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### 'Stubborn and Disposed to Stand Their Ground': Sugar Workers and the Dynamics of Collective Action in the Louisiana Sugar Bowl, 1863-87

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#### Publication Information & Recommended Citation

Scott, Rebecca J. "'Stubborn and Disposed to Stand Their Ground': Sugar Workers and the Dynamics of Collective Action in the Louisiana Sugar Bowl, 1863-87." In *The Lafourche Country III: Annals and Onwards*, edited by J. P. Doucet and S. S. Michot, 221-35. Thibodaux, La.: Lafourche Heritage Society, 2010. (Originally published under the same title in *Slavery & Abolition* 20, no. 1 (1999): 103-26.)

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**"STUBBORN AND DISPOSED TO STAND THEIR GROUND":  
BLACK MILITIA, SUGAR WORKERS AND THE DYNAMICS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION  
IN THE LOUISIANA SUGAR BOWL, 1863-87**

*by Rebecca J. Scott*

A few hours' ride on the railroad southwest from New Orleans, or on horseback along the Mississippi River to Donaldsonville and then down Bayou Lafourche, there occurred in 1887 a most remarkable set of events. The formal end of Reconstruction was already a decade in the past, and the electoral disfranchisement of African Americans in Louisiana would be completed over the next 11 years. A white-supremacist Democratic governor was entrenched in the statehouse, and the state militia had become almost a branch of the White Leagues. But somehow into this unpromising environment there erupted a tenacious expression of militancy by thousands of plantation workers, the great majority of whom were either former slaves themselves or the direct descendants of former slaves.

In late October and early November 1887, on the eve of the harvest, black, mulatto, and white sugar workers on estates in St. Mary, Terrebonne, and Lafourche Parishes took the remarkable step of declaring allegiance to the Knights of Labor and insisting on the right to bargain with their employers. After being rebuffed by the planters' association they downed tools and refused to cut cane until employers would negotiate with them. They sought regular payment of better wages, in cash not scrip, and extra compensation for night work.

Planters brought in strike-breakers from out of state, but the replacement workers were met with hostile crowds at the railway depot and, on occasion, with birdshot as they tried to get the equipment going. Local authorities asked the governor to send in the militia. Those deployed to the estates met defiant strikers: "the negroes hooted and used violent language, the women waving their skirts on poles, and jeering."<sup>1</sup>

The region remained in tumult through the month of November, as the militia evicted strikers to enable planters to house the strike-breakers and resume production. For reasons that are still not entirely clear, by 20 November most of the militia withdrew, leaving planters to enforce security on their own. Shortly after the formal withdrawal of the militia, a

Peace and Order committee of white citizens tried to hem in strikers evicted from the estates who had taken refuge in the town of Thibodaux. An unexplained shooting triggered an attack by the white vigilante forces on strikers. Going from house to house and street to street, vigilantes killed dozens of strikers and injured perhaps a hundred more. The viciousness of the repression broke what remained of the strike, sowing fear through the region.<sup>2</sup>

There are several ways to fit these events into narratives of southern history in this period. The presence of black and white Knights of Labor organizers encourages one to view the strike as an unusually bold instance of the cautious policy of cross-racial alliance followed by the Knights in this period. The failure of the strike, and the inability of the Knights to protect their members from repression, might be seen to illuminate the limits of that policy.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, one can situate this conflict in the story of modernization and consolidation of industry, a Sugar Bowl variant on the Gilded Age pattern of large-scale capital investment and large-scale labor repression. On this view, the breaking of the strike eliminated an obstacle to the hegemony of a particular elite vision of the organization of production and of labor relations.<sup>4</sup> Finally, one can understand the Thibodaux Massacre alongside the 1873 Colfax Massacre and the 1874 Battle of Canal Street in New Orleans, Louisiana's macabre and outsized contributions to the violent imposition of white supremacy through a combination of local white mobilization and what Lawrence Powell calls "silk-stocking vigilantism."<sup>5</sup>

This chapter is somewhat less ambitious. Rather than situate the events of November 1887 in one or another story about where Louisiana was headed, it will ask a different pair of questions: How could a strike of this magnitude ever get off the ground in a setting as hostile to African-American mobilization as the Louisiana sugar parishes in the 1880s; and what might we learn about the politics of freedom by looking at the decades that separated the end of slavery from the events of 1887? These questions are addressed on three levels: the structure of production

on sugar estates; patterns of mobilization by African Americans in these parishes in the 1870s; and the social geography of the bayou country, with its implications for networks of support and points of vulnerability.

### THE STRUCTURE OF PRODUCTION

Union occupation of the sugar parishes of Louisiana during the Civil War had triggered the breakdown of slavery but did not immediately replace it with a thoroughgoing system of wage labor. On plantations abandoned by Confederate owners, former slaves sought in some cases to cultivate the land in collective "labor companies," with an emphasis on locally consumable crops.<sup>6</sup> Some planters remained in place and continued cultivation under Union auspices, but they were reluctant to plant new cane, and sugar output fell abruptly due to the disruption occasioned by war and conscription of laborers, as well as the reliance on lower-yield ratoon cane, regrown from the previous year's roots. Workers and administrators continued to tug and haul over the choice of overseers, the right to garden plots, and the pace of work in the fields.<sup>7</sup>

With the end of the war came the end of formal experiments like the labor companies, though on one plantation in Terrebonne Parish something similar seems to have persisted into 1866. In April 1866, the Freedmen's Bureau agent reported that Orange Grove Plantation was leased by "William James (colored)" and worked by a force of 39 men, 36 women, and 11 children, accompanied by 57 dependent children. The agent clarified: "the balance of the negroes on this place partners with him in the hiring and working of it. This place is rented for three years to the Freedmen. Wm. James is the head man ..." But by July 1866, a new agent reported routinely that the Orange Grove estate was under the authority of one A. Verrette and that 41 hands were working under contract for rations, clothing, quarters, fuel, and wages. William James had vanished from the record.<sup>8</sup>

Gradually the lines of a new free labor system were emerging in the sugar sector, to become dominant over the next years. Planters were generally "averse to leasing land to the freedmen," as one Freedmen's Bureau agent in Lafourche Parish put it, and their insistence on controlling labor often made

for unhappy relationships. Both planters and agents of the Freedmen's Bureau encouraged annual wage labor contracts, but former slaves were quick to see the disadvantages of arrangements that deferred their compensation to a year-end settlement in which they could easily be short-changed.<sup>9</sup>

When blocked from establishing themselves as tenants or smallholders, freedpeople used the occasion of the signing of a New Year's contract as a moment of bargaining. One agent near New Orleans reported in January of 1866, "the freedmen are delaying to make a permanent contract in expectation of orders from the Bureau compelling the planters to hire labor and pay for it at the rate of fifty cents per hour, this idea originated probably among freedmen working on the levee in the city who have recently been "striking" for the aforesaid wages."<sup>10</sup> In Terrebonne Parish during the same month the local agent apologized that he could file no monthly report on the number of freedmen on each plantation: having recently received their final pay from the previous year's contract, workers showed a disposition "to look around and see where they can get the best wages before entering into new ones."<sup>11</sup> This kind of negotiation put an upward pressure on wages, which climbed slowly.

By the time of the Bureau agent's report for Terrebonne Parish in April of 1868, the new system of free labor was largely in place. Laborers worked for rations, quarters, fuel, and wages, without a government-supervised contract. The average monthly wage on the seven major plantations that the agent inspected was said to be \$13, one half paid at the end of each month, and one half reserved until the end of the year. A portion of land on each estate was given rent-free to the freedpeople, presumably for the cultivation of gardens. Male field hands outnumbered female. Many freed women and children had diminished their regular labor in the cane fields, turning to household tasks and to attendance at the newly established school.<sup>12</sup>

Some variant on this system was probably in force on most of the parish's other estates, though there were occasional reports of leasing of land to the freedmen. During the sugar harvest itself, demand for labor was high, and workers traveled to the bayou sugar parishes from the poorer northern parishes or from out of state. Increasing numbers of white smallholders, many of them of Acadian origin, seem to have worked

seasonally in the fields as well. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of permanent workers were still African Americans born in Louisiana.<sup>13</sup>

The overall recovery of production in the sugar sector was painfully slow. Louisiana's 1861 crop had weighed in at 264,000 tons. In 1866 and 1867 the crop barely broke 20,000 tons, less than one tenth of the earlier total. A decade later it had still not reached one half of the 1861 record. Labor was in flux; working capital was not easy to find; Louisiana's longstanding disadvantages of frost and flood were hard to overcome.<sup>14</sup>

The portrait of the first years after emancipation, then, is one of halting gains for freedmen and continuing frustration for planters, in the realm of production as in the realm of Reconstruction politics. But soon the financial crisis of 1873 brought sharp downward pressure on wages, as prices fell and planters sought to reduce their expenses. The monthly wages offered on sugar plantations fell abruptly from \$18 to \$13. These wage cuts were met by strikes in Terrebonne Parish, where workers combined demands for higher pay with an appeal for the right to form "sub-associations" and lease land. The hostile *Daily Picayune* reported on January 16 that "the negroes have been marching around the parish, preventing the field hands from working."<sup>15</sup>

The results of the 1873-74 struggles were inconclusive. Laborers could block some concerted efforts to drive down wages, but few planters would countenance renting their land to former slaves. On those occasions when planters, faced with mounting losses, did choose to subdivide the land, white immigrants seem to have had priority. The newly installed tenants on the Rienzi Plantation outside of Thibodaux, in Lafourche Parish, were said to be "Portuguese, English, Spaniards and colored," in that order.<sup>16</sup> Though planters were unable to hold themselves together in stable combinations to reduce wages over more than a narrow area, they could generally keep harvest wages well below 20 dollars a month, with rations.<sup>17</sup>

By 1880, certain basic patterns had been set. The majority of labor in the cane would be performed by groups of wage workers of African descent, under direct supervision, largely continuing patterns of gang labor that harked back to slavery. But these patterns also meant that landless workers had potential

numerical strength, mechanisms of communication, and concentration of effort in moments of dispute. John Rodrigue has gone so far as to argue that sugar planters' dependence on collective labor at harvest helped to discourage the more blatant forms of "bulldozing" and violent intimidation of African-American voters, for fear of disrupting the harvest.<sup>18</sup> At the very least, an awareness of the potential power of black sugar workers seems for a time to have encouraged a degree of discretion in the exercise of force.

### PATTERNS OF MOBILIZATION

Louisiana had contributed more black soldiers to the Union Army, some 24,000, than any other state. Many came from the city of New Orleans, which had been occupied by Union forces in 1862. By 1863, Union recruiters were active in rural areas, as Federal control extended up the river and down the bayous into the sugar parishes. In testimony before the Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, one former cooper from St. James Parish recalled the path he had traveled from plantation artisan, to runaway, to "contraband" at Camp Parapet above New Orleans, to enlistment. By the end of the war he was a corporal in the Union Army.<sup>19</sup>

In the case of Louisiana, black soldiers not only shared in the Union triumph over the Confederacy, but also represented a significant fraction of the occupying troops in the aftermath of the surrender. Though the number of Federal soldiers fell sharply after 1865, some black soldiers from within and outside the state returned to or remained in Louisiana after being discharged.<sup>20</sup> The presence of demobilized soldiers among the workers on sugar estates was frequently commented on by officials of the Freedmen's Bureau, who made varying estimates of their impact. Some emphasized their orderly and disciplined habits as a good example to other workers, though a Bureau agent in Jefferson and Orleans Parish thought they had "erroneous and incongruous notions of liberty" and were thus a bad influence.<sup>21</sup>

Union veterans, along with other supporters of Republican rule in the state, joined various associations designed to mobilize Republican voters and consolidate newly won rights. In rural areas, in particular, considerable caution was required,

as African-American mobilization and Republican politics were equally anathema to many whites. But radical or Republican clubs were said to be thick on the ground in St. Mary parish, organized on every third or fourth plantation by John J. Moore, a former slave.<sup>22</sup>

Initiatives in electoral politics accompanied other forms of popular mobilization. Voters in Terrebonne, Lafourche, and St. Mary Parishes elected numerous African-American officials during Reconstruction, including more than a half-dozen representatives to the state legislature. Although some came from a pre-war group of property-owning free men of color, others were former slaves who lived and worked for wages in the countryside. Among them were John J. Moore and Isaac Sutton, both rural laborers who represented St. Mary Parish. Oscar Crozier, a mulatto sugar planter, served as a member of the police jury (town council) and as president of the school board in Thibodaux. Thomas A. Cage, born a slave in Terrebonne Parish, became sheriff and chair of the Republican state central committee. William Murrell, Sr., a minister and editor, served in the legislature from Lafourche Parish.<sup>23</sup>

The possibility of open political organization among African Americans depended, of course, on Republican rule backed up by the presence of Federal troops in the state. As white resistance to radical Reconstruction gained in strength, white supremacist leagues, clubs, and "rifle companies" proliferated, portraying themselves as the legitimate representatives of the people. The Republican leadership scrambled to assemble a countervailing force by building on the Federal authorization to form a state militia.<sup>24</sup> In New Orleans, former Confederate General James A. Longstreet, now a Republican and a proponent of peaceful reconciliation with the North, was named adjutant-general of the state in 1870 and commissioned brigadier-general in the state militia in January 1872. The militia was a fragile organization, combining some largely black municipal police units with assorted white recruits, including some former Confederate soldiers willing to work with Longstreet.<sup>25</sup>

As the 1872 election approached, the contradictions of Republican rule in Louisiana became more glaring. Fewer than 500 Federal troops were present in the entire state, under the command of William H. Emory,

who had his doubts about the whole enterprise. This force was altogether insufficient to prevent intimidation of Republican voters. Rivalry between the parties and among factions at the top was mirrored in struggles among different groups at the parish level. The outcome of the election for governor was itself contested, complete with two inaugurations of rival contenders.<sup>26</sup>

During the year that followed, the legitimacy of governor William Pitt Kellogg rested on the most fragile of underpinnings, and the results of local elections were by no means definitive. In Grant Parish, on the Red River, electoral conflict ended in a bloody massacre of Republican supporters by local vigilantes. In the heart of the bayou sugar country, Lafourche Parish, the main Democratic paper piously regretted the bloodshed but issued its own warning to local African-American officials, specifically addressing William Murrell, Sr., legislator and Methodist Episcopal pastor in Thibodaux: "We sincerely hope that Murrell who flourishes in the Bayonet Legislature under the familiar cognomen of the 'Wild Man of Lafourche' will take note of the way things are done when it comes to a question of races, and that he and his like will know one for all that when color is arrayed against color the whites must and shall rule in Louisiana."<sup>27</sup>

In Lafourche Parish, a dispute flared over the results of the elections for Sheriff, Recorder, Clerk, and parish Judge. Rev. Murrell feared violence, particularly from a group of "bulldozers" (vigilantes) who were rumored to be on their way from Texas. A contingent of Metropolitan Police came out from New Orleans to keep the peace, and perhaps at the same time install the defeated Republican contenders, but they were greeted with scorn and more or less passive resistance by the town's white notables. Further sarcasm was heaped on Reverend Murrell by the *Thibodaux Sentinel*, which ridiculed his stovepipe hat and gold-headed cane, mocked the way he parted his hair, and accused him of cowardice. The vulnerability of African-American activists in such circumstances was obvious. In response to a request to guarantee Murrell's safety, the sheriff simply replied, "No. I can guarantee no man's lives; I can not stand watch over any man." The Metropolitan Police nonetheless returned to New Orleans.<sup>28</sup>

The town of Thibodaux itself had become bitterly contested ground, with competing parties, public

officials, and associations. The *Thibodaux Sentinel* reported scornfully in May of 1873 that there was a "secret society" in town, to which only "pure blooded radicals" and people of color were admitted, and which was characterized by initiation rites of a "pronounced indecency."<sup>29</sup> Republicans, in turn, feared violence from groups like the White League or from "bulldozers" who might invade the parish.

In March 1874 a schoolteacher from Thibodaux named Benjamin Lewis came forward to offer his services and those of more than 50 companions to the state militia in order to defend Republican rule and black citizens in the Lafourche Parish area. He was named captain of Company C of the Sixth Regiment Infantry, to be assisted by First Lieutenant Anatole Panale and Second Lieutenant William Robinson. His unit was mustered in by Major General Longstreet and issued Enfield rifles. Owing to the "revolutionary condition" of the country, they "suspended their drill in the manual arms" for a time. But in July, a second unit, led by Benjamin Peney of Terrebonne, was mustered in. The militia soon made their presence felt.<sup>30</sup> The hostile former chairman of the Democratic Party in Lafourche Parish, H.N. Michelet, characterized the militia as "warriors" able to rally the support of their wives and sisters, whom he described as "colored Amazons." He reported that this company of "negro Militia armed with state arms" had been drilling every Saturday evening on the commons in the town of Thibodaux.<sup>31</sup>

The militia led by Benjamin Lewis seems to have served as a kind of countervailing force to the civil authorities in matters of day-to-day administration of justice. One white local official, Major I.D. Moore, fumed that "The mere arrest by a civil officer of a drunken negro in the town of Thibodaux is the tocsin that sounds to arms and summons these Valiant warriors to bold heroic deeds to wit the rescue from the officer of his prisoner and of the provoking of the turbulent mob to the very verge of riot, bloodshed and arson."<sup>32</sup>

Until enlistment registers or payrolls for the Terrebonne and Lafourche militia are located, it will remain difficult to determine the social and racial composition of the group. A historian of Reconstruction-era militia writing 40 years ago observed dryly that "there was a noticeable mixture of Negro and white troops in the Tennessee, Louisiana,

and North Carolina companies. The militia was nevertheless considered a 'Negro militia,' in keeping with the longstanding Southern indifference to logic when considering questions involving race."<sup>33</sup> In describing Benjamin Lewis as "of mixed negro and Indian blood, the Indian in him clearly predominating," and then characterizing his force as a "Negro militia," Michelet was following the same reasoning. For him, this was a "Negro militia" in part because most of its members were believed to be of African descent, but also because the rhetoric of white supremacy required that racial categories be clear and dichotomous.

The manuscript census of 1870 provides a glimpse of Benjamin Lewis and hints at the networks he may have mobilized in order to form and sustain the armed unit Major Moore mocked as "valiant warriors." July 1870 found Benjamin Lewis in Lafourche parish's Third Ward, near the railroad and sugar town of Raceland, a short distance along the bayou from Thibodaux. His was a remarkably diverse and complex household. The first inhabitant of the dwelling was William E. Kerr, age 37, white, born in Connecticut, who listed his occupation as retired United States soldier. Next was listed Tench Goodly, age 22, a black boatman born in Louisiana. Then came Taylor and Mary Nelson—he a black farm laborer born in Mississippi and she a black woman born in Louisiana, now occupied in "keeping house." Last was Benjamin Lewis himself, age 31, mulatto, a schoolteacher born in the state of Maine.<sup>34</sup>

With a little imagination, one can envision the links to different segments of the community that each member of this household may have provided. Tench Goodly would have traveled by boat up and down the bayou in the course of his work. Taylor Nelson may have labored on several nearby plantations and seems later to have become a member of the Republican Party executive committee in Thibodaux. Mary Nelson probably kept in touch with neighbors in the Third Ward and traveled to Thibodaux for events of various kinds. William Kerr, meanwhile, remains a mysterious figure. "Retired U.S. soldier" was not a conventional occupational description; perhaps he was injured in the war and no longer worked. Perhaps, but the evidence is silent on this question, he and Benjamin Lewis had both served in the invading Union forces.

Benjamin Lewis taught school a little further



along the bayou in the Second Ward of Terrebonne Parish. In 1872, he shared responsibility for 116 schoolchildren with Mary Ann Clay and earned about \$55 a month. His supervisor in 1875 judged him a "faithful, hard working teacher" and termed his school (the Nichols School) "among the best in the parish."<sup>35</sup> It is not certain whether Captain Benjamin Lewis actively collaborated with the white-haired Reverend William Murrell, the young carrier of the Enfield rifle with the older carrier of the gold-headed cane, but they very likely knew each other, for Murrell served on the school board of Thibodaux and had probably noticed the conscientious teacher in neighboring Terrebonne even before Lewis came forward to form a militia.<sup>36</sup> During the 1870s, their interests converged, as both sought to sustain the Republican rule that underlay their freedom of action.

Benjamin Lewis seems to have moved easily from the sphere of education to that of armed defense to that of electoral activism. In October 1874, he stepped in as a substitute police juror in the Terrebonne Parish seat of Houma just in time to help designate the polling places for the November election. (He himself would serve as commissioner of election at Poll #2, at the Lejeune Store on the old Beattie Place in upper Terrebonne.) Lewis thus joined that year as Terrebonne Parish police juror and election commissioner with W.H. Keys and Alfred Kennedy, African-American officials who had been denounced a few months earlier as inciters and supporters of the January 1874 strike of Terrebonne sugar workers. Keys was accused by the *Daily Picayune* of having called upon workers to seize the land and prevent strike-breakers from working; Kennedy was said to have headed an armed group of 50 who came down the bayou to stop work at Southdown Plantation.<sup>37</sup>

Benjamin Lewis's militia was a visible public presence in Lafourche Parish over the next two years. During the local elections of 1876, they intervened at one polling place as rival groups struggled for physical possession of the ballot boxes. A great deal was at stake in that election, and destroying the "Negro militia" would be a high priority of local Democrats if they won. Indeed, the Democratic leader H. N. Michelet recalled that a group of Democratic supporters, most of them Confederate veterans, had been armed and eager to sweep away this group of "vandals." The "gray heads" among the Democrats, he

recalled, had with difficulty restrained the young in the interests of adding the parish's vote for the Democrat Francis T. Nicholls to the statewide total rather than risking the annulment of the vote.<sup>38</sup>

Out of that election, of course, came the famed Hayes-Tilden dispute at the national level and eventually the installation of the Democratic Government of Nicholls at the state level.<sup>39</sup> Once in power, the Democrats moved quickly against Lewis's militia, declaring their terms expired. But Oscar Crozier, the African-American sugar planter who still held the office of tax collector, intervened with Governor Nicholls and temporarily stalled the disbanding. Those connected with the militia held on to a certain public presence: Anatole Panale, who had served with Benjamin Lewis, remained on the school board in April 1877, and in May the militia were said to be vocally involved in a court case bearing on the election for police jurors. Angry Democrats recalled that the militia's weapons were never turned in, and they believed that the militia members, with their guns, eventually "scattered over the state."<sup>40</sup>

Benjamin Lewis, at least, had not scattered anywhere. In 1880, the census recorded him as living in the First Ward of Terrebonne Parish. Married and the father of two children, he still listed his occupation as schoolteacher. The neighborhood was similar to the one near Raceland where he had lived as a single man a decade earlier: large numbers of black and mulatto laborers lived alongside a smaller number of white farmers and laborers and near a boarding house filled with black railway workers from Virginia, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, and Maryland.<sup>41</sup>

Although 1876-77 marked the dramatic formal end to Reconstruction, streams of activism nonetheless continued over the next decade through narrowed channels. Black militia members could no longer parade with fifes and drum in the streets of Thibodaux. A new and presumptively white militia had been organized under the command of Brigadier General John S. Billiu of Thibodaux.<sup>42</sup> The exercise of open political voice by black Republicans had become significantly more difficult, though a white Republican planter, Taylor Beattle, still held the office of district judge.

On occasion, however, black residents of the sugar parishes openly asserted their right to occupy the formal public spaces of town. In July 1887, for

example, the Vigilance Fire Company and Pride of Iberia Hook and Ladder Company arrived in Thibodaux from New Iberia with "over five hundred excursionists." The firemen formed in line at the depot, marched through the principal streets and then "repaired to Eureka Hall, where dancing was indulged into a late hour." It was reported that before leaving the firemen "proceeded in a body to serenade the mayor, but the gentleman was either absent or did not want to receive *negro serenaders*."<sup>43</sup>

The white elite did not soon forget what they sometimes termed "Benjamin's militia." An article in the Thibodaux papers in 1887 recalled the way in which the men and women who followed Benjamin Lewis had come to town from out in the country to dispute possession of the ballot box in 1876.<sup>44</sup> Although in the intervening years African-Americans marched in town as members of fire companies rather than militia, activists continued to move back and forth between the plantations and the parish seat. Though they had to contend with an increasingly conservative leadership in the Republican Party and with the renewed power of the Democrats, it seems likely that they too carried a memory — albeit a different one — of the sight of the "Negro militia" drilling in front of the courthouse. Junius Bailey, for example, was a teenager at the time that the Lewis and Peney militias were active in Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes. Born a slave in Assumption Parish in 1857, he was part of a post-war generation of African-American children able to attend public schools. He trained as a schoolteacher, attended Leyland University, and then entered Republican politics in the unpropitious year of 1878, running for sheriff in Lafourche Parish in 1884. He became a member of the black Masonic lodge in Thibodaux and served as a teacher, probably on the Laurel Valley Plantation several miles outside of town. He seems to have moved around very widely, acquiring training in New Orleans, and taking up teaching positions in a variety of places. In 1887, he would emerge as a leader of the Knights of Labor in Lafourche Parish and a participant in the November sugar strike.<sup>45</sup>

#### THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE SUGAR BOWL

For Benjamin Lewis, as he moved back and forth from Raceland to Thibodaux to Houma to rural

Terrebonne Parish, and for Alfred Kennedy, the police juror who accompanied 50 men down the bayou to the Minor Plantation in support of the 1874 strike, physical mobility and political mobilization were intimately linked.<sup>46</sup> In seeking the roots of the bold actions of 1887, it may therefore be helpful to look briefly at the physical and social geography of the bayou sugar country.

The characteristic shape of a Louisiana sugar plantation is significantly different from the sugar estates of Cuba or Brazil. Louisiana's sugar plantations extended like ribbons along the rivers and bayous of the southern part of the state, each stretching back from a specified number of arpents of land along the waterfront. The depth of a sugar property, from the levee to the farthest reach of the plantation, was usually limited by ecological constraints: as the land slopes back from the levee, it eventually becomes too low to be drained and planted in sugar. The layout of the Laurel Valley Plantation in Lafourche Parish provides a good example. Still a working plantation, it has narrow frontage along Bayou Lafourche, and then a deep rectangle of land extending back along a sandy ridge as far as the swamps.<sup>47</sup>

This layout helped to shape social life. The levees along the river and the bayous constituted thoroughfares that joined estates to each other and 411 of them to the nearby towns, permitting workers to travel by boat or on foot to and from the plantations. Already in the early months after the fall of New Orleans during the Civil War, word of the possibility of freedom had spread quickly along the Mississippi River and triggered the flight of slaves by boat to Union lines downriver. Bayou Lafourche, played a similar role as an axis of communication, though on a smaller scale. It is not surprising that a classic view of nineteenth-century Thibodaux shows a boatman in the foreground on the Laurel Valley and Rienzi Plantation side of Bayou Lafourche, with the town arrayed across the bayou.<sup>48</sup>

At the back of most plantations lay the swamplands. The swamps were a buffer and a resource, a point of intersection between the laboring world of the plantation and the world of moss-gatherers and woodcutters, often Acadian, who had long inhabited the land unsuitable for cane. Within these swamps lay the *brulées*, burned-over ridges that were the characteristic refuge of poorer Acadians and Canary



Islanders.<sup>49</sup> Octave Johnson, the cooper from St. James Parish, recalled that during the war he and a group of 30 runaways had survived for months in the swamps four miles to the rear of the plantation house, relying on a fragile set of exchanges with those still enslaved.<sup>50</sup>

The built environment of the plantation itself had a characteristic form. The "quarters" were generally facing rows of cabins, sometimes double cabins with central chimneys, each with a gallery in front. Life on those front porches has been memorably portrayed in the fiction of Ernest Gaines, and is revealed as well in the court records of the Parish of Lafourche. On the galleries took place everything from a dispute between neighbors over the loan of a frying pan to tense discussions about debts and wages paid. However impoverished, sugar workers' dwellings had little of the isolation of a single sharecropper's or tenant's cabin in the cotton parishes, and the already lively world of the quarters became even busier with the arrival of migrant workers for the harvest.<sup>51</sup>

Beyond the quarters were the canefields themselves, reached on foot or on horseback, at times through a sea of mud. In the 1870s and 1880s one could still, on some estates, find provision grounds and kitchen gardens where the workers grew potatoes, corn, and vegetables. On others, barracks-like dwellings for migrant workers and a company store, combined with an immense mill, gave the plantation something of the feel of a "factory in the field."<sup>52</sup>

A dominant feature throughout was collective life and group activity. This was the ironic concomitant of planters' efforts to retain gang labor and exert full control. Moreover, continuity of residence in the quarters had not brought the docility and isolation from the world beyond the plantation that planters hoped to instill in their workers. Schoolteachers, migrant workers, mechanics, and blacksmiths came onto the plantation; women on their way to market, folks looking for a new job, and members of assorted organizations still went to town.

One of the many contested moments of the November 1876 election highlights the links between electoral politics and the interior world of the sugar plantation. The Republican supervisor of elections in Lafourche, Marcelin Ledet, initially announced that several of the polling booths were to be located within plantation boundaries. White Democrats were

furiously at this assumption of the power "to go into men's plantations and to establish polls in or about sugar houses, most of which were at work." The local Democratic paper reported that "determined opposition" brought "these usurpers to terms and to a little common sense in 24 hours after the notice had been published." Under duress, Ledet seems to have acceded to announcing that the polling place would be a warehouse on the public road that fronted the R.H. Allen Plantation, a mile and a half from the quarters. At 3 AM on 7 November, however, the poll was apparently opened inside the sugarhouse, whereupon "eighty-six negroes ... voted the Republican ticket," choosing the Republican state senatorial candidate and former slave Thomas A. Cage over the Democratic candidate, Isaiah D. Moore, Esq.<sup>53</sup>

The image of this early-morning gathering is a telling one. In this, the last election in which African-American voters in Louisiana would have any hope of voting freely for many years to come, collective action in the sugarhouse was the final line of electoral defense. To retain the ability to vote, sugar workers had to exercise solidarity and perhaps a degree of stealth. Democrats, with their own long history of attempting to monopolize ballot boxes, quickly cried foul and labeled the election of Thomas Cage fraudulent.

#### THE 1887 STRIKES

With these images and antecedents in mind, one can return to the year 1887. But this time it may be best to begin at the start of the year rather than focus immediately on the huge strike of November. Knights of Labor organizers had begun to move into the sugar regions in late 1886, though they may or may not have been the instigators of the first work stoppages. They were particularly active in the towns in St. Mary Parish, which came to hold twelve local assemblies of the Knights. Their members included farm hands, laborers, railroad employees, clothing workers, and building trade's workers; white and black, men and women.<sup>54</sup>

In the adjacent parish of Lafourche, court records show that already on 19 January 17 black men were apparently trying to halt work on the Mary Plantation. Jordan Brannon, Briscoe Wheeler, Johnny Phillips, William Pearson, Peter Young and James Lagarde

were charged with unlawful disturbance and riotous assembly. In that same month, Clay Williams, Adam Elles and Israel Lucust were charged with trespassing on the Upper Ten Plantation, while Numa Gautreaux was charged with trespassing on the plantation of Delphin Babin. In the case of Adam Elles, the charge was more specific: he was said to have prevented one Nelson Christian from working on the plantation.<sup>55</sup>

Testimony in the cases of Peter Young and Amos Johnson casts a bit more light on these events. Mary Plantation covered 1800 acres of land valued at \$20,000.<sup>56</sup> The owner, Richard Foret, recalled that on 19 January 1887 he had come up from his estate to the town of Raceland to take "the cars" to Thibodaux to do some business: "On my way I met a crowd of colored men going down the bayou on the levee ... When I got to the depot Mr. Sevin told me the crowd were going down to stop my hands from working ... as a matter of fact my hands stopped working at 12 M [*sic*] that day." The clerk from Raceland whom Foret sent down to warn the overseer of the impending arrival of "strikers" recalled, "I told the boys on Mary Plantation to keep on working but they said 'no'—the men who had been there had said if they didn't stop they would come back and run them out of the field." A resident of Mary Plantation, Lewis Anderson, recalled that the crowd of strikers had specified that they would not work for 60 cents a day and that "the Foret hands agreed at once to stop. They didn't make any threats they didn't have time to make any threats because the others were willing to stop." The testimony of Wiley Jackson in the case of Peter Young conveys something of the atmosphere on the levee at Raceland that morning, as folks milled around and waited to see what would happen: "All I know when the crowd went down Peter Young was on the levee and when they came back Peter Young was there yet. He didn't go down. I stayed around there, on the levee at the store, sometimes at the depot and down at the little boat."<sup>57</sup> One has a sense here of the levee as the site of a tense political promenade with participants, spectators, surrogates, and bystanders involved in a debate on the question of whether a man or a woman should work in the fields for 60 cents a day. (Indeed, even those 60 cents often came in the form of a credit slip at the company store.) Although individual workers may have had prior contact with Knights of Labor organizers, their strike actions seem

not to have been formally called by the Knights.

By late October 1887, much of the sense of improvisation was gone. District Assembly 194 of the Knights of Labor met in Morgan City in St. Mary Parish on 19 October to try to set a rate of wages for sugar workers in St. Mary, Terrebonne, Lafourche, Iberia, and St. Martin parishes, together accounting for a large percentage of the state's sugar output. The demands were by now familiar: better wages, no payment in scrip, extra pay for night watches. The call from Morgan City was followed in Lafourche by a letter to sugar planters, reiterating the demands, signed by J.H. Bailey, president of the joint local executive board, Knights of Labor, and several others. An experienced schoolteacher, Junius Bailey took a courteous but forceful tone: "should this demand be considered exorbitant by the sugar planters ... we ask them to submit such information with reason therewith to this board not later than Saturday, Oct. 29 inst. [*sic*] or appoint a special committee to confer with this board on said date."<sup>58</sup>

Planters refused to negotiate, one noting smugly that "it is impossible for the negroes to succeed in a strike for the reason that they are dependent on the planters for their living." Work stopped on 1 November, and on 2 November the press in New Orleans estimated the number of strikers at 10,000. Militia were promptly deployed to the region. The *Daily Picayune* noted uneasily that "the negroes generally are stubborn and disposed to stand their ground."<sup>59</sup> As in earlier years, the links between town and country were crucial. The commander of the militia reported on the movement of workers back and forth to town, though he tended to interpret it as aimless: "I noticed at Schreiver [*sic*] a very large body of negroes lounging around the depot, and at Thibodaux, [*sic*] the streets were full of them. They would leave the surrounding plantations and walk into the towns, where they would loiter all day and return to their cabins on the farms at night."<sup>60</sup>

To intimidate strikers and make room for strike-breakers, planters and the militia evicted families of workers from the quarters. Belongings were soon "scattered along the bayou on the public road," outside the boundary of the plantation.<sup>61</sup> The local press reported during November on the exodus from the plantations to the town of Thibodaux, "Every vacant room in town tonight is filled with families

of penniless and ragged negroes. All day long a long stream of black humanity poured in ... bringing all their earthly possessions, which never amounted to more than a frontyard full of babies, dogs, and ragged bedclothing."<sup>62</sup> Conflict flared on plantations in Lafourche Parish, and Richard Foret was said to have been wounded on 4 November by "a negro striker" named Moses Pugh. According to press reports, when a deputy sheriff attempted to arrest Pugh, "about 150 negroes surrounded the murderer and defied the authorities." The deputy sheriff returned with a detail of militia and completed the arrest. Foret turned out to be only slightly injured.<sup>63</sup>

Although the plantations were the scenes of scattered violence during the strike, it was in Thibodaux that the defining moment took shape. As in the days of the 1874 drills by Benjamin Lewis's militia, black men and women had come to Thibodaux from the surrounding countryside, but this time they came as evicted strikers. A Gatling gun now stood on the steps of the courthouse, deployed by the all-white militia under the command of a brigadier general from New Orleans. It was never fired, however. Instead, Brigadier General Pierce declared on November 20 that the major estates were back at work, and the militia no longer needed. He withdrew all but one of his units, a crew from Shreveport who had been dismissed but had not yet headed home. Pierce had earlier noted that the Shreveport militia was not in uniform and that their officer had experienced difficulty "preventing a collision between his men and the strikers."<sup>64</sup>

That Sunday, 20 November, a meeting of Thibodaux's "best citizens irrespective of trade" formed a Peace and Order committee and, with the assistance of local townspeople and perhaps the Shreveport militia, established pickets around the town of Thibodaux to prevent the entry or departure of any black men or women. Mary Pugh, the widow of a wealthy Democratic planter, later recounted events from her vantage point in town. Her sons, back at home, had been devoting themselves to pouring lead into moulds to make bullets. Early Wednesday morning someone fired at one of the pickets, she reported, and "the ball began." The scene was stark: "they began then hunting up the [strike] leaders and every one that was found or any suspicious character was shot. Before Allen got back the rifles on St. Charles Street

sounded like a battle." She witnessed the capture of one hidden striker: "they brought them by our side gate. I thought [they] were taking them to jail instead they walked with one over to the lumber yard where they told him to 'run for his life' [and] gave the order to fire. All raised their rifles and shot him dead. This was the worst sight I saw but I tell you we have had a horrible three days [and] Wednesday excelled any thing I ever saw even during the war."<sup>65</sup>

Shooting seems to have gone on for hours. There is no way to estimate accurately the number of deaths. Officially, eight or nine people were killed. Mary Pugh herself dismissed the newspaper reports and guessed that fifty black people had died. Many more may have been injured.<sup>66</sup> Covington Hall, whose uncle lived nearby, recalled that "Newly made graves were reported found in the woods around Thibodaux for weeks afterward," and the body of a dead man appeared in the yard of his uncle's place two miles south of Thibodaux.<sup>67</sup> The strike ended; many Knights of Labor organizers fled the region; and the harvest was brought in. Mary Pugh reflected on the events she had seen, and framed them not in terms of wages or labor, but in a language of race war and political dominion: "I am sick with the horror of it. But I know it had to be else we would all have been murdered before a great while. I think this will settle the question of who is to rule the [Negro] or the white man? for the next 50 years but it has been well done [and] I hope all trouble is ended. The [Negroes] are as humble as pie today. Very different from last week."<sup>68</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

This examination of social geography, mobilization, and repression suggests several observations about the dimensions of freedom and the exercise of political voice in the Louisiana sugar parishes. The first rests on a renewed appreciation of the role of militia in Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction collective action. The presence of a visible and active militia led by men of color in Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes challenged the very structure of white domination — including the monopoly of access to the public space in front of the courthouse and of the right to bear arms. For at least three years, the exercise of political voice at the ballot box by former slaves was accompanied by public displays of

solidarity encompassing women as well as men. Sugar workers in town on the weekends in the early 1870s are unlikely to have forgotten the sight of Company C drilling in front of the courthouse. Some may also have attended Lewis's well-run school in the Second Ward in Terrebonne or voted at the polling places where he served as commissioner. By 1887, however, militia service was again monopolized by those who counted themselves white. Indeed, 20 members of the local assemblies of the Knights of Labor in Morgan City also served in the now all-white local militia, fracturing cross-racial solidarity within the Knights as the conflict escalated.<sup>69</sup> The presence in Thibodaux of the restless Shreveport militia seems to have hastened the onset of direct repression, in which several different groups of white citizens then participated.

The second observation emerges from the examination of court records and the geography of the region. The spatial organization of the world of cane initially facilitated the mobilization of sugar workers but later made efficient repression possible. Work stoppages were built and spread by flying squadrons of laborers moving along the bayou on the levee, on foot or on horseback, armed or just assertive in their numbers. If they were arrested for riotous assembly and arraigned at the courthouse in Houma or Thibodaux, their allies in town could in some instances post bond. Even a decade after the formal end of Reconstruction there were still black Masons, schoolteachers, and former officeholders active in town and able to lend a hand.<sup>70</sup> But once planters, both high-tariff Republicans and White-Line Democrats, were faced with a full-scale strike and evidence of collective determination among strikers' families, they closed ranks, spread rumors of violence, and set out to control the key spaces. The state militia took control of the railway line and made its way up and down the levee, moving into the quarters, evicting strikers and their families from their cabins. Workers took the familiar roads to Thibodaux, but the town that had earlier served as a refuge and source of alliances had now become a dangerous cul-de-sac. When the white vigilante forces circled the town of Thibodaux they boxed in the evicted strikers, and by the time the rifles began firing on St. Charles Street, there was nowhere to go.

In retrospect, the risks taken by the strikers seem immense, and the weight of the repression that fell upon them seems foreseeable. At the time, however, the prior experiences of public mobilization of black men and women in conjunction with Lewis's and Peney's militia were still relatively near at hand. The power of collective work stoppages in an industry entirely dependent on wage labor had been tested in wildcat strikes and might have been expected to exact concessions from planters on the eve of the harvest, as deadly frosts approached. It was just barely possible to imagine collective action that would challenge both the hegemony of planters and the suffocating consequences of the White Line strategy of intimidation in electoral politics.<sup>71</sup>

The elite of Lafourche Parish were taken aback by the magnitude of the strike, and by the inability of the militia to bring it to an end. The *Thibodaux Sentinel* had in the past amused its readers with stories of streetcorner quarrels in which "the colored people took to flight at the sight of a drawn pistol."<sup>72</sup> Now the newspaper had to acknowledge a situation in which intimidation seemed not to be working. William Murrell, Jr., an African-American legislator from the more northerly cotton parish of Madison, had some years earlier recounted to a Congressional Committee the antecedents of the arrival in his parish of vigilante groups of white "bulldozers": Whenever these men got ready to come you can always tell—they put out what we call 'a feeler;' the white people began to talk this way; they say 'The negroes are going to burn the white folks' gin-houses; a massacre will come; the negroes are getting ready to burn our gin-houses.' And wherever you hear that kind of talk, our people understand and know very well that they are fixing to come."<sup>73</sup> It was precisely such predictions of black violence that signaled the imminence of white violence in Thibodaux, as the Peace and Order Committee circled the town. The *Thibodaux Sentinel* claimed in retrospect that "The negroes were in motion and rumors of contemplated violence on their part multiplied faster than mosquitoes on a sultry summer day. Their women boasted that they were ready to fire the town."<sup>74</sup>

Once the repression began, the goals of planters and the vigilante units seem to have gone far beyond breaking the last of the strike and intimidating the Knights of Labor. They sought to force on both black



workers and labor organizers an attitude of "humility," by which they hoped to stop further mobilization, while creating the illusion that former slaves and their descendants were willing to accept a definition of freedom that declared them subordinated wage laborers, not citizens entitled to engage in collective action. But this exemplary violence was so stark, and contained so much of what Mary Pugh herself called "horror," that it could in the end be spoken of only in private.

Just a few days after the killings, a letter to the French-language pages of the *Thibodaux Sentinel* reflected on the events and remarked that "mieux vaut pour tous déchirer cette page de notre histoire que de chercher à l'expliquer" ("Better for all concerned that this page be torn out of our history rather than try to explain it.").<sup>75</sup> White citizens in Louisiana nearly succeeded in silencing the events that could easily have been called the "Thibodaux Massacre." Evidence that would permit an accurate reconstruction of the dimensions of the killing does seem now to be beyond reach. But the events that preceded it can be reconstructed. Cane workers and their families, strikers and their allies left significant traces in the court records, on the land, and in a variety of manuscript documents. The story of their actions, in the end, is a page that was not successfully torn out from Louisiana's history.

Though Louisiana's white elite preferred to trace redemption to the glorious "Battle" of Canal Street initiated by the White League in New Orleans in 1874 and to the withdrawal of Federal troops in 1877, it may be that for the sugar parishes the denouement came only with the massacre in Thibodaux more than a decade later. By extending our focus, then, to encompass the entire period between Union occupation in 1862-63 and the events in the sugar parishes in 1887, we can begin to see the dynamics of a quarter century of mobilization among workers in the bayou country, encompassing multiple and repeated assertions by a people stubborn and disposed to hold their ground.

END NOTES

1. *Report of Brig.-Gen. William Pierce Commanding State Troops in the Field in District from Berwick's Bay to New Orleans to General G. T. Beauregard, Adjutant General of the State of Louisiana, November 28th, 1887* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Leon Jastremski, State Printer, 1887), p.11.
2. Various primary sources on the strike are cited below. The best published secondary accounts are Jeffrey Gould, "The Strike of 1887; Louisiana Sugar War," *Southern Exposure*, Vol.12 (November-December 1984), pp. 45-55, and William Ivy Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1969), Ch.8.
3. See Melton Alonza McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South* (Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1978), pp.74-6, 131-48.
4. Gould, "The Strike of 1887."
5. Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest*, Ch.8. The Louisiana experience can also be examined in the context of other post-emancipation societies. For some thoughts in this direction, see Frederick Cooper, Thomas Bolt and Rebecca Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations on Race, Labor, and Citizenship* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.)
6. See Paul K. Eiss, "A Share in the Land. The Production of Politics on Government, Plantations, Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes, Louisiana, 1863-1865," *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol.19, No.1 (April 1998).
7. See George S. Denison to Hon. S.P. Chase, 23 Oct. 1863, and other wartime reports reproduced in Ira Berlin, Thavolia Glymph, Steven J. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, and Julie Saville, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, Series I, Vol. III, *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 471-3.
8. Evidence on these arrangements comes from Records of the Assistant Commissioner, Louisiana, RG 105, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, reproduced in U. S. National Archives Microfilm Publication M1027 (hereafter M1027). On Orange Grove, see Monthly Report of 1st Lieut. J.S. Wadsworth, Asst. Inspr. Freedmen, for the Parish of Terrebonne, for the month ending 30 April 1866, M1027, Reel 28; and Monthly Report of George A. Ludlow, Asst. Inspr. Freedmen, for the Parish of Terrebonne, La., for the Month ending 31 July 1866, M1027, Reel 29. On a few estates in Lafourche Parish, freedpeople still worked under rental arrangements and grew corn rather than sugar in 1868. See Monthly Report of John. H. Van Antwerp, Asst. Insp. Freedmen, Parish of Lafourche, La., for the month ending 30 September 1868, M 1027, Reel 31.
9. On the reluctance to lease, see Monthly Report of Capt. C.E. Wilcox, Asst. Inspr. Freedmen, Parish of Lafourche La., for the month ending 31 January 1866; and Hqtrs BRFAL, State of Louisiana, Inspection Report for Jan., Feb., March, 1866, both in M1027, Reel 28.

10. Wm. Dougherty, Provost Marshal and Asst. Inspt. of Freedmen, Inspection Report of Plantations, freedmen, &c. in the parishes Jefferson and Orleans, Right Bank, January 1866, M1027, Roll 28.
11. See Henry S. Wadsworth to Col. J.I. Grigg, Inspector General, 31 January 1866, In M1027, Reel 28.
12. See Monthly Report of Wm. Woods for the Parish of Terrebonne, La., for the month ending 30 April 1868. M1027, Reel 30.
13. The predominance of black and mulatto workers among plantation laborers in Terrebonne Parish can be seen in the manuscript schedules of the 1870 census.
14. Noel Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (London, Chapman and Hall, 1949), Vol.1, p.250.
15. The events in Terrebonne can be followed in the *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), 14 January to 20 January, 1874. John Rodrigue, in "Raising Cane: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1862-1880" (Ph.D., Emory University, 1993), sees the demand for leaseholds as a desperate response to falling wages (chap.5), Paul K. Eiss, in "A Share in the Land," sees it as a continuation of the spirit of the labor companies.
16. See "Our Future," *The Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel*, 14 February 1874.
17. See Ralph Shlomowitz, "'Bound' or 'Free'? Black Labor in Cotton and Sugarcane Farming, 1865-1880," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol.50 (November 1984), pp.569-96; John Rodrigue, "Raising Cane," pp.504-32. In the Summer of 1887 a laborer in Lafourche Parish might expect to earn 60 or 65 cents a day cultivating cane. See *The Weekly Pelican* (New Orleans) 13 August 1887 and the discussion of the strike below.
18. Rodrigue, "Raising Cane," pp.551-2.
19. On Union recruiting in Southern Louisiana, see Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy and Leslie S. Rowland (eds.), *Freedom. A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, Series II, *The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp.116-22. The testimony of Octave Johnson appears in Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph P. Reidy and Leslie Rowland (eds.), *Freedom. A Documentary History of Emancipation*, Series I, Vol. I, *The Destruction of Slavery* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 217. See also James G. Hollandsworth, Jr., *The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience during the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1995).
20. On the number of federal soldiers in Louisiana, see Joseph G. Dawson III, *Army Generals and Reconstruction: Louisiana, 1862-1877* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1982), Appendix III.
21. Wm. Dougherty, Provost Marshal and Asst. Inspt. of Freedmen, Inspection Report of Plantations, freedmen, & c. in the parishes Jefferson and Orleans, Right Bank, January 1866, in USNA, M1027, Roll 28.
22. Evidence on St. Mary comes from John J. Moore, in House Misc. Doc. No. 154, 41st Cong., 2nd Sess., "Testimony taken by the Sub-Committee of Elections in Louisiana," [1870], pp.634-42. Moore described himself as "a radical republican, as near as I can come at it." His testimony is also cited and discussed in Nell Irwin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 11. For a brilliant discussion of comparable grassroots mobilization in South Carolina, see Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860-1870* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994), Ch.5. See also Michael W. Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South: Politics and Agricultural Change During Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp.32, 238.
23. See the entries for Thomas Cage, Ulgar Dupart, William H. Keyes, Frederick Marie, and Frederick R. Wright of Terrebonne Parish; Arthur Antoine, John B. Esnard, John J. Moore, and Isaac Sutton, of St. Mary Parish; and Oscar Crozier, William Murrell, and John Nelson of Lafourche Parish, in Eric Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders during Reconstruction* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1993). See also Charles Vincent, *Black Legislators in Louisiana during Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1976).
24. On black militia in Louisiana, which dated back to 1870, see Otis Singletary, *Negro Militia and Reconstruction* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1957), pp.13-14, 66-80. Singletary is mistaken in his view that African American militia activity in Louisiana was confined to New Orleans "and never spread to the provinces" (p.80).
25. See William Garrett Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant James Longstreet and his Place in Southern History* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1987), p. 120.
26. See Ted Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction: War, Radicalism and Race in Louisiana, 1862-1877* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1984), pp.151-72; Dawson, *Army Generals*, Ch.6 and 7; and Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed, 1863-1877* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1974).
27. "The Fight in Grant Parish," *Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel*, 19 April 1873.
28. "Usurpation on the Rampage!!!," *Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel*, 24 May 1873.
29. "La Ville et la Campagne," *Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel* (French section), 31 May 1873.
30. Peney was assisted by First Lieutenant James Madison and Second Lieutenant Scott Brown. See *Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Louisiana For the Year ending December 31st, 1874* (New Orleans, The Republican Office, 1875), pp.24, 27, and 47 of the WPA typescript of this document, held at the Library, Jackson Barracks, Louisiana.



31. See *The Times Democrat* (New Orleans), 3 October 1887, transcribed in *Historical Military Data on Louisiana Militia July -Dec. 31, 1878*, Library, Jackson Barracks, New Orleans.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Singletary, *Negro Militia*, p.15.
34. See Vol.7, Louisiana, Ninth Census of the United States, 1870. Benjamin Lewis appears in household number 135, Third Ward, Parish of Lafourche, Post Office: Raceland. (These schedules are reproduced on Roll 516, U.S. National Archives Microfilm Publication 593.)
35. The supervisor's judgment appears in *Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Education, William G. Brown, to the General Assembly of Louisiana for the Year 1875* (New Orleans, The Republican, 1876), p.262. In the 1871 report, Lewis appears as a teacher in the Second Ward of Terrebonne Parish, along with Charles Preston and Mary A. Clay. In the 1872 report, 75 male and 41 female children were said to be enrolled in the Second Ward school, where they were taught by Benj. H. Lewis and Mary Ann Clay. See *Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Education, Thomas Conway, to the General Assembly of Louisiana, for the Year 1871* (New Orleans, The Republican, 1872), and *Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Education, William O. Brown, to the General Assembly of Louisiana, for the Year 1872* (New Orleans, The Republican, 1873).
36. William Murrell was President of the School Board in Thibodaux, commissioned in April 1873, and Nelson Taylor was a member for Lafourche. See *Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Education, William G. Brown, to the General Assembly of Louisiana for the Year 1873* (New Orleans, The Republican, 1874).
37. See the W.P.A. transcriptions of the Policy Jury Minutes for Terrebonne Parish, 1868-1882 and 1882-1894, Box 183, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge (hereafter LLMVC). On the role of Keys and Kennedy in the sugar strike, see *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), 16 January 1874 and 20 January 1874.
38. "Communication" (in the French-language section), *Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel*, 22 October 1887.
39. For a dated but detailed account, see Paul Leland Haworth, *The Hayes-Tilden Presidential Election of 1876* (Cleveland, The Burrows Brothers Company, 1906).
40. *Historical Military Data ... 1878*, pp.87-94.
41. See Sheet 38, First Ward, Terrebonne Parish, Vol.16, Louisiana, Tenth Census of the United States, 1880. (Reproduced on Roll 412, Microfilm Publication T9, U.S. National Archives.) B. H. Lewis, mulatto, age 42, born in Maine, is listed along with his wife Ester, mulatto, born in Louisiana, and their children Ann Mary (age 5) and Ben Philip (age 2).
42. The names of black residents of Lafourche Parish appeared on the 1878 rolls of men eligible for the militia, though by then it was highly unlikely that they would be chosen. (These rolls can be found, uncatalogued, in the records of the Clerk of the Court, Lafourche Parish, Thibodaux, Louisiana.) For the text of the 30 March 1878 law reconstituting the militia and the identification of the officers of the Special Military Force of the Second Military District, see *Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Louisiana, for the Year Ending December 31, 1880* (New Orleans: The Democrat, 1881).
43. *Weekly Pelican* (New Orleans), 23 July 1887. Emphasis in original. For a subtle discussion of dancing, excursions, and public space, see Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg D. Kimball, "Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond," *Journal of Urban History*, Vol.21 (March 1995), pp.296-346.
44. A Democratic leader recalled that in 1876 "The Majority of the armed men [lived] in all directions out in the country....," *The Times Democrat* (New Orleans), 3 October 1887, transcribed in *Historical Military Data 1878*.
45. Most of the information on Junius Bailey's career comes from A.E. Perkins. *Who's Who in Colored Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, Douglas Loan Company, 1930), p. 109. For Bailey's place of employment in 1887, I have drawn on Jeffrey Gould, "Heroic and Vigorous Action": An Analysis of the Sugar Cane Workers' Strike in Lafourche Parish, November, 1887," ms.
46. On Kennedy, see the *Daily Picayune*, 20 January 1874.
47. I would like to thank Jerry McGee, the manager of Laurel Valley, for sharing his knowledge of the history and geography of the estate with me during my visit to the estate in 1996. See also J. Paul Leslie, "Laurel Valley Plantation, 1831-1926", in Philip D. Uzee (ed.), *The Lafourche Country: The People and the Land* (Lafayette, Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1985), pp.206-24; Sam B. Hilliard, "Site Characteristics and Spatial Stability of the Louisiana Sugarcane Industry," *Agricultural History*, Vol.53 (January 1979), pp. 254-69; and John B. Rehder, "Sugar Plantation Settlements of Southern Louisiana: A Cultural Geography" (Ph.D. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1971).
48. See, for example, the letter of Frank H. Peck, Officer of the Day at Camp Parapet, 15 June 1862, in Berlin *et al.*, *The Destruction of Slavery*, pp.209-10. As avenues of communication, the rivers and bayous were complemented by the railway, which cut south-west from New Orleans toward Berwick Bay. The watercolor referred to is by Alfred Waud and is held in the Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana, catalogued 1965-21, O.C. Waud 13.
49. Paul Leslie, of Nicholls State University, called the expanding role of Acadian wage laborers to my attention. See also Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun. Transformation of a People, 1803-1877* (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 1992). On Canary Islanders around Bayou Lafourche, see Gilbert C. Din, *The Canary Islanders of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1988), especially p. 135.

50. See Berlin *et al.*, *Destruction*, p. 217.
51. See in particular Ernest J. Gaines, *Bloodline* (New York, W.W. Norton, 1976), and the criminal records in the office of the Clerk of the Court, Lafourche Parish. See also Richard C. Plater Jr., "Acadia Plantation around 1900", Mss-0, Item 17, Allen Ellender Archives, Ellender Library, Nicholls State University, Thibodaux, Louisiana.
52. An exceptional collection of photographs from Evan Hall Plantation in the Bayou Lafourche region is held by the Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana. See, for example, the photographs taken in 1888 and catalogued as 1978.26.15, 1978.26.58, 1978.26.60, 1978.26.62. I have borrowed the phrase "factory in the field" from Sidney Mintz.
53. See *Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel*, 11 November 1876, and *Report of the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections in the Case of Moore vs. Cage to the Senate, State of Louisiana, Session 1878* (New Orleans: The Democrat, 1878), pp. 34, 39. One cannot, of course, be certain of the details of this account, since portions of the evidence were generated by a dispute over alleged election fraud. As George Rable has noted, such testimony often "reeks of perjury." (George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* [Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1984], p. 141.) Checking the various Democratic charges against each other, however, helps to fill in the story. It is the contemporary Democratic newspaper account, for example, that inadvertently discredits the later Democratic implication that the Poll #17 had been originally announced as the warehouse on the public road.
54. Hair, *Bourbonism*, p.177. Jonathan Garlock, *Guide to the Local Assemblies of the Knights of Labor* (Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1982), p.165.
55. The first case is to be found in the Volume labelled "Criminal Cases, Vol. A, District Court, Parish of Lafourche," pages 384, 385. The second is found among the loose documents titled Criminal Cases, 1887. All are in the Records of the Clerk of the Court of Lafourche Parish, in the annex to the Courthouse, Thibodaux, Louisiana (abbreviated hereafter as CCLP). I thank Barbara Lee and other staff members of the office of the Clerk of Court for their assistance in locating these materials.
56. See the entry 1913, Assessment Roll. Lafourche Parish, 1887. In CCLP.
57. The State of Louisiana vs. Peter Young and The State of Louisiana vs. Amos Johnson, Criminal Cases, 1887, CCLP.
58. *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), 30 October 1887.
59. See *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans) 30 October 1887 and 2 November 1887.
60. Pierce, *Report*, p. 4.
61. See Pierce, *Report*, p. 9.
62. Cited in Covington Hall, "Labor Struggles in the Deep South", ms., Part 2, p.7. Labadie Collection, Harlan Hatcher Library, University of Michigan.
63. *Weekly Capitolian Advocate* (Baton Rouge) 12 November 1887, transcribed in *Historical Military Data on Louisiana Militia, 1887*, in the Library, Jackson Barracks, New Orleans, Louisiana. Pierce, *Report*, p. 10.
64. Pierce, *Report*, p. 21, pp. 27-34. For a vivid day-by-day description of events, see Gould, "The Strike of 1881."
65. Letter, Mary W. Pugh to Edward F. Pugh, Nov. 25, Folder 1, Mary W. Pugh Papers, LLMVC.
66. Hair, *Bourbonism*, pp.181-2.
67. Hall, "Labor Struggles", Part 2, p. 11.
68. Letter, Mary W. Pugh to Edward F. Pugh, Nov. 25, Folder 1, Mary W. Pugh Papers, LLMVC.
69. Gould, "Heroic and Vigorous Action", n.38.
70. For a list of those who posted bond in the case of alleged assault on the deputy who arrested Moses Pugh, see p. 402, Vol. A, Criminal Cases, District Court, Parish of Lafourche, CCLP.
71. On aspects of the White Line strategy, see Singletary, *Negro Militia*, Ch.9. It may also be well to recall an observation made by Albert Hirschman, who suggests that sometimes men and women make commitments in part because, even if the goal turns out to be unattainable, they want to have been part of a principled and collective effort to achieve it. Albert O. Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982), Ch.5.
72. *Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel*, 1 September 1883.
73. Testimony of William Murrell [Jr.], 2 April 1880, in Senate Reports, Vol. 8, No. 693, Pt. 2, 46th Cong., 2nd sess., "Negro Exodus from Southern States," pp. 512-37.
74. See *Thibodaux Sentinel*, French section, 5 November 1887; English section, 26 November 1887.
75. "Nouvelles Locales," *Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel*, 3 December 1887.

