousas. The first report of black coordination came from "General" Thomas Anderson's plantation, but Simms was able to send the estimated 30-40 men away by convincing them that Bentley was alive and that there was no need to come to his aid. However, in the only other instance of black organization during the massacre, the black men did not turn back.<sup>72</sup>

At around 3 p.m., reports circulated that a group had organized at Halaire Paillet's plantation, one mile south of Opelousas. L. Saunders King (Dem.) was once again a member of the first group to arrive, which Democrats claim to have been no larger than eight people, where he found a group of around two dozen armed black men. Upon ordering the black men to lay down their arms and to come peacefully with him to Opelousas, the black leader refused and gave the order to open fire. The short skirmish resulted in one black death, a fatal gunshot wound to King's horse, and several injuries on both sides, including Thomas Anderson's cousin, Baylis, and a Captain Mayo.<sup>73</sup> The white group captured eight black combatants and took them to the courthouse in

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<sup>71</sup> *House Misc.* 406-416, 510-519; Multiple sources claim that many people simply disappeared, never to be seen again. Bodies turned up periodically in the months that follow, so it is likely that those who were not taken to jail or had gained protection either fled the region or were killed.

<sup>72</sup> *House Misc.*, 510-519, 611-619; *Supplemental Report*, 29-30.

<sup>73</sup> Captain Mayo was not referred to by first name, and as there are multiple individuals by the same surname, it is impossible to determine with certainty which one was involved here. However, due to his participation in the Democratic party and in the caning of Bentley, Sebastian Mayo is the most likely candidate.

Opelousas, later brought to the local jail, while the remainder of the survivors fled into the surrounding woods and fields.<sup>74</sup>

After the skirmish at the Paillett plantation, "no armed negro organization was found" in the parish for the remainder of the massacre. Yet the white population continued to gather in Opelousas, increasing to between 2,000-2,500 by nightfall, a number maintained the following morning. By September 29, a Washington citizen found a scene of general black abandonment of their homes: the inhabitants either taken away or had fled the area. Understandably, no blacks who had not already sworn allegiance to the Democratic Party could be found in Opelousas, and while shots were heard occasionally, no murders within the corporation were reported. Patrols roamed the region for around two weeks with the purpose of "disarming" the blacks and Democratic leaders posted sentinels around Opelousas and Washington in order to prevent black citizens from entering or leaving. While it is entirely possible that the black organization had been crippled beyond repair on the first day, the more plausible scenario was that there was no plan in place to burn Opelousas and kill its white inhabitants. The largest group of black men reported found was at the Paillett plantation, and they were no threat to overtake the immense white presence in Opelousas. In fact, one Confederate veteran agreed that the "negroes were entirely at their mercy" by the second day, victims of an "uncontrollable excitement" that gripped the white population. But this white population showed no mercy, as the scattered killings across the parish on the second day were reported to represent the highest body count during the massacre.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *House Misc.*, 510-519; *House Misc., Part II*, 5-12.

<sup>75</sup> *House Misc.*, 493-495, 512, 599-605; *House Misc., Part II*, 5-12, 33-46, 50-65.

Throughout September 28 and the early part of September 29, black citizens had been rounded up and sent to the prison in Opelousas, estimated to be twenty-nine in total. Two of these men were Joseph Gradney and his brother, who had heard about the troubles on September 28 and proceeded unarmed to Opelousas from nearby Washington to check on the status of their family. On their way, the brothers encountered a white patrol, who brought them to Opelousas. The leader of the patrol was heard speaking to "Colonel" Thompson, and was ordered to "kill anything that was captured" instead of taking additional prisoners. The prisoners remained in the jail overnight, but they would not stay there long. At around 4 p.m. on September 29, Loeb was overheard talking to the jailer in order to acquire the jailhouse key at a certain time. That night, sometime after 10 p.m., a crowd "broke into" the jail, removed the prisoners from their cells, and took them to an undisclosed location outside of the prison that held over thirty armed Democrats led by Loeb. Fortunately, the Gradney brothers were separated from the rest of the prisoners by Ferreol Perrodin (Dem.), the deputy sheriff. Perrodin denied that he helped the Gradney brothers, but they cited a personal acquaintance with the lawman as the reason for his aid. The rest of the prisoners were taken a short distance into the woods in small groups to be shot. The bodies were left where they fell for several days until they were buried haphazardly, "with portions of the body out of ground...upon which the *buzzards were feeding*."<sup>76</sup>

At around 10 p.m. on September 29, around the same time that the prisoners were executed, materials used for and the press of the *St. Landry Progress* were taken into the street and either destroyed or set ablaze. The benches for the schoolhouse where Bentley taught were also "torn to pieces, and the school (was) broken up." The *Progress* was the

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<sup>76</sup> *House Misc.*, 460-469, 493-501; *House Documents*, 184-186.

voice of the St. Landry Republican party, and while its destruction crippled the party in St. Landry, it was not the only paper to have been destroyed during this time period. By May, 1869, those involved directly with newspapers in Louisiana believed there to be no Republican paper within 100 miles of the parish, the nearest being in Nacogdoches, located to the northwest of St. Landry in Natchitoches Parish. Unsurprisingly, Natchitoches was one of the two parishes not located on the Mississippi River to vote for the Republican candidate in November, suggesting a relative lack of violence and voter intimidation. As violence dismantled the regional Republican party, its members survived either by fleeing the area or by converting to the Democratic party.<sup>77</sup>

Presumably, before the Gradney brothers were released, they received some form of protection from the Democratic wrath. After September 28, no black person could travel into Opelousas without a red ribbon tied around their arm, a symbol of Democratic conversion and safety from violence. Protection papers were also passed out in the weeks after the massacre and blacks felt compelled to file these for their own safety. Their signatures on these papers declared for them to be members of a Democratic club, and were thusly "entitled to the friendship, confidence, and protection of all good Democrats." There were no political meetings after September 28, Republican or Democrat. There was no need, with the regional Republican presence eradicated and the November vote secured for the Democrats. Beverly Wilson, a blacksmith in Opelousas and an influential black Republican, believed that by the end of 1868, black citizens were "in a worse condition now than in slavery." Republican inhabitants of the region felt a sense of hopelessness, as even exhibiting Republican ideas was enough to endanger their

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<sup>77</sup> *House Misc.*, 406-416; *Darrall v. Bailey*, 6-7.

lives, and those that did not flee or were killed found themselves with no option other than to convert to the Democratic party.<sup>78</sup>

The St. Landry Massacre was a general uprising that lasted around two weeks, and most able-bodied white Democrats were involved in one way or another. Actions taken by white Democrats during this time were supported by local civil authorities, who "refused to execute" any affidavits against those who had committed the atrocities. After caning Bentley, Dickson was arrested for the attack but had escaped the same day, the matter not to be revisited. During this time, especially during the first several days of the massacre, Republican leaders were hunted. One such leader was C.E. Durand, the French editor of the *Progress*. As a representative of the "incendiary" speakers that regional Democrats grew to despise, Durand was to be made an example of. The editor was not seen after the night of September 28, and although the exact date that he was murdered is unclear, Durand was killed sometime within the first three days of the massacre. By the third day, Durand's corpse was put on display outside of the Opelousas drug store as a warning to other "incendiaries." The drug store was owned by Claudius Mayo, an influential Democrat and Sebastian Mayo's brother, in a partnership with James Thompson (Dem.). Durand's murder and the attempts on other white Republicans are significant, as they help dispel Democratic claims as to the reasons behind the massacre.<sup>79</sup>

Democratic testimony usually described the events as a personal conflict that escalated into a race war, and their reaction of mass murder was one based out of fear of a black uprising that would compromise the life of every white person in the area. One

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.; *House Documents*, 185-186.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 184; *Darrall v. Bailey*, 3, 8-9; *House Misc.*, 665-668.

historian described the white response as conditioned, a result of constant warnings against black insurrections by the Democratic community. The Democratic leaders were able to use this conditioning, as newspaper articles and rhetoric were increasingly targeted towards the possibility of a black insurrection since the passage of the Reconstruction Acts, in order to eliminate the Republican presence in the parish and establish Democratic control. At one point, Loeb was heard saying that the Democratic plan was to "kill every man who has been engaged in deceiving the freedmen and trying to create enmity between the races." The idea of this being purely a race riot is false, as white Republican leaders were also targeted and blamed for giving the black population illusions of progress. During the massacre, Southern conservatives expressed fears that blacks "were going to ride in Mrs. So-and-So's carriage, and to sit at Mrs. So-and-So's table" in attempts to stir up the white masses. But these were just tools to incite the local white population, as actions of local Democratic leaders during and after the massacre suggest political ambitions, and not one of defense and protection from a black insurrection. The elimination of these Republican leaders would allow for the Democrats to control, through violence and intimidation, the black vote that would decide the November election in St. Landry.<sup>80</sup>

Most Republican leaders in St. Landry were able to escape, but not without difficulty. The Donato brothers, *hommes de couleur*, and Sam Johnson, a freedman, were both able to leave the area, but no record survives of their escape. At around 8:30 p.m. on the night of September 28, while hiding in the barn behind the *Progress* office, Emerson Bentley overheard Solomon Loeb say "Come on boys; Let's go get Francois

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<sup>80</sup> Carolyn E. DeLatte, "The St. Landry Riot: A Forgotten Incident in Reconstruction Violence," *Louisiana History* 17 (Winter 1976), 45-46; *House Misc.*, 406-416, 510-519; *House Misc., Part II*, 63.

D'Avy." During the course of the day, D'Avy had conversed with multiple other prominent Republicans to decide a course of action, including Linden Bentley and Gustave Donato. These Republican leaders decided that D'Avy would write a telegram to the governor describing the events while the others sent couriers to warn the black inhabitants of the parish. By nightfall, D'Avy felt as if the excitement had died down and that he was not in danger. But, sometime between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m., a group of men came into his house and pulled him into the street. While on the street, the group taunted D'Avy, struck him with the butt of a gun, dislocating his shoulder, and shot him, grazing the side of his face. D'Avy escaped by feigning death, but a picket stopped him on his way out of the area. He managed to escape, but not without a dislocated ankle. Moving between safehouses and recovering from multiple injuries, it took D'Avy eighty days to arrive in New Orleans.<sup>81</sup>

John Amrein, the Republican parish judge, was ill with yellow fever during the second half of 1868. One of Amrein's sons died on September 28 of causes unrelated to the massacre, but armed Democratic guards did not allow him entrance into town for burial in order to limit Republican communication, so Amrein buried his child in the yard at his plantation on the morning of September 30. During the weeks after the riot, Amrein received multiple visits from regional Democrats, the first coming just hours after he buried his child. Here, a group of over a dozen men approached Amrein, claiming an intent to "disarm the radical party." But, the conversation quickly degenerated into insults directed at Amrein, and at one point the Democrats blamed the massacre directly on him and other Republican speakers, having "advised these colored

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<sup>81</sup> *House Misc.*, 406-416; *Darrall v. Bailey*, 3-4; *House Documents*, 186-188.

men to make all this fuss and riot." At this, the party of armed men left Amrein and his sick family safe for the moment.<sup>82</sup>

About three weeks after the riot began, Amrein began to receive additional Democratic callers at night, led by J. Saunders King. King promised Amrein's safety through the door, then proceeded to question the Republican at gunpoint about the Knights of the Grand Republic, an organization designed to aid widows and orphans of the Civil War and to support reconstruction measures. Amrein promised the men a copy of the organization's constitution, which he provided for them the following day. Before leaving, the men told Amrein that he should remain at home, as night patrols were a danger to him. Two nights after Amrein provided the constitution, groups of men appeared at his house and surrounded it, making their presence known but not taking action. This continued for three nights. On the fourth day, Amrein traveled to Opelousas but was too sick to continue at one point and was forced to stay in a safehouse for several days. As the parish judge, Amrein felt relatively safe from violence, but upon hearing warnings about his safety and of an order of banishment from the parish from friends in Opelousas, he decided to contact James M. Thompson (Dem.), a local KWC head. Thompson confirmed his banishment, explaining that Amrein's "politics do not suit the people." Amrein was forced to sell his plantation, but as he was still stricken with yellow fever throughout this entire ordeal, he remained in the parish until he recovered in early January, 1869, when he left for New Orleans.<sup>83</sup>

As the violence had largely subsided by the end of October, Swan Miller and J. Baptiste Antoine falsely believed that they were safe to return to St. Landry and distribute

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<sup>82</sup> *House Misc.*, 416-421.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*



Republican tickets. Miller was a Swedish immigrant that favored Republican politics and Antoine was a local Republican. Miller was not present during the September and October violence, having left St. Landry in July of that year due to "animosities exhibited against (his) politics." Antoine had a close encounter during the massacre, where he was taken into the woods with a freedman named Tony. Tony was shot, but Antoine was able to escape by swearing Democratic allegiance. Upon arrival in the town, the men were denied accommodation at a local hotel and were confronted by a group of Democrats. The group questioned their political affiliation, but the Republicans were able to pass without trouble as Antoine carried a Seymour and Blair badge for such an occasion. Later that day, Antoine was taken to the prison, but not before discarding the Republican tickets he carried. The white locals in charge appear to have not known Antoine's political affiliation with certainty, as once again they let him go free with a mere promise of giving a Democratic speech that night. Antoine was able to escape the parish under the cover of darkness, but Miller, seen being taken away as Antoine was escorted to jail, was not as fortunate.<sup>84</sup>

After being denied accommodation at the hotel, Miller went to the Freedmen's Bureau office, where he encountered ex-agent Oscar Violet and conversed with him outside of the office. Violet blamed Miller for his removal from the Bureau post, as Miller reported Violet earlier that year for ordering a black man off a plantation, treating him "roughly and unmannerly" in the process. Violet, known to be of Democratic tendencies, often placed planter's ambitions over those of the black laborers. Upon their return to the office, Miller found an estimated 30-50 armed men waiting for him, who gave him ten minutes to leave Opelousas lest he wished a violent removal. The armed

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<sup>84</sup> *House Misc.*, 455-457; *Darrall v. Bailey*, 4-5, 8-9; *Supplemental Report*, 42-46, 48.

group relieved Miller of his Republican tickets then Ferreol Perrodin and a Bureau agent escorted him out of town. Although Perrodin sided with the Democrats throughout the canvass, this was the second noted occasion that he went out of his way to prevent additional violence. These men left Miller after he had made it around two miles outside of Opelousas, but "a good many" men were following the group, including individuals who had threatened Miller previously. Perrodin and the Bureau Agent were relieved by another deputy sheriff, C.C. Dason, who unsuccessfully ordered the trailing men to return to their homes. Miller and Dason made it to the woods by dusk, where the deputy sheriff left Miller to his own devices. Dason made it no more than fifty yards away from Miller when the attackers rode in at full gallop, pistols drawn. Dason fired at one of the men and missed, but this gave Miller enough time to escape into the woods, where he hid that night. During the course of the night and the following day, the group continued to search for Miller, who eventually escaped with the aid of a black man. More than a month after Bentley's caning and mere days before the election of November 3, "terrorism still exist(ed)" in St. Landry.<sup>85</sup>

Accurate death tolls are difficult to discern for most Reconstruction violence, including the events in St. Landry. White evasiveness and solidarity in testimonies usually only provided minor details or general information already known to investigators. The black population was usually so scared of white retribution that they remained silent if they wished to remain in the area. The St. Landry Massacre also featured many different groups of whites riding around the parish committing "outrages" against blacks and white Republicans, and if the state Democratic leaders knew of the number killed in total, they did not let it be known. Jesse M. Lee, a lieutenant for the

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*; *House Misc.*, 455-457, 460-469; *Darrall v. Bailey*, 8-9.

United States army, was sent to Louisiana on September 18, 1868 to investigate turmoil in various regions in the state. When Lee arrived in St. Landry on October 3, he found an intimidated black population alongside an uncooperative white population, and felt that no information would be available unless there was a military presence. Lee found that in "most parts of the State a systematic series of outrages, robberies, and murders were committed on the loyal people with the avowed intention of intimidating, and thus forcing, them to abstain from voting, and of driving" the Republican leaders out of the area.<sup>86</sup>

Lee's report estimated that 223 total deaths occurred in St. Landry Parish during the massacre, but white solidarity and black fear forced him to rely on the Democratic press for some of these numbers, as with "the state of lawlessness and intimidation existing it has been impossible to procure full evidence from this parish." General Hatch's report for the Freedmen's Bureau encountered similar difficulties in obtaining information and only reported 23 deaths, the number that most Democratic testimony seemed to have agreed upon. The Board of Registrars for St. Landry Parish estimated for over 200 total deaths. Democratic testimonies fell between 23-75 total deaths while Republican estimates ranged between 200-500. However, the dates in which the Republican estimates fell varied, as violence was common enough to begin including deaths as early as March, 1868. As no Republican newspapers were in existence in the area at this time, Democratic papers are the only sources available that provided numbers. The far-right *Franklin Planter's Banner*, edited by the same Daniel Dennett who had helped form the KWC in Louisiana, estimated that 100 black deaths had occurred, a number that regional Democratic papers appear to have agreed upon. During this time

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<sup>86</sup> *Supplemental Report.*

period, Lee's report confirmed only two white deaths, one Republican and one Democrat, and the highest estimate of white Democratic casualties was four. No estimates were given as to white Republican deaths, but John Amrein (Rep.) testified to a House committee that investigated occurrences during the 1868 presidential canvass that "every leader of the republican party whom I knew of, who did not escape, has been killed." Judging by the general state of lawlessness in the region and the vigor in which the Democrats hunted Republicans, 250 black deaths is by no means an impossibility, and the total number of deaths probably fell between 200-250 from September 28 until November 3. Large numbers of Republicans also fled the region, and although actual numbers are not known with certainty, Emerson Bentley estimated for the total to be near 200. The massacre was a Democratic success, and Dennett stated that the Democrats were "well satisfied with the result."<sup>87</sup>

The presidential election on November 3, 1868, was by no means fair. The Republican population of St. Landry parish and of Louisiana as a whole was intimidated into submission. Republicans who had remained in the parish were compelled to join Democratic clubs to ensure safety. When they arrived at the polls, armed guards distributed Democratic tickets to the voters and made sure that the tickets were placed in Seymour's box. The supervisors of registration for St. Landry were "fully convinced that no man on that day could have voted any other than the democratic ticket and not been killed inside of twenty-four hours thereafter." In an election where Seymour received 39,557 votes to Grant's 25,233 in Louisiana, St. Landry Parish was one of seven in the state that did not record a single Republican vote. In fact, Grant majorities were all found, with the exceptions of Rapides and Natchitoches parishes, in parishes on the

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 48, 255-273; *House Misc.*, 406-421, 476-477, 547.

Mississippi River, where federal control was more secure. While Grant won the nomination, Seymour's victory in Louisiana was carried by violence.<sup>88</sup>

Fair voting practices in the presidential election were not the only casualties of the fall violence. Congressional elections on November 3 were also fraudulent and often very lopsided due to a nonexistent Republican voter turnout and corruption at the polls. The election in the Third Congressional District of Louisiana between C.B. Darrall (Rep) and Adolphe Bailey (Dem) is another example of violence impacting poll results. As in the presidential elections, Darrall did not receive a single vote in any of the district parishes other than St. Mary. Citing fraudulence and intimidation, Darrall contested Bailey's seat by early December, 1868. By this point, returns from St. Martin Parish had already been thrown out due to "a want of legal returns," or fraud. Republican testimony unanimously stated a desire to vote for Darrall, but the overarching fear of white retaliation towards Republican action prevented most from voting the Republican ticket after the massacres of September and October. Fraud most likely reduced total Republican votes to zero.<sup>89</sup>

Parish	April Gubernatorial Returns <sup>90</sup>				November Congressional Returns		
	Warmoth	Taliaferro	Baker	Voorhies	Darrall	Bailey	
Lafayette	743	121	137	0	0		1,420
St. Landry	2,514	649	1,187	0	0		4,683
St. Martin	1,057	915	530	0			
St. Mary	2,019	811	3	0	1,132		1,814
Vermillion	133	39	70	0	0		957

By February, 1869, Bentley left New Orleans for a position as assistant editor of the *St. Bernard Herald*. But, shortly after Bentley began work, John Tucker (Rep.), the

<sup>88</sup> *Supplemental Report*, xxix; *Darrall v. Bailey*, 5-6, 21-22; Tunnell, 158.

<sup>89</sup> *Darrall v. Bailey*.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

Assistant Assessor of Internal Revenue in Opelousas, proposed a partnership in starting a new Republican paper in St. Landry Parish. Tucker felt that anti-Republicanism in the parish had waned since the massacre, to the point where it was safe for their return. However, Tucker was mistaken, as the parish remained hostile to Republicans of any race throughout Reconstruction and eventually became the home to the first of Louisiana's White League in 1874. Democrats had something to gain by preventing the establishment of the paper, as Warmoth promised Bentley and Tucker the state printing contract. If their paper was unsuccessful, Senator Thomas C. Anderson (Dem.) arranged for the contract to go to the *Opelousas Journal*, a relatively moderate paper under the influence of the Democratic parish leaders. By early May, the U.S. Army 25th Colored Infantry Regiment arrived in Opelousas, sent to the area to ensure peace in the aftermath of the deadliest uprising in the Reconstruction Era. As he was not fully convinced that the white population would not harm him, Bentley stayed with the black soldiers in their camp on the outskirts of Opelousas for protection.<sup>91</sup>

Similar to Lieutenant Jesse M. Lee's report on conditions immediately after the massacre, upon its arrival the black regiment found a deceptive peace, where Captain Frank M. Coxe reported that "although everything indicates quiet and order, it is not difficult to discern a temper...which uncontrolled would jeopardize the life of any Republican in his public expression of opinion." The Democratic white community was virtually silent as to the events of the previous fall, but tension rose as the military presence lingered. Threats were made on Bentley's life and eventually, some locals threatened to attack the camp if Bentley was not released into their control. On May 11,

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<sup>91</sup> Emerson Bentley Journal; U.S. Army 25th Colored Infantry Regiment Letterbook, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; *House Misc., Part II*, 44.

1869, Coxe reported that 50-100 "regulators" were in the wooded area nearby ready to make such an attack, although action was never taken. Even with the military presence, multiple incidents of violence with racial and political overtones occurred within the Opelousas city limits.<sup>92</sup>

The first reported case of violence was against John Tucker (Rep.), Bentley's partner, on May 23, 1869. Tucker left the confines of the army's camp at around 10 p.m. and 4-5 men followed him into Opelousas. Here, these men attacked Tucker with the "purpose of assassination," resulting in two gunshot wounds and a blow to the head. One of the shots grazed his arm and the other went through the arm, fracturing a bone in the process. Tucker survived this attack, and with the aid of Coxe, attempted to find the offenders and turn them over to local authorities. Upon investigation, Coxe found an uncooperative population who showed "no general desire that the perpetrators be found." Parish officials, such as Judge Garrigues (Dem.), were sympathetic to Tucker's attackers and were generally unwilling to aid Coxe in his investigation. The day after the assassination attempt, a pamphlet circulated that declared for Tucker to have been drunk upon leaving the army camp, accidentally shooting himself. Tucker testified that he was sober at the time of departure and Coxe confirmed, writing that the pamphlet was most likely "fabricated for the purpose of self-exoneration."<sup>93</sup>

Eventually, Tucker received a subpoena to testify before the Congressional Committee on Elections, but he was told "that he should not live to testify against this community." Tucker's case was similar to many others across the South during Reconstruction, where civil authorities were unwilling or unable to prosecute criminals

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, Letter, Captain Coxe to Captain Baldey, 5/8/1869; Emerson Bentley Journal.

<sup>93</sup> Letter, Captain Coxe to Captain Baldey, 5/24/1869, 5/27/1869, 7/29/1869, Colored Infantry Letterbook; *House Misc, Part II*, 34-35, 42-43.

for crimes against blacks or white Republicans. Coxe's letters to his superior illustrate a frustration with the local government, expressing that "this occurrence, previous ones of like nature, (were) liable at any time to be repeated due to the utter inefficiency of the civic government." He estimated that hundreds of "outrages" against white Republicans and freedmen since the war's end had occurred, yet no investigations had taken place even though the guilty parties were often known to local officials. In fact, Coxe believed that securing an effective local government required a military presence, with a large number of soldiers ready to be called into the area. These locals resented anything Republican, and despised the military presence to the point where the black soldiers were not safe from being targeted.<sup>94</sup>

Little more than a month later, in late June, another incident occurred in Opelousas. An elderly owner of a saloon in town, John Cochran (Dem.), refused service to one of the black soldiers who stopped in for a drink on his way to a dance at the local dance hall. Upon leaving the saloon and rejoining several other soldiers, the black soldier was followed and accosted by a half dozen men, one of whom was Captain May, a participant in the massacre nine months prior. One black soldier was struck with a club wielded by Cochran then Captain May drew a pistol and told the soldiers that "no damned United States uniform can protect you here; we are going to clean you all out in a few days." The soldiers were unarmed at the time, but were able to escape without serious injury. Following the confrontation, with the local authorities not taking action, Captain Coxe filed an affidavit. The case eventually wound up in the district court, but justice was not found. During the trial process, Coxe showed continued exasperation

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.



with the regional legal system, describing the juries as those "pledged to save from punishment their own Confederates."<sup>95</sup>

By May, 1869, although many local whites described the parish as being peaceful and law-abiding, Coxe found that "a formidable reign of terror has subdued the spirit of the people...I have never seen in my continuous experience in reconstruction duty, a class of people...so completely crushed as among the loyalists here." In the 1870 census, St. Landry Parish contained 13,776 whites and 11,694 free blacks. As a general rule, the white population voted Democratic while the black population voted Republican during Reconstruction, so the facts that Grant received no votes in November and that Democrats held a stranglehold on parish politics speaks volumes of the local impact of the St. Landry Massacre.<sup>96</sup>

As the largest incident of violence during Reconstruction, the St. Landry Massacre accomplished its purpose of electing a Democratic president on the local level. Republicans in the parish were intimidated into submission, exiled, or killed. After the massacre, Democrats secured control of St. Landry and the parish Republican Party was unable to recover for the remainder of Reconstruction. As a response to the electoral bulldozing by violence and fraud found in 1868, preventative state and national legislation came into existence over the next several years. However, this legislation's effectiveness was short-lived, as Southern conservatives began to gain influence while Radicalism waned nationally. As Southern governments were beginning to be "redeemed" back into Democratic hands, Southern conservatives were able to use their successes in 1868 as blueprints for regional control. After 1868, violence as a means of

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 6/28/1869.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 5/11/1869; *Ninth Census of Population*.

control was utilized by Southern conservatives when other methods failed, plaguing the South for decades.

### Chapter III

#### To Maintain the White Man's Government

While the St. Landry Massacre succeeded in its initial goal of electing a Democratic president, at least on the local level, it impacted parish politics and power structures in the long-run as well. Thomas C. Anderson, a Democratic state senator, was able to secure a power base in the parish after the massacre and controlled parish politics and patronage for the rest of Reconstruction. As violence by secret societies permeated the South in late 1868, preventative measures were taken on state and national levels to prevent similar occurrences. In Louisiana, one of these measures created the Returning Board on Elections, a committee that could discard any votes it deemed to be fraudulent, ultimately playing a role in deciding the outcome of elections in the state for the remainder of Reconstruction. Nationally, the Fifteenth Amendment and the First Enforcement Act passed as attempts to secure and federally enforce rights granted to the freedmen in the Fourteenth Amendment and at the polls. As a result of this legislation and further legislation that increased federal enforcement powers, violence and intimidation as they occurred in 1868 were no longer possible. However, after the massacre, no Republican organization was found in St. Landry until 1872 and no parish Republican paper was produced until 1876. In 1874, St. Landry became the host of the first Louisiana White League, a paramilitary organization that focused on the "redemption" of political control from Republican to Democratic hands. But, its presence was unnecessary in the parish, as St. Landry's redemption occurred in 1868.

St. Landry Parish was not the only area to experience collective violence in the South during the 1868 presidential campaign. Local leaders often sanctioned these acts, as Lee, the federal investigator sent to the region after the massacres, found the violence not to be "the work of rowdies and roughs; their influential movers and backers were men called respectable and influential." Bossier, Caddo, Jefferson, Orleans, St. Bernard, and St. Landry parishes all reported large scale collective violence, but increased violence was a regional phenomenon across the South and was not isolated in Louisiana. Second only to Louisiana, Georgia also experienced violence on a broad scale, the largest outbreak being the Camilla Riot. Camilla, the county seat of Mitchell County, was located in southwest Georgia. As local Republicans were gathering for a meeting in Camilla on the morning of September 19, white locals fired on them and killed nearly a dozen. Democrats in Camilla expressed the same fears present in St. Landry, where they felt that if the black population assembled inside of the corporation, an uprising would occur and white lives would be in danger. While the number of black deaths was much lower than that experienced in Louisiana, its effect on the black population was similar. In the November presidential election, only two Republican votes were tallied in Mitchell County and Georgia became the only Southern state other than Louisiana and Tennessee to realize a Seymour victory.<sup>97</sup>

Large scale violence and intimidation occurred throughout Louisiana during the late summer months of 1868 and its effectiveness was far greater than previous Democratic attempts to restore the antebellum racial hierarchy. Where labor fraud, legislation, and economic intimidation had failed, large scale collective violence provided

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<sup>97</sup> *New York Times*, 10/10/1868; *Supplemental Report*, vi: Lee W. Formwalt, "The Camilla Massacre of 1868: Racial Violence as Political Propaganda," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* LXXI (Fall, 1987), 399-426.

Horatio Seymour (Dem.) a victory in Louisiana in the November presidential election. Only two country parishes away from the Mississippi River and federal military reach voted for Ulysses S. Grant (Rep.) in November, both of which reported little to no voter intimidation during the presidential canvass. Several parishes within federal military reach, surrounding New Orleans and on the Mississippi, experienced collective violence as well; even in areas where federal military control was found they could not adequately suppress the general white uprisings that occurred in the region. This violence established long term Democratic dominance in several Louisiana parishes and created a blueprint for political control for the remainder of Reconstruction.

Most collective violence in Louisiana during the presidential canvas began in late September and lasted through the early November election. Yet, the effects of these massacres were long term and played a role in the Democratic dominance that would envelop the state in 1874. Bossier and Caddo parishes, located in the northwest corner of Louisiana bordering Texas, experienced consistent violence throughout the Reconstruction Era. One historian even argued that Caddo Parish experienced the most violence in Louisiana during the period, in terms of deaths. A U.S. Marshal in Shreveport described the area as a "desperate part of the country" and a "great place for drinking, gambling, and shooting." Heavily concentrating in cotton production using sharecropping, Caddo Parish contained a black population of 15,799 and a white population of 5,913 in 1870. However effective, in 1868, levels of violence in Caddo Parish did not reach the levels of other areas of the state, including Bossier Parish. White perpetrators were often found to have crossed parish lines during incidents of collective violence and this was reported in both the Caddo and Bossier incidents. The fact that

both parish seats, Shreveport in Caddo and Benton in Bossier, were within twenty miles of each other allowed for these perpetrators to travel with ease between the two parishes. The violence in Bossier Parish was even closer, occurring less than ten miles from Shreveport. While the Ku Klux was not noted as far south as St. Landry Parish, testimonies reveal its presence in these two parishes and not that of the KWC, but as their methods and intents were similar, differences between the two are negligible.<sup>98</sup>

The primary incident in Caddo Parish occurred on October 12, 1868, when local whites took five black men from the local brickyard to the river and shot them. This was a regular occurrence in the parish, as one witness estimated for 25-30 bodies to have floated down the river from the summer of 1868 until the November election. On October 14, Robert Gray, a Republican Justice of the Peace elected in April but never allowed to occupy that position by local Democratic leaders, was shot and killed. Just as in St. Landry, local Democrats confiscated Republican tickets, prominent Republicans found themselves in danger if they remained in the area, armed men surrounded the polls on election day, and Republicans only tallied one vote in November. This Republican vote was cast by James Watson, who was killed that night. Lee's report estimated for forty-three black deaths in Caddo Parish during this time period. In December, Democrats held such a stranglehold on the parish that two local whites sentenced for life in prison were "rescued by an armed crowd," once again illustrating the inadequacies of law enforcement in rural Louisiana parishes. While violence in Caddo Parish was

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<sup>98</sup> *House Misc.*, 125-132, 309-312; *Ninth Census of Agriculture, 1870*; *Ninth Census of Population, 1870*; Gilles Vandal, "'Bloody Caddo': White Violence Against Blacks in a Louisiana Parish, 1865-1876," *Journal of Social History* 25, No. 2 (Winter, 1991), 373-388.

effective, only the massacre in St. Landry eclipsed the death toll in Bossier Parish during the 1868 presidential canvass.<sup>99</sup>

Just as in Caddo Parish, Bossier Parish relied heavily on cotton production and held a population that contained 9,170 black people and 3,505 whites. Outrages in Bossier began on September 27, 1868, when a stranger from Arkansas named Gibson arrived at the Shady Grove Plantation and argued with freedmen there. This confrontation resulted in the stranger firing a shot at an old black man, labeled as a Radical, which missed him. The freedmen then restrained Gibson and chained him to a tree, hoping to turn the prisoner over to local law enforcement. The next morning, Gibson was retrieved by a group of white men who claimed a desire to take him to the civil authorities in Bellevue, the closest town. The freedmen obliged, having little hope of successful prosecution but glad to be rid of the man. After this incident, word spread among the white population about a black uprising, whose members reportedly "yelled and whooped like a set of infuriated demons as they gloated over the prospect of spilling the white man's blood." Shortly after white lawmen retrieved Gibson from the freedmen, a white mob of over forty men arrived at Shady Grove and began an "indiscriminate slaughter of the colored people."<sup>100</sup>

Although most black citizens in Bossier Parish eventually fled to the surrounding countryside, the parish was unique in terms of 1868 Louisiana violence where a black group mounted an opposition after the initial hostilities. After the violence at Shady Grove, a group of around twenty-five black men traveled to the nearby Baer Plantation, where they arrested two of the men involved in the killings. Although their claimed

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.; *Supplemental Report*, xvi-xvii, 75-78, 235, 270.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., xv-xvi, 87-93, 270; *Ninth Census of Agriculture, 1870*; *Ninth Census of Population, 1870*; *House Misc.*, 125-132, 337-344, 537-541; *Shreveport Southwestern*, 10/7/1868.

intention was to bring the two men to Shreveport for trial, the whites were shot along the way. The murders of the two white men sent the local population into a frenzy and bands of Democrats proceeded to patrol the countryside, claiming disarmament as a goal but in reality slaughtering large quantities of black citizens. The U.S. Marshal, sent from nearby Shreveport on September 30, did not see any living freedmen aside from servants during his journey to the area, only finding corpses on the side of the road. The violence continued at this pace throughout the first week of October, but began to simmer after that. However, those expressing Republican sentiments were not welcome in the parish and were threatened with death should they stay as Republicans. Lee's report estimated for 167 total deaths during this short but effective time period, where only one Republican vote was cast in the presidential election.<sup>101</sup>

Although violence was comparatively less common in sugar parishes and along the Mississippi River when compared to country parishes, these parishes were by no means isolated from uprisings. As Warmoth's earlier request for federal military aid yielded no results and at this time it was illegal to form a militia, the state of Louisiana approved an act on September 13 that established a Metropolitan Police force which held jurisdiction in New Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Bernard parishes. This police force was under the direction of a board of five supervisors appointed by the governor, removing controlling power from civic authorities that proved unwilling or unable to prosecute offenders in racial injustices. Intact until 1877 but significantly weakened after their

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<sup>101</sup> *Supplemental Report*, xv-xvi, 87-93, 270; *House Misc.*, 125-132, 337-344, 537-541.



1874 defeat in the Battle of Liberty Place, the Metropolitan Police became the primary Republican response to violence in the New Orleans area during its lifetime.<sup>102</sup>

While some incidents were reported in the New Orleans region during late September and early October, escalation mostly occurred during late October as the election became imminent. Jefferson Parish was basically an extension of New Orleans at this time, where the parish seat of Gretna was across the river from New Orleans, so violence in the two parishes often contained the same offenders and occurred within the same time frame. In 1870, Jefferson Parish contained 11,054 blacks and 6,709 whites. On October 23, 1868, a group of white men organized claiming intent to disarm the black population to prevent an uprising, but instead ransacked homes and stole anything of value within, in the process threatening Republicans with death should they vote for Grant in November. Finding these men to be a mockery of the code of chivalry preferred in the South, Lee reported that "nothing seemed small enough to merit the disdain of these chivalric gentlemen. To steal fifty cent pieces and old women's spectacles from 'niggers,' was not beneath the dignity of these champions of 'a white man's government.'" Only nine deaths were reported, but the white mob succeeded in its goal of Democratic domination in the parish. Out of 2,400 total registered black men, 1,742 did not vote in November, giving the Democrats a victory in a parish with nearly a 2:1 ratio favoring black voters over whites.<sup>103</sup>

On the night of September 22, a relatively minor outbreak of violence occurred in predominately white New Orleans, which held a population of 140,923 whites and

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<sup>102</sup> *Acts of Louisiana, 1868*, 85-98; *Acts of Louisiana, 1869*, 61-62; Taylor, 177-178; Melinda Meek Hennessey, "Race and Violence in Reconstruction New Orleans: The 1868 Riot," *Louisiana History* XX, No. 1 (Winter, 1979), 83.

<sup>103</sup> *Supplemental Report*, xvii, 1-16, 237-238, 271; *Ninth Census of Agriculture, 1870*; *Ninth Census of Population, 1870*.

50,456 blacks. Here, a Republican procession was marching down Canal Street when several Democrats taunted them from a store on the intersection of Canal and Bourbon streets. Following the taunts, several whites began firing into the mostly unarmed Republicans on the street, forcing them to scatter. Only one black man died while several sustained wounds, but no other casualties occurred that day. Later that night, however, Joseph Ellerson, a prominent Democrat, attempted to ring an alarm for a black riot, but J.J. Williamson, the New Orleans chief of police, prevented him from doing so. Lee determined for Ellerson's act to have been a signal to begin a massacre of local Republicans. The next month in New Orleans was a time of "continuous and high excitement," where a general state of lawlessness existed and attacks were "exclusively by white Democrats upon Republicans."<sup>104</sup>

Little more than a month later, on October 24, New Orleans experienced a larger outbreak of violence. Similar to the September 22 attack, on the night of October 24 a Republican procession met a Democratic procession traveling in the opposite direction on Canal Street. White Democrats, concealed in the center of the street on the divider, began firing on the Republican procession. Immediately after the gunfire, those involved in the Democratic procession broke rank and "stampeded" towards the Republicans, firing at them. The uprising continued until the November 3 election date, as there was a "hunt" for Republicans in the area. The white rioters ransacked Republican clubhouses and besieged the office of the Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police. The Innocents, a secret society based in New Orleans with red uniforms, were the main perpetrators here,

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<sup>104</sup> *House Misc.*, 379-384; *Supplemental Report*, xi-xiii, 168-181; *Ninth Census of Agriculture, 1870*; *Ninth Census of Population, 1870*; Hennessey, 78-79.

but the Seymour Knights held a strong regional following and the KWC "drilled nightly" in New Orleans.<sup>105</sup>

By October 26, after violence in surrounding parishes began, Warmoth found that the "civil authorities in the parishes of Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Bernard are unable to preserve order and protect the lives and property of the people," handing control of New Orleans and the duty to preserve peace to General Rousseau. Two days later, on October 28, Rousseau issued an address to the citizens of New Orleans that prohibited gatherings of "large bodies on the streets," reorganized the police force by removing "inefficient members,"<sup>106</sup> and warned those inclined towards violence that the military was now supporting the local police force. However, violence against local Republicans continued, prompting Rousseau to speak in front of an Innocents meeting on October 31 in a plea for peace. During the presidential canvass, Lee's report estimated for 65 total deaths in Orleans Parish. Although the majority of the Orleans Parish returns were invalidated because the board of supervisors that made the returns was not a legal one, only 276 Republican votes were tallied despite the 36,000 registered Republican voters in the parish. The October 24 violence in New Orleans sparked uprisings in surrounding parishes, particularly in St. Bernard.<sup>107</sup>

St. Bernard Parish, bordering Orleans Parish to the southeast, contained a relatively even black: white ratio, with 1,913 whites and 1,640 blacks. Around September 20, racial tension in St. Bernard nearly escalated into violence when whites coming from a Democratic meeting began to threaten both white and black Republicans.

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<sup>105</sup> *Supplemental Report*, xi-xiii, 181-198; Hennessey, 80-82.

<sup>106</sup> The phrase "inefficient members" in this case most likely means the removal of policemen who had either directly or indirectly supported the violence.

<sup>107</sup> *House Misc.*, 28-32, 313-316, 376-384; *Supplemental Report*, xi-xiii, 372; Hennessey, 82-91.

These Democrats, mostly armed, went into procession and "lost no opportunity of insulting the black Republicans during the day, often brandishing knives and pistols in their faces." Later that day, a large group of Innocents out of New Orleans searched for the Republican Parish Judge, A.G. Thornton, claiming that he was at fault for the death of black people at the meeting. The Innocents could not find Thornton, but local Democrats announced their intent to dismantle the parish Republican Party here and one week later at a Republican meeting, in which Warmoth was a speaker, where threats against black men occurred and armed outposts organized with the intent of intimidation.<sup>108</sup>

During the afternoon of October 25, the day after the violence in New Orleans, an "unprovoked attack" occurred in St. Bernard when a Democratic procession found two black men by the side of the road. These Democrats struck one of the black men and pointed a gun at him, who then pulled his gun and shot his assailant in the shoulder. The Democrats then killed the two black men, initiating a parish-wide massacre of black people. Later that day, sugar planter Thomas Ong, the Republican chairman of the board of registrars in St. Bernard, began to send for military aid. Local Democrats shot the first courier sent, a policeman, before he could reach his destination. The second courier arrived in New Orleans with a letter that described the parish as on the verge of a general "slaughter of innocent people." With a nearly immediate response, a company of the 1st Infantry, numbering 24 men, traveled from Jackson Barracks in New Orleans to St. Bernard, leaving at around 3:00 a.m. on October 26 and arriving later that morning.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> *House Misc.*, 102-116; *Supplemental Report*, 67-73; *Ninth Census of Agriculture, 1870*; *Ninth Census of Population, 1870*.

<sup>109</sup> *House Misc.*, 102-116, 119-125; *House Misc, Part II*, 491-492; *Supplemental Report*, 65-73.

On the night of October 25, a confrontation occurred between freedmen and Pablo Fillieu, at Fillieu's house. Who shot first is unclear, but Fillieu and at least one freedmen died, with the house looted and burned. When the soldiers arrived in the area the following morning, they received word that Ong was in danger and traveled to his plantation. When they reached the plantation, the soldiers found a large group of over sixty armed Democrats outside of Ong's gates. These Democrats blamed Ong, as a Radical incendiary, for riling up the black population to the point of killing Fillieu. In retribution, this "sheriff's posse" arrested several dozen men on Ong's plantation and reportedly looted their homes. Due to their small numbers, the federal soldiers decided to secure Ong's plantation and provide safety for Republicans in need, but those outside of the plantation were still targeted by local whites. Lee's report estimated that 68 total deaths occurred between October 25 and November 3, illustrating that while military aid was available for parishes in the vicinity of New Orleans, its effectiveness was limited. Many Republicans were arrested during this time period, one witness estimating 150 in total, only to be released after the election had transpired. By the election, every supervisor of registration in the parish was either in jail or had fled the region. As the supervisors were the only people authorized to present electoral returns for the parish, the sheriff had done so instead, resulting in the parish vote being thrown out due to illegal returns.<sup>110</sup>

St. Mary Parish, located southeast of St. Landry on the Gulf of Mexico with the parish seat of Franklin, contained one of the most conservative Democratic organs in the area with the *Franklin Planter's Banner*. The *Planter's Banner* was edited by Daniel

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<sup>110</sup> *House Misc.*, 102-116, 312-314, 631-633, 174-186; *House Misc., Part II*, 76-98; *Supplemental Report*, xviii, 65-73, 272.

Dennett, who was also a founding member of the KWC in Louisiana. Although large scale collective violence was not found here, intimidation and a general feeling of danger amongst white and literate black Republicans was found. On September 8, Colonel Henry Pope, the Republican sheriff based in Franklin, sent a response to a circular regarding the state of affairs in the parish, where he mentioned low levels of violence but found a "settled determination on the part of the leaders of the Democratic Party in the parish to draw out by every means in their power all white" Republicans. By October 17, this tension had escalated and two of the few local white Republicans, Pope and Judge Valentine Chase, were "publicly assassinated" within Franklin's town limits. While the white population vastly outnumbered the black population in St. Mary, 9,607-4,200, local Democrats, both white and black in this case, were still able to hunt prominent Republicans and either drive them out of the parish or kill them. On October 18, materials used for the Republican paper in Franklin were destroyed and armed Democratic patrols roamed the parish until the November election. This violence and intimidation was effective, as the parish board of registrars found that the Democratic majority "was not an expression of the will of the people."<sup>111</sup>

These parishes were by no means alone in experiencing violence during the 1868 presidential campaign, as nearly every Louisiana parish experienced some form of violence or intimidation. Some parishes, such as Franklin in northeastern Louisiana, experienced frequent violence but no information was found that suggests concentrated collective killings. Here, Lee's report estimated fifty-seven deaths during the presidential canvass and observed that Democrats ran the November election "with a ticket in one

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<sup>111</sup> *Franklin Planter's Banner*, 10/24/1868, 10/31/1868; *House Misc.*, 448-450, 541-563, 634-642; *Ninth Census of Population, 1870; Supplemental Report*, 239.

hand and a pistol in the other." Presidential electoral returns were invalidated in Avoyelles, West Feliciana, Franklin, Jackson, Jefferson, Orleans, Sabine, St. Bernard, St. John Baptist, Terrebonne, St. Martin, and Washington parishes, mostly due to illegal voting procedures like the instances in Orleans and St. Bernard parishes. While Republicans protested for additional invalidations due to intimidation or violence impacting the returns, their cries were to no avail. Louisiana and Georgia were the only two Southern states in which Seymour emerged victorious. With the invalidated returns in Orleans Parish, parishes with large populations that contained an intimidated black demographic, such as St. Landry, were able to carry the election for the Democrats, leading to a lopsided 80,225-33,263 victory for Seymour in Louisiana. On the national scale, however, Grant easily won the electoral vote 214-80 while narrowly winning the popular vote 3,012,833-2,703,249. Although Democrats had lost the election that they had deemed to be essential in the spring of 1868, the violence achieved long-term regional Democratic dominance in many parts of the state, and ultimately across the entire region.<sup>112</sup>

To dissolve the Democratic stranglehold on the country parishes gained as a result of the 1868 violence, Republican officials on the state level took several steps. Signed into law on April 5, 1870 and organized by 1871, a volunteer state militia was created that helped offset the removal of a significant portion of federal troops in the South that had taken place since 1868. This organization also provided a defense for state officials to supplement the Metropolitan Police. Additionally, eight new parishes were created between 1868 and 1871, including Grant Parish, which would gain notoriety with the

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<sup>112</sup> *House Misc.*, 313-316, 654-656; *Supplemental Report*, 271; Charles H. Coleman, "The Election of 1868: The Democratic Effort to Regain Control" (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1933), 384.

Colfax Massacre of 1873. Warmoth appointed officials himself in these new parishes, mostly located in rural northern Louisiana, providing Republicans temporary relief from Democratic control, as the new officeholders were secure in their positions until the next general election. However, the fact that St. Landry Parish was not among those reorganized played a role in the Democratic domination in the parish for the remainder of Reconstruction. After the St. Landry Massacre, Thomas C. Anderson was able to consolidate power both in St. Landry Parish and on the state level, where he secured multiple influential appointments over the course of his political career.<sup>113</sup>

On March 16, 1870, Louisiana passed a series of election laws. These laws were designed to prevent the intimidation, violence, and fraud that permeated the 1868 elections. The most effective deterrent installed was the Louisiana Returning Board on Elections, which could invalidate returns found to be obtained by fraud or other illicit means. This Returning Board, described by one historian as the "most feared weapon in the Radical arsenal," was able to control the outcome of elections for the party that was in power and played a large role in Louisiana politics for the remainder of Reconstruction. Initially, the board replaced its own vacancies, but the state senate gained the power to do so in an 1872 Louisiana election law. In the 1872 and 1876 presidential elections, Louisiana was one of the states to have its Returning Board invalidate its votes due to violence and fraud.<sup>114</sup>

In 1870, the Louisiana Returning Board contained a four-man committee:

Governor Henry Clay Warmoth, Lieutenant Governor Oscar J. Dunn, Senator John Lynch (Rep.), and Senator Thomas C. Anderson. Lynch would prove to be influential in

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<sup>113</sup> *Acts of Louisiana, 1868*, 151-154; *Acts of Louisiana, 1869*, 79-81; *Acts of Louisiana, 1870*, 168-169; *Acts of Louisiana, 1870*, Act 75, 168-188; Tunnell, 158-159; Hogue, 68-75.

<sup>114</sup> *Acts of Louisiana, 1870*, v-vii, 145-161; Tunnell, 160-161; Taylor, 181, 227.



the heavily disputed 1872 state elections, favoring Republican William Pitt Kellogg, but Anderson's political affiliation is more unclear. Historian Joe Gray Taylor labeled Anderson as a Radical Republican, but several other historians and sources from the time period found him to lean more towards the Democratic Party. Historian Geraldine Mary McTigue's dissertation provides what is probably the most accurate description of Anderson, as an opportunist who was more interested in acquiring power while remaining conservative in ideology, rather than setting his political affiliation in stone.<sup>115</sup>

By 1870, Republicans in St. Landry were still pacified to the point of inactivity. On September 3, the *Opelousas Journal* printed an article titled "No Need of a Convention," where the editors found no trace of Republican organization or Republican candidates for the upcoming state elections. By this time, "General" Thomas C. Anderson had solidified his power base within the parish. Anderson, born in Virginia in 1821, held terms as a state senator from 1864-1865 and 1868-1877. He also held one of the coveted seats on the Louisiana Returning Board for its duration during Reconstruction, from 1870-1877. In 1870, Anderson owned 1,800 acres of land and held property valued at \$30,000, making him one of the wealthiest men in St. Landry. But, a large amount of his power came from patronage and corruption. Anderson owned part of a navigation company and used his influence to allocate parish funds to the company, which were mostly stolen. Anderson was also the school treasurer in the parish, accused at one point of embezzling \$85,000 from state funds. Anderson's control was so complete that one historian concluded that all parish appointments went through him by the early 1870's. As there was no Republican organization in the parish until 1872 and no

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<sup>115</sup> *Acts of Louisiana*, 1870, v-vii, 145-161; Howard J. Jones, "Biographical Sketches of Members of the 1868 Louisiana State Senate," *Louisiana History* 19, No. 1 (Winter, 1978), 67; Tunnell, 160-161; McTigue, 300-315; Taylor, 181, 476.

Republican newspaper until 1876, Anderson was able to control the parish virtually unchecked for the remainder of Reconstruction.<sup>116</sup>

On the national level, the Fifteenth Amendment passed as a direct result of the violence that encompassed the 1868 presidential election. First proposed on February 27, 1869, ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment occurred on March 30, 1870. A short document, containing only two clauses, this legislation provided that voting rights can not be "denied or abridged...on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude" while placing enforcement powers with Congress. However, as is later demonstrated by multiple bills designed to increase federal effectiveness in the enforcement of reconstruction measures, the intended effect of the Fifteenth Amendment was not realized. Less than two months after its passage, additional legislation was in the works that aimed to increase federal power and control Southern violence.<sup>117</sup>

Between 1870 and 1871, three Enforcement acts passed in order to protect rights granted by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments. Ratified just weeks before the Fifteenth Amendment on February 21, 1870, the First Enforcement Act's purpose was to prevent violence and intimidation towards voters. The most important section of the First Enforcement Act was Section 6, which stated that "if two or more persons band or conspire together, or go in disguise upon the public highway, or upon the premises of another" with the purpose of preventing the "enjoyment of any right of privilege granted or secured to him by the Constitution," a felony charge would be levied. However, these

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<sup>116</sup> *Opelousas Journal*, 9/3/1870; *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Louisiana*, National Archives Microfilm Publications, Microcopy no. T8, Reel 131; St. Landry Parish Police Jury Minutes, W.P.A Collection, Historical Survey Transcriptions of Louisiana Police Jury Records, Louisiana State University, 4/6/1868; William Ivy Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 7-8; McTigue, 300-305; Taylor, 466.

<sup>117</sup> *Statutes at Large* XVI, 1131-1132; Foner, 422-423.

actions were still not a federal offense, hindering federal enforcement attempts. By early 1871, the First Enforcement Act had proven to be inadequate in enforcement powers, and new legislation was necessary to prevent racial violence in the South.<sup>118</sup>

The First Enforcement Act targeted the rural South, but Northern cities also experienced electoral fraud during the 1868 elections. To combat urban fraud, the Second Enforcement Act passed on February 28, 1871, but held little impact in the South. On April 20, 1871, the Third Enforcement Act passed, also known as the Ku Klux Klan Act. This act followed a pattern of legislation during Reconstruction, where the federal government received greatly increased power and size. Violators of Section 6 of the First Enforcement Act now faced a federal court. As state and local governments had largely been unwilling to secure these rights for the black population and were often found aiding their violators, the President was now empowered to use military force and suspend the writ of habeas corpus to secure adherence. The Ku Klux Klan Act also provided the federal government with the ability to prosecute individuals. Until this point, federal legislation had focused on states abrogating freedmen's rights while allowing these states to hold most of the power to punish individuals. Federal legislation had mostly ended in failure due both to the secretive nature of societies such as the Ku Klux Klan and a general white solidarity on the state and local levels. With these new powers, federal agencies were able to successfully destroy structures of Democratic secret societies as they had existed and forced Southerners to resort to other strategies of regional control, primarily fraud.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *Statutes at Large* XVI, 140-146; Everette Swinney, "Suppressing the Ku Klux Klan: The Enforcement of the Reconstruction Amendments, 1870-1877" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas, 1966); Trelease, 385-386.

<sup>119</sup> *Statutes at Large* XVI, 433-440; *Statutes at Large* XVII, 13-15; Trelease, 385-391.

In the 1872 presidential election, Ulysses S. Grant (Rep.) ran for a second term against Horace Greeley (Dem.). Violence surrounding the 1872 presidential election was comparatively lower than the 1868 presidential election in Louisiana, as the 1868 massacres still influenced the actions of many Republicans and by 1872 fear of the Enforcement Acts left Democrats resorting mostly to fraud instead of violence. But, Democratic domination in St. Landry Parish continued despite being "free of disturbance," where Greeley defeated Grant 2,817-1,584 votes. Grant still carried Louisiana 71,663-57,029, but both Louisiana's and Arkansas's votes were thrown out due to fraud. On the national level, Grant easily won the electoral vote 286-66, but Greeley died shortly after returns were tabulated, causing a split in distribution among four additional candidates. In Louisiana, the 1872 state elections would prove to be divisive and hotly contested, the results of which would instigate additional large scale collective violence within the state.<sup>120</sup>

By 1872, Radicalism had lost support nationally and Louisiana was no exception. In Louisiana, the Republican Party split prior to the gubernatorial election, where Warmoth disassociated himself with the general Republican ticket and ran with the Liberal Republican faction, which opposed further Reconstruction measures. The Liberal Republican faction and the Democratic faction, with candidate John McEnery, merged, and if victorious Warmoth would gain a senatorial seat in Washington while McEnery would obtain the governorship of Louisiana. This "Fusionist"<sup>121</sup> faction was opposed by the Custom House Republicans, with William Pitt Kellogg as the candidate. Stephen B. Packard, the chairman of the Republican State Committee, and P.B.S. Pinchback, of *gens*

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<sup>120</sup> *Opelousas Journal*, 11/16/1872; Foner, 499-511.

<sup>121</sup> This 1872 Fusionist coalition is distinct and not to be confused with Fusionists during the Southern Populist movement of the late 19th century.

*de couleur* ancestry, who held influence among black voters, supported the Kellogg ticket. The Enforcement Acts had created the necessity for fraud instead of violence to control elections, which crippled McEnery's chances as a Democratic candidate against a Republican Returning Board. One historian found that, with Warmoth's support, McEnery had most likely won the popular vote in the state, and the returns of St. Landry tell both of this and the fact that Democrats still dominated the parish, where McEnery received 2,948 votes to Kellogg's 1,346. So much fraud was noted that the Returning Board split and each declared their own victor in the election, one led by Lynch supporting Kellogg and the other by Warmoth in support of McEnery. This resulted in two sets of state officials and in many parishes two sets of local officials, both vying for one position.<sup>122</sup>

Since his inauguration in 1868, Warmoth had steadily lost support within Louisiana. Warmoth inherited a large state debt, mostly from the Civil War when no state taxes were paid, which he struggled with during his governorship. He also lost support from "pure" Radicals through some of his political appointments, one example being former Confederate General James Longstreet's appointment to Adjutant General. Corruption within the Warmoth government, his veto of a 1868 civil rights bill, and the compromise made in the 1872 state gubernatorial election were enough for his opponents to push for impeachment. On December 5, 1872, Circuit Court Judge Edward Henry Durrell declared for the Warmoth Returning Board to be illegal and ordered Packard to prevent any "illegal assemblage" in the State House. Acting immediately and without prepared articles of impeachment, Kellogg sympathizers voted 58-6 to impeach

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<sup>122</sup> *Opelousas Journal*, 11/16/1872; Tunnell, 227-249; Charles Lane, *The Day Freedom Died: The Colfax Massacre, the Supreme Court, and the Betrayal of Reconstruction* (New York: Henry Hold and Co., 2008), xviii.

Warmoth. Under Louisiana law, Warmoth was suspended for the remainder of his term, little over a month, and P.B.S. Pinchback, the Kellogg Senate President, was installed as an interim governor. The matter was sealed when Grant recognized Pinchback as the legal governor less than a week later. The 1872 Louisiana elections brought schisms in an already weak Republican Party to the forefront and set the stage for additional violence, albeit less ubiquitous in the state when compared to events in 1868.<sup>123</sup>

In some country parishes, the rival factions created by the split Returning Board either refused to mutually accept Grant's verdict or news had not reached the area by that time, one of which being Grant Parish. Grant Parish was created in 1869 with Colfax as its parish seat, located on the Red River in northern Louisiana. Here, conflict between the two tickets escalated by the spring of 1873. On the night of March 25, freedmen seized control of the Colfax courthouse in order to secure the validity of the Kellogg electees, swearing in their appointees the next day. By early April, black and white numbers in the region swelled, both groups hoping to control the area. On April 2, shots were exchanged between the two groups, but no one was hurt. On April 5, freedman Jesse McKinney was shot and killed. These two events in early April "alarmed" and instilled fear into the black population, causing them to gather in the Colfax courthouse for protection. Over the next eight days, black forces attempted to fortify the courthouse while white forces gathered in the surrounding area. Tension between the groups had

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<sup>123</sup> Henry Clay Warmoth, *War, Politics, and Reconstruction: Stormy Days in Louisiana* (New York: MacMillen Company, 1930), 164-165, 207-218; Charles Vincent, *Black Legislators in Louisiana During Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 92-93; Taylor, 245-249.

grown to the extent that one witness declared that Colfax was "in a state of siege" until April 13, Easter Sunday.<sup>124</sup>

On April 13, 1873, a white group of at least 150 members, led by ex-Confederate lieutenant Christopher Columbus Nash, mounted an attack. The freedmen were severely outgunned during this confrontation, leading to a massacre the scale of which had not been seen since St. Landry in 1868. As the courthouse became overrun, local whites set it ablaze and shot any black citizens that exited in surrender. As in St. Landry, local whites took black prisoners outside of the corporation and killed them after the excitement died down. Because Colfax was in the Louisiana countryside, military intervention was more difficult than it would have been near the federal garrisons in New Orleans. Due to inaction and transportation difficulties, troops did not arrive in Colfax until after the massacre. As in many of these racial massacres, actual numbers dead are uncertain, with the preliminary Congressional report detailing 59 bodies found, only two of which were white. Historians since have differed, with one more conservative estimate ranging between 62 and 81 total deaths and another estimating between 70 and 165.<sup>125</sup>

To exacerbate racial tension and no doubt playing a role in the creation of White Leagues in 1874, Louisiana passed civil rights legislation on April 18, 1873. This bill, a forerunner to the federal Civil Rights Act of 1875, provided universally equal accommodations "from all common carriers on land or water, from inn keepers and from all public places of resort licensed by the State or by any municipal corporation." This

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<sup>124</sup> Lane, 72-89: *House Reports*, 43rd Congress, 2nd Session, Report Number 261, "Condition in the South," 12-14, 409-413, 858-859.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*; Lane, 90-110, 265-266; LeAnna Keith, *The Colfax Massacre: The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror, and the Death of Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 109.

act was ignored in the country parishes, where the Republican state government had little control, and was rarely enforced in New Orleans. In 1902, the 1873 Louisiana Civil Rights Act was repealed, having been of little significance during its lifetime.<sup>126</sup>

The first important interpretative ruling of the Fourteenth Amendment occurred in the *Slaughterhouse Cases* (1873), where a Louisiana chartered corporation had monopolized butchering in New Orleans, forcing many butchers out of work. These butchers claimed that the state had deprived them of the opportunity to pursue their trade, violating their Fourteenth Amendment rights. The result was a ruling in favor of the Louisiana corporation that redefined state and federal rights. Federal rights were protected under the Fourteenth Amendment, among them the right to run for a federal office and access to ports and waterways. However, most individual rights were still under state control. This was an important decision, as many of the struggles during Reconstruction rested upon whether the federal government or the state held control over individual rights. If the state held control, especially going further into the 1870's, freedmen's rights granted by federal legislation were not necessarily guaranteed or protected. The *Slaughterhouse Cases* set a precedent that would later be relied upon in cases more directly involving freedmen's rights, such as *U.S. v. Cruikshank* (1876).<sup>127</sup>

After mostly resorting to fraud to control elections after the Enforcement acts passed, Southern whites regained some confidence in violence and intimidation as effective methods to do so by 1874, especially as Southern governments began to revert to Democratic control. By 1874 in Louisiana White Leagues began to appear, the first of which formed in St. Landry Parish. On April 17, propaganda for the St. Landry White

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<sup>126</sup> *Acts of Louisiana, 1873*, 156-157; Taylor, 259.

<sup>127</sup> *Slaughterhouse Cases*, 83 U.S. 36 (1873); Foner, 529-531.



League first appeared in the *Opelousas Journal*, one article containing a communication from leading man Edward T. Lewis, a local lawyer, titled "White vs. Black – The Coming Issue." Here, Lewis wrote that whites had a "manifest duty" to prevent black men from holding office, but in order to do so the whites needed solidarity and organization. Lewis also continued Democratic rhetoric claiming that white Republicans were self serving and taught black populations a "fear of the whites" only to further their own ambitions. If this fear was absent, Lewis foresaw that "the next election would eventuate in a negro Governor and an exodus of carpet-baggers." Although instilling fear in the black denizens of Louisiana was necessary for Democratic dominance in other parishes, even the Anderson influenced *Journal* saw these measures as unnecessary in St. Landry. The *Journal* believed that securing a good crop outweighed the necessity of "political hostility to the blacks" in the parish. According to the *Journal*, there was less organization among the black ranks in 1874 when compared to 1868, as there were no black officeholders in the parish, and although there were black men on the school board "there are plenty of white men who would make worse school directors." But, behind these reservations were some of the same fears and ideals held by Lewis, where the *Journal* wrote that it would be "foolish" for a black man to run for office and the feeling that "whites were drifting...into the Republican organization."<sup>128</sup>

The St. Landry White League also impacted the state elections in late 1874. To fill a vacancy in the Louisiana House, a special election occurred on December 29, 1873. Here, John Simms, the Republican *homme de couleur* who attempted to prevent violence in St. Landry during the 1868 massacre, easily beat three candidates who ran under an

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<sup>128</sup> *Opelousas Journal*, 4/17/1874; Alexandre E. DeClouet and Family Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Independent ticket. However, only 733 votes were cast in St. Landry and one historian found traces of a deal struck between Simms and Anderson for the position. Simms would only hold his seat until the 1874 state elections, where he lost his bid for reelection. This election was mostly swept by the Democrats, who ran against a compound Radical ticket that was a compromise between parish Republicans and Democrats, containing members from both parties. Democrats from both tickets won all four positions in the state House and both seats in the state Senate. Representing the sole substantial Republican victory in the 1874 Louisiana elections, Charles E. Nash (Rep.) lost the vote in St. Landry for a Congressional seat but won the overall vote, the only black man to do so during Reconstruction.<sup>129</sup>

During the summer of 1874, White Leagues appeared across the state attempting to emulate the St. Landry organization, including St. Martin Parish. A leader of the St. Martin Parish White League and a sugar planter, Alexandre DeClouet stated their purpose as "consolidating the white race in another effort to restore our state to its rightful rulers" and away from the "unscrupulous adventurers, knaves, and office seekers" that influenced the "blind and ignorant negro voters." This rhetoric illustrated a White League goal of removing Republican Governor William Pitt Kellogg, one such attempt happening in New Orleans during September of that year. While white supremacy remained the primary goal of the White Leagues, these organizations were different from the secret societies that ran rampant throughout the state during the 1868 elections, as meetings were generally in public view with no hidden intentions. Although the White Leagues never had a strong central organization, local leaders were able to control its

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<sup>129</sup> *Opelousas Courier*, 1/3/1874, 1/10/1874, 10/24/1874; *Opelousas Journal*, 11/20/1874; McTigue, 309-312; Eric Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders During Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 158.

members much more effectively and focus violence to a much larger extent than the earlier secret societies. These Leagues were usually able to secure localities through the removal of Republican officials and intimidation of the black voters, leading to two cases of large scale collective violence in Coshatta and New Orleans.<sup>130</sup>

Similar to Grant Parish, Red River Parish was formed in 1871 in northwestern Louisiana, with the parish seat of Coshatta. By 1874, Republican carpetbagger Marshall Twitchell created a power base in the parish much like Anderson's in St. Landry, holding a seat in the state Senate since 1870, the presidency of the parish police jury and school board, and a position as a United States Commissioner. Members of his family also held influential positions within Red River Parish. To compound matters for planters during the global depression that began in late 1873, the 1873 cotton crop had been ravaged by the cotton worm in the parish, leaving many planters in a desperate economic condition. As White Leagues focused on removing Republican power structures within Louisiana, Twitchell and his fellow parish officeholders became targets. During the late summer months and into August, rates of violence and intimidation increased, including the murder of the deputy postmaster and banishment of the postmaster, culminating at the end of August.<sup>131</sup>

On August 25, 1874, an argument between two white locals and several black men occurred in Brownsville, eight miles south of Coshatta, where the black men threatened the whites. That night, a white posse approached two of the black men, one of whom fired on the whites, instigating a skirmish where the two black men and one white man died. News of an imminent black insurrection spread throughout the parish and a

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<sup>130</sup> DeClouet and Family Papers; Hogue, 140-143.

<sup>131</sup> Pope, 145-184.

large white crowd gathered in Coushatta by August 28, estimated to range between 700 and 1,000 people. Due to threats on the lives of Republican officeholders, white citizens offered to take these Republicans into custody for protection. When the mob grew increasingly volatile over the next day, six of the Republicans signed resignation papers and were escorted out of the area on August 30. But, in the process of leaving, local whites overtook the Republican escort and slaughtered all six, adding to the minimum of a dozen black deaths from August 25 to August 30. Twitchell was safe in New Orleans during the massacre, but during his return the following May an unsuccessful attempt was made on his life.<sup>132</sup>

In early September, shortly after the Coushatta Massacre, rumors about shipments of arms for the New Orleans White League began to spread. The Metropolitan Police confiscated several crates full with arms on two separate occasions, then on September 13 sealed off access to the *Mississippi*, a ship that contained additional weaponry. The seizure of the *Mississippi* infuriated the local White League, who called for all of its supporters to assemble the following day in order to overthrow Kellogg. At around 2 p.m. on September 14, White League and Metropolitan Police forces met on Canal Street and fought for nearly an hour. Here, after clearing part of Canal Street and fearing that the White League forces would flank them, the Metropolitans fortified their position facing south towards the docks and the *Mississippi*. However, the Metropolitans held their ground in a "very exposed" place while the White Leaguers were able to use cotton bales for cover, ultimately resulting in a near-complete White League victory.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> *House Reports*, "Condition in the South," 388-390, 885-886, 901-906; Pope, 145-184.

<sup>133</sup> *House Reports*, 43rd Congress, 2nd Session, No. 154, "Condition of Affairs in the Southern States," 242-268, 399-401, 801; Hogue, 116-143.

This victory gained the arms aboard the *Mississippi* for the White League, but they still strove to remove Kellogg from office, who had fortified his position in the Custom House. White Leaguers were unable to breach the Custom House walls, but most of Kellogg's forces within were unwilling to die for the cause and deserted, dismantling the Louisiana State Militia established under Warmoth for all intents and purposes and severely crippling the Metropolitan Police force. Within the next week, federal forces were able to retake New Orleans from the insurgent White Leaguers and restore Kellogg to his office, but roughly one hundred casualties had occurred by this point. The Louisiana White Leagues represented a shift in the focus of violence, from the massacre of freedmen and expulsion of "incendiary" Republican influences to secure election results to the outright removal of Republicans from office.<sup>134</sup>

A new Civil Rights Act, largely created by Senator Charles Sumner (Rep.) in 1870, had failed to pass on multiple occasions in the following years and was the topic of constant debate throughout the first half of the decade. The bill finally passed nearly one year after Sumner's death, on March 1, 1875. The primary purpose of the act was the requirement for equality in public accommodations and specifically mentioned "inns, public conveyances on land or water, theaters, and other places of public amusement." Jurisdiction over violators of the act was given to federal courts rather than the state courts, which had proven to be inadequate in prosecuting civil rights violators. However, court cases increasingly ruled in favor of states when interpreting prior legislation during

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

the 1870's and these decisions marginalized the Civil Rights Act of 1875. By 1883, in the *Civil Rights Cases*, the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was declared unconstitutional.<sup>135</sup>

The Enforcement acts received their first major test in *U.S. v. Cruikshank* (1876), the case that resulted from the Colfax Massacre. The charge against the accused was a conspiracy to deprive citizens of their rights, violating Section 6 of the First Enforcement Act. But, only three convictions were obtained, and the Court overturned a conviction by accepting callously that the prosecutors failed to mention race as the motivating factor behind the incident. In another blow to freedmen's rights, *Cruikshank* ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment “prohibits a state from depriving any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; but this adds nothing to the rights of one citizen against another.” This removed federal power to intervene in an area devastated by violence, leaving that power to state and local authorities.<sup>136</sup>

The presidential election of 1876 was one of the most contested in American history and the last of Reconstruction, pitting Rutherford B. Hayes (Rep.) against Samuel J. Tilden (Dem.). In Louisiana, the gubernatorial election was held on the same day as the presidential election, where Francis T. Nicholls (Dem.) beat Stephen Packard (Rep.) by a slim margin. In St. Landry Parish, Tilden outpolled Hayes 3,745-2,432 and Nicholls beat Packard, 3,750-2,445. Votes reported from Louisiana in the presidential race favored Hayes, 75,315-70,508. Fraud was present on both sides and some intimidation was found in several parishes that did not record a single Republican vote, but no incidents of large scale collective violence were noted. As a result of the fraud in Louisiana, all four members of the Louisiana Returning Board were arrested, their trials

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<sup>135</sup> *Statutes at Large XVIII*, 335-337; J. David Hoeveler, Jr., "Reconstruction and the Federal Courts: The Civil Rights Act of 1875," *The Historian* 31, No. 4 (August, 1969), 604-617.

<sup>136</sup> *United States v Cruikshank*, 92 U.S. 542 (1876); Foner, 530-531.

to be suspended until February, 1878. Thomas C. Anderson was the last remaining member on the Louisiana Returning Board from its initial 1870 committee, and he was the only one who would see the courtroom. Anderson was convicted and sentenced to two years in prison on February 25. However, before the next member could be tried, the Louisiana Supreme Court nullified the charges against all four and forced the release of Anderson on March 18.<sup>137</sup>

In addition to Louisiana, returning boards in Florida and South Carolina declared for the results in their state to be invalid, with Louisiana and South Carolina both forming rival state governments, one Democratic and one Republican. All three states showed a majority for Hayes, totaling 20 electoral votes, and with their removal Hayes lost the election 184 votes to 165. Southerners had long realized that in order to secure fully redeemed governments, the federal military presence could not remain in the region. To obtain this, the two parties agreed upon the infamous Hayes-Tilden Compromise of 1877, where the removal of the federal army from the South would occur in exchange for the validation of the lost electoral votes from Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina. Not only did this remove the federal military from the region, but the rival Republican governments in Louisiana, led by Packard, and South Carolina were doomed to fail. With no federal presence in the South, blacks and white Republicans were at the mercy of the redeemed governments, officially ending the Reconstruction Era.<sup>138</sup>

The St. Landry Massacre and other similar events during the 1868 presidential canvas in Louisiana had accomplished their initial purpose: to secure the electoral victory for Horatio Seymour in Louisiana. But, the consequences of these massacres reached

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<sup>137</sup> *New York Times*, 2/26/1878; *Opelousas Journal*, 12/1/1876; Hair, 31-33; Taylor, 480-493.

<sup>138</sup> Taylor, 500-503.

much further than the 1868 presidential election on the local, state, and national levels. While the 1868 massacres were not able to spawn influential court decisions as Colfax had, federal measures were taken and preventative mechanisms such as the Returning Board on Elections were placed in Louisiana that would play a significant role in state and national politics for the remainder of Reconstruction. Nationally, 1868 represented the peak of collective violence during Reconstruction and illustrated that rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment and other prior legislation needed additional protection. This realization led to the Fifteenth Amendment and Enforcement Acts, where the secret societies responsible crumbled only when the Third Enforcement Act drastically increased federal power over the individual. As Radical tendencies decreased by the early 1870's and Southern governments began the redemption process, a series of court decisions allowed for states to retain control of most individual rights. As states controlled by the Democratic Party were unwilling or unable to intervene when freedmen's rights were violated, groups such as the Louisiana White Leagues were able to usurp positions of influence from incumbent Republicans. In some areas, such as St. Landry Parish, these organizations were unnecessary, as prior violence still controlled the actions of the Republican populations. But in others, like Coshatta, the Democratic elite was able to remove Republicans with established bases of power.

The 1868 St. Landry Massacre, the deadliest in Reconstruction, eliminated the Republican element of the parish for all intents and purposes for the remainder of the period. Democrats directly involved in the violence secured local offices as a result, one example being Ferreol Perrodin and his ascension from deputy sheriff to mayor in early 1869. Those in charge were able to exponentially increase their power locally and



occasionally on a state and national level, such as Thomas C. Anderson. Just months after the 1868 massacre, the black "living witnesses of their horrors, fathers, brothers, and sons, who meet us every day, dare not whisper a word in conviction of their crime" in fear of Democratic retribution. The fear instilled in the local black population was so effective and resulted in a Democratic dominance so complete that violence as a means to secure electoral results was not necessary again until the 1890's, when outrages were again reported in St. Landry on the eves of the 1894 state elections and the 1896 presidential election.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Letter, Captain Coxe to Captain Baldey, 5/11/1869, Colored Infantry Letterbook; Vandal, 197.

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