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The Politics of Terror : Enforcing Reconstruction in Louisiana's Red River Valley

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4. Towards a 'Reign of Terror'

Political Violence and the Collapse of Congressional Reconstruction (1867-1868)

In DeSoto, shortly before the elections, Charles Reynolds used brickbats to beat Stephen Humphreys, a freedman and the Republican candidate for the state legislature from the parish. A few days later, a local shopkeeper, Captain Hawkins, unsuccessfully tried to hire a black man to murder Humphreys. After the election, which he won due to his opponent being disqualified, Humphreys received threats on a daily basis and in June he fled the parish for the relative safety of New Orleans. On the day of the election itself, whites in Mansfield mobbed Freedmen's Bureau agent and Republican candidate James J. Walsh, threatening him with a knife. Conservatives, armed with knives and guns, formed a 'dead line' in front of the Mansfield polling station, "outside of that line was a crowd of white men who examined all voters coming there, and made them show their tickets before they came near the window to vote, and if they had a Republican ticket they were not allowed to vote or they tried to substitute democratic tickets for them." Although federal soldiers came to town during the election and many blacks tried to avail themselves of the opportunity to vote, the commander of the detachment sent them away for coming to town in formation.¹

Such scenes appear familiar to any student of Reconstruction in Louisiana. Once congressional Republicans took over the administration of Reconstruction from Andrew Johnson and replaced his conservative policies with far more radical alternatives, which included the enfranchisement of the black population in the Southern states, the role of violence in social life both dramatically increased and acquired a more explicitly political character. The persecution of white Unionists and incessant violence directed against blacks in the early postwar years had political undertones, but with conservative whites firmly in control of state and local political power, its primary function had been to reassert the traditional social, racial and economic hierarchy. Now, with many whites disenfranchised and the Republican Party ascendant thanks to federal support, whites increasingly used violence and intimidation to attempt and restore their political supremacy, or, failing to do so, to undermine any substantial changes in the race relation that the Republican regime might try and effect.

¹ *Supplemental Report of Joint Committee of the General Assembly of Louisiana on the Conduct of the Late Elections and the Condition of Peace and Good Order in the State* (New Orleans: A. L. Lee, State Printer, 1869) [Hereinafter: *Supplemental Report*], 159; CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 136-138, 319-320, 533-535.

What might surprise that same student of Reconstruction, however, is that the elections referred to in the above vignettes were not those of November 1868, when a virtual 'reign of terror' gripped the state, but those of April 1868. Most historians of Reconstruction in Louisiana have either explicitly echoed Henry Clay Warmoth's observation that in April "the canvass passed off quietly," or implicitly endorsed it by simply not discussing the existence of political violence and intimidation.² Joe Gray Taylor notes that "only in East Baton Rouge, Caddo, Bossier, and DeSoto parishes was there evidence of systematic coercion and intimidation of the type that was to be so common in future elections," and Tunnell mentions the fact that "whites coerced ninety-two blacks into opposing ratification" in Bienville parish, but neither author attached much significance to these statements beyond the local election outcomes.³

In reality, the violence and intimidation that erupted on a limited scale in northwestern Louisiana prior to the April 1868 elections and the statewide reign of terror during and after the presidential campaign in November were intimately connected. The success that many of these parishes experienced in reducing or overturning the Republican majorities that had elected delegates to a constitutional convention in September 1867 showed conservative whites throughout the state just how effective such a strategy could be. The halfhearted response by the federal government, moreover, indicated that whites might pursue such a strategy with relative impunity. The Red River region, as would be the case throughout Reconstruction, served as an incubator where conservative whites developed, experimented, and honed their political strategies, both legal and extra-legal, in order to reclaim power statewide and locally.

Simmering Tensions

In September 1867, the (male) black population of Louisiana, most of them only recently freed from slavery, voted for the first time ever in the federally supervised elections for a new constitutional convention. For the first two years following the surrender, the army and the Freedmen's Bureau had had to deal with state and local governments under the control of white conservatives. President Johnson, moreover, supported these governments in their aim

² Henry Clay Warmoth, *War, Politics, and Reconstruction: Stormy Days in Louisiana* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 59; Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields*, 98; Dawson, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*, 77; Lane, *Day Freedom Died*, 18; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 134; Francis Wayne Binning, "Carpenters' Triumph: The Louisiana State Election of 1868," *Louisiana History* 14, no. 1 (1973): 38.

³ Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 158; Tunnell, *Edge of the Sword*, 128.

to restore the South to full political independence as quickly as possible on the basis of white supremacy. Then, on March 2, 1867, congressional Republicans passed the first of a series of Reconstruction Acts. The law divided the former Confederate states – with the exception of Tennessee, which had already approved the Fourteenth Amendment - into five so-called military districts. Louisiana and Texas together formed the Fifth Military District, commanded by Phillip H. Sheridan, a general of strong Radical convictions. Existing civil governments would remain in place, but would be “deemed provisional only, and in all respects subject to the paramount authority of the United States at any time to abolish, modify, control, or supersede the same.”⁴

To be restored to political independence and readmitted to Congress, the former Confederate states had to meet a number of conditions. First of all, they had to elect a constitutional convention based on equal suffrage for blacks as well as the electoral provisions of the proposed Fourteenth Amendment, which disenfranchised all those who had held office prior to the Civil War and subsequently participated in the Rebellion. Secondly, the new constitutions had to enshrine the same electoral provisions for future elections. Thirdly, this electorate had to approve of the constitution thus drafted as, fourthly, did Congress. Finally, the legislature elected under these provisions would have to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment. Once states met these conditions, Congress would readmit Senators and Representatives from these states into its ranks and lift military supervision over civil government.

Conservative whites loathed the Reconstruction Act and immediately attempted to circumvent it. Even before its final passage, the state legislature in New Orleans, dominated by Conservative whites, ordered elections for a constitutional convention in early April, based on the existing, exclusively white, electorate. Although Wells vetoed the Act, the legislature succeeded in passing it over his veto. The conservative press applauded such a course, and urged Louisiana lawmakers to “proceed, at least for the present, as if no [Reconstruction] Act was in existence,” until it had been challenged in court.⁵ Congress quickly responded by passing the Second Reconstruction Act on March 22, ordering all military commanders to organize the registration and election mandated by the original act. Those wishing to register not only had to be eligible under the original law, but also swear an oath to that effect. All

⁴ ‘March 2, 1867, An Act to Provide for the More Efficient Government of the Rebel States,’ in United States Statutes at Large, Volume XIV, 428-29. See also: Foner, *Reconstruction*, 271–291; CSS, 40-1, HOR. Ex. 20; CSS, 40-1, Sen. Ex. 14; CSS, 40-1, HOR. Ex. 34;

⁵ LD, 67-03-06; BB, 67-03-16, 67-03-23.

officials appointed by the commanding general to enact the registration and conduct the election, moreover, had to swear to the even more restrictive Ironclad Oath.⁶

Initially, the conservative press in the Red River region furiously denounced the Reconstruction Acts. The *Louisiana Democrat* predicted that military commander “so accustomed to tyrannise [sic] over the South” would abuse their “almost unlimited powers.” The *Bossier Banner*, the most outspoken of the region’s conservative papers, denounced the initial act as “a mockery of free institutions” and treason enveloped in the forms of law.” It approvingly cited a Democratic Representative Andrew J. Rogers from New Jersey who advocated violent resistance to the law if necessary. The *Banner* published an even more scathing response to the Supplementary Act, “the odious military ‘butcher’ bill [...], by which edict of unprecedented brutality and outlawry the iron heel of a military despotism is to be remorselessly placed upon the neck of the already prostrate and submissive South.”⁷

Once the reality of the new situation sunk in, however, conservative whites quickly changed their tune. Although they undoubtedly abhorred the new laws, and particularly the prospect of black political participation, they soon turned from an all-out rejection to a debate on how to preserve as much of their political power as possible while ostensibly adhering to the new congressional mandates. This reflects the trend, apparent throughout the South, that Michael Perman has described as a turn from ‘masterly inactivity’ to an ostensible compliance with Radical Reconstruction, in fact “tantamount to qualified opposition, since the explicit purpose behind cooperation was to undermine and blunt, rather than fulfill, the intentions of the Republican legislators in Congress.”⁸ After first lambasting the Second Reconstruction Act, the *Banner* published a speech by Confederate war hero P. G. T. Beauregard, an address by Louisiana’s conservative state legislature, and a letter by George Williams, elected to the US Senate by that same legislature, all of whom counseled submission in the face of superior force. These conservative luminaries, as well as the editors of the *Banner*, the *Democrat*, and the *Natchitoches Semi-Weekly Times*, urged whites to take the requisite oath, register, and vote. They believed that Southern whites would be able to control the black votes and thus

⁶ ‘March 22, 1867, An Act supplementary to and Act entitled “An Act to provide for the more efficient Government of the Rebel States,” passed March second eighteen hundred and sixty-seven, and to facilitate Restoration,’ in United States Statutes at Large, Volume XV, 2-4.

⁷ LD, 67-02-27; BB, 67-03-09, 67-04-06.

⁸ Perman, *Reunion Without Compromise*, 278.

retain political control of the state and local governments, while at the same time ostensibly adhering to the demands of Congress.⁹

Conservatives, correctly as it turned out, predicted that the very stringency of the new laws would backfire, causing the military authorities difficulties in carrying out their provisions. The Second Reconstruction Act authorized the commanders of the Military Districts to appoint as many registrars and commissioners of election as necessary, every one of whom would have to swear the Ironclad Oath. The editor of the *Democrat* wryly noted that Rapides would require over a hundred such officers, while, at best, “by a thorough search, two or three respectable and competent men may be found, who can take the oath.”¹⁰ This prediction involved more than mere bluster or conservative propaganda. Whatever anti-secessionism and Unionism had existed before and during the Civil War, had not nurtured much widespread support for the Republican party among Southern whites - in part because “uncommon endurance and fortitude have been necessary to enable them to live here this long, they have all felt the heavy hand of Rebel oppression, and are still the subject of threats, slanders, and insults, and in fact, all the annoyances their Rebel neighbors can heap upon them.”¹¹

The military authorities ordered Martin Flood, Freedmen's Bureau agent for Bossier, Caddo and Desoto, to compile a list of six suitable candidates from each election district in those parishes. On April 9, Flood wrote to a Mr. Dean in DeSoto, to notify him that he would send his name in as registrar and election commissioner. He also asked Dean to please supply him with additional names. Although DeSoto would require at least a dozen (and perhaps twice that many) officers, Flood knew of not a single other eligible candidate in the parish. In Bossier, James Dobie, the chairman of the board of registration for the parish, found no more than twenty whites who could take the Ironclad Oath and at least one of those was murdered shortly after being appointed as commissioner of election. As a result of such difficulties, Flood failed to compile a complete list of candidates, submitting mostly the names of outsiders rather than local residents. In DeSoto and most of Bossier, he explained, “non-resident registers would be the only chance by which the freedmen [...] would have their full rights under the Bill secured to them.” None would have an opportunity to register and vote in

⁹ BB, 67-04-13, 67-04-20; LD, 67-04-03, 67-07-17; NT, 67-05-01.

¹⁰ LD, 67-04-10.

¹¹ 'July 26, 1867, Bossier, Dobie to Sheridan,' enclosed in 'July 26, 1867, Bossier, Dobie to Forsyth,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4575, box 6.

those areas “if the registration is left to those who say they accept ‘the military bill under protest.’”¹²

In most parishes, the military authorities succeeded in finding at least some competent, qualified and sincerely Republican officers, but rarely enough to fill all the offices required. In Rapides, the chairman of the board of registration, Azariah F. Wilde, complained that both his colleagues, George Dorman and John Stroeber, were unfit for their task. Dorman quit voluntarily, but Stroeber wished to stay on despite being hardly able to read or write, leaving Wilde and his clerk to do all the actual work. In DeSoto, two registrars notified the military supervisor that their chairman, John Cheneyville, had loudly proclaimed that he “did not care how the registration progressed as long as he received his \$8 per day for being idle.” In Winn, one of the registrars, T. S. Bacon did not join the board until several days after it convened, and after a few days claimed he had to leave to see to his other duties as Freedmen’s Bureau agent in Winn and postmaster in Alexandria. The chairman, William Wright, requested Bacon removed, since “if the board can do the work for such a length of time, I trust it can be completed without further assistance.”¹³

Despite such difficulties, registration commenced throughout the state on May 1. The conservative press continued to broadcast a conflicting message, rejecting military Reconstruction on principle, but urging whites to participate in the election fully in order to minimize its repercussions. Whites complained that boards of registration interpreted the Reconstruction Act too strictly by refusing to register those whom they considered ineligible, even if they had taken the requisite oath. An opinion by Johnson’s attorney general, Henry Stanbery, in early June, supported their contention that registrars had to accept all those who would swear the oath. Only a legal charge of perjury could then prevent those swearing falsely from voting, a procedure that most likely would last until well past the election date.¹⁴ The mostly Republican registrars, to the whites’ chagrin, ignored the ruling and continued to refuse registration to those whom they believed ineligible. They even petitioned the military authorities to strike men from the list whom they discovered to be disqualified after having previously registered them. The registrars quickly became the particular target of conservative whites’ anger against military Reconstruction. One disenfranchised resident of Rapides

¹² Ibid.; ‘April 9, 1867, Shreveport, Flood to Dean,’ and ‘April 18, 1867, Shreveport, Flood to Sterling,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 100, frames 388, 389; August 8, 1867, Bellevue, Boon to Forsyth,’ NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4575, box 6.

¹³ ‘May 9, 1867, Alexandria, Wilde to Forsyth,’ ‘June 13, 1867, Natchitoches, Pierce to Forsyth [1],’ and ‘June 13, 1867, Natchitoches, Pierce to Forsyth [2],’ NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4575, box 5.

¹⁴ NT, 67-05-15; LD, 67-06-05; BB, 67-06-08.

exploded when the board refused to register him, even after repeated applications: "I don't care a D... and I am going to register or I will do all I can to tear the United States Government to pieces." The US Congress, as far as he was concerned, might "sink into the bottom of Hell and the quicker the better."¹⁵

By the end of May, registered blacks outnumbered whites by wide margins in every parish along the Red River except Winn. Conservative whites publicly continued to express their acquiescence in the political process and Lieutenant F. E. Pierce, stationed in Natchitoches, reported "a feeling on the part of respectable citizens to cheerfully do all in their power to aid in the reconstruction of their respective parishes." He assured his superiors that "if any rowdies should attempt to interfere with any one of the boards, that there are good citizens enough to immediately quell and crush any such movement." Troops, he was confident, would not be needed to keep the peace during either registration or the election.¹⁶ Under the surface, however, tensions mounted, as it became increasingly clear to the white population that they would not be able to control the black vote. The conservative press increasingly insisted that "submission to these laws does not necessarily imply approbation or an acknowledgment of their justice." Conservative whites also complained about the demoralizing effect that political organization had on black laborers, even while they maintained to have "no wish to prevent the negroes from exercising their right of suffrage under the law, according to the best of their light and knowledge."¹⁷

As blacks began to register en masse, such tensions did not remain confined to the pages of the press. In the southern portion of Rapides Parish, near Bayou Boeuff, a white man named Hase accosted some freedpeople leaving a political meeting. The freedpeople fired some warning shots and Hase fled, but they followed him to his house, briefly arrested him, and soon released him unharmed. In Bossier, the planter William Harrison refused to allow his freedmen to leave the plantation to register. The freedmen chose to leave their homes, rather than give up their newfound political rights. While they gathered their belongings from their cabins an enraged Harrison "took a double barreled gun from Joe Robinson and called to Isaac Crawford to stop and the boy did not stop quick enough for him and he shot him twice." He then proceeded to beat the murdered boy's father with a stick. Throughout the region,

¹⁵ LD, 67-06-19, 67-06-26; 'May 2, 1867, Alexandria, Wilde to Forsyth,' 'June 29, 1867, Alexandria Wilde to Forsythe,' and 'August 2, 1867, Alexandria, Wilde to Forsyth,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4575, box 5.

¹⁶ LD, 67-05-22; BB, 67-05-25; 'May 23, 1867, Natchitoches, Pierce to Forsyth,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4575, box 4.

¹⁷ BB, 67-06-01; LD, 67-05-15; NT, 67-05-08.

Bureau agents received complaints from freedmen dismissed by their employers for no other reason than registering and intending to vote the Republican ticket.¹⁸

In Rapides, a quarrel between Registrar Wilde and the Democratic sheriff, James R. Andrews, nearly came to blows after letters from Wilde to General Sheridan and Provisional Governor Benjamin F. Flanders became public. He complained of Andrews's unwillingness to prosecute whites for crimes against freedpeople, particularly following the murder of Ned Jefferson by Thomas McNeely in which Andrews allowed the prisoner to escape after he had been remanded to jail to await trial. Wilde urged Flanders to have Andrew removed and a Republican, A. J. Sypher, appointed in his stead. A little over a week later, Andrews entered the office of parish recorder Moore, where the local military commander, Colonel J. C. Bates, Wilde and others were gathered. Andrew spat on Wilde who then put his hand to his breast and partly drew out his pistol. Bates quickly defused the confrontation and Andrews left the room. As soon as he learned that the cause of the argument was an official act by Wilde, Bates had Andrews arrested, releasing him on bail only after he learned that his presence was required for upcoming court business. Wilde took the insult seriously, asking the departmental command in New Orleans to provide him with protection, or else to allow him to make it a personal matter, allowing him, under the honor code, to challenge Andrews to a duel.¹⁹

Despite such tensions, interference in the election in Natchitoches and Rapides parishes remained limited to occasional incidents and to complaints by whites of the freedpeople's neglect of their work in favor of attending political meetings. Although the *Democrat* endorsed a call by the *Ouachita Telegraph* to no longer employ any freedpeople who joined the Republican Party, there is no indication that white planters implemented such a boycott on a large scale. In both these parishes the registration and election passed off without major incidents, returning large majorities in favor of the convention. In Natchitoches, in fact, following the elections, Freedmen's Bureau agent James Cromie complained only that a few white Republicans had "marshaled up [the freedmen] in ranks and took all opposition

¹⁸ 'May 10, 1867, Alexandria, Williams to Cromie,' and 'May 15, 1867, Alexandria, Williams to Sterling,' NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 52, frames 578, 581; May 21, 1867, Shreveport, Monroe to Sterling,' 'Church Robinson Deposition,' enclosed in 'May 14, 1867, Shreveport, Monroe to Cutts,' and 'May 31, 1867, Shreveport, Monroe to Sterling,' NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 100 frames 393, 394, 396; 'Sparta Journal of Business, entry May 19, 1867,' NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 102, frame 248.

¹⁹ 'August 19, 1867, Alexandria, Wilde to Forsyth,' and 'August 31, 1867, Alexandria, Bates to Forsyth,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4575, boxes 5, 6; 'August 31, 1867, Alexandria, Bates to AAAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 3, entry 287, box 1.

tickets from them and caused them to vote their ticket,” thus preventing them “to exercise their right as freemen.”²⁰

Further north, white opposition to black political participation coalesced over the summer into what a petition from Caddo Republicans termed “a general sense of insecurity [...] in this locality, to such an extent that there is practically no freedom of speech” or of assembly. The Shreveport agent for the Freedmen’s Bureau similarly reported that whites threatened and abused all loyal men. A “party of ruffians” whipped a “respectable and orderly” Northern man in broad daylight and publicly insulted a justice of the peace for advocating the removal of certain officials.²¹ In early August, Edward B. Benton, a Unionist who moved to Shreveport after the war, wrote General Sheridan to complain of an attack on him by a “notorious ex-guerrilla captain John Jacobs” and his associates. They choked, beat, and attempted to stab him, as punishment for a petition Benton had presented requesting the removal of some of the conservative city officials.

Despite the intentions of the Reconstruction Acts, conservative whites still dominated local government, protecting Jacobs and his ilk from the legal consequences of such a politically motivated assault. A justice of the peace who witnessed the assault fined the leader a mere 25 dollars for breaching the peace. He refused to take the victim’s statement, warning him “in a threatening tone and manner [...] that as I had come here since the war, any speech had better be guarded.” The military authorities had neither the resources nor the jurisdiction to interfere in such cases and, according to Benton,

threats are daily made by these desperate rebel outlaws to rise suddenly and clean out the handful of soldiers stationed here, massacre the negroes, and escape by flight to Mexico, and this class of desperadoes, in this parish and vicinity, so far outnumber the soldiers that they appear to be prepared and preparing to execute their threats and leave the country which they consider will be of no use to them after Reconstruction.²²

²⁰ LD, 67-05-15, 67-05-29, 67-08-28; NT, 67-05-08; ‘June 30, 1867, Natchitoches, Cromie to Parker,’ and ‘September 30, 1867, Natchitoches, Cromie to Parker,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 90, frames 53, 76; ‘September 20, 1867, Natchitoches, Miller, trimonthly report,’ and ‘September 30, 1867, Natchitoches, Miller, trimonthly report,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 91, frames 671, 674; ‘September 30, 1867, Alexandria, Williams, trimonthly report,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 53, frame 966; ‘October 1, 1867, Alexandria, Wilde to Forsyth,’ NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4575, box 5.

²¹ ‘June 24, 1867, Shreveport, Register et al. to Sheridan,’ NARA, RG 393, part 3, entry 287, box 2; ‘August 10, 1867, Shreveport, Monroe to Parker,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 100, frame 404.

²² ‘August 8, 1867, Shreveport, Benton to Sheridan,’ NARA, RG 393, part 3, entry 287, box 1.

It is unlikely that conservative whites ever seriously considered such a scorched earth strategy, but Benton's words accurately capture the desperate and recalcitrant mindset, which, over the ensuing months, would lead to a virtual reign of terror throughout much of the South as whites sought to reestablish their political, economic, and racial dominance.

Similarly, in neighboring Bossier, "the Rebel spirit is not extinguished," according to election registrar Dobie. Although the white population had received him and his colleagues "with a kind of politeness," it was "often of a cringing kind, that reminds me more of ghastly grins than smiles, and more of fear than love." Curtis A. Boon, the only local man to receive them with sincere courtesy and respect, was "treated with the utmost contempt and insult wherever we have been, yet his most inveterate enemies charge him with no other offence than his unswerving loyalty to the Union and now acting in the capacity of a US officer." He went on to warn Sheridan that "every plan and trick that can be invented by the ablest minds of the country are being practiced upon [the freedpeople] to induce them to vote with the Rebel party and without strong protection (military the best) no one dare publicly advise them of their interests."²³

Nothing, however, caused so much tension as the mass political meetings of freedpeople organized in local Republican clubs. Whites both resented and feared these meetings, which were a visible reminder of the free blacks' newfound autonomy. In the white imagination, freedmen attended these meetings armed and the clubs served no legitimate political purpose, but functioned as a training ground for a supposed black insurrection. In the face of such a threat - however unrealistic - even military interference seemed a desirable alternative. In DeSoto, R. J. Boarman wrote to Judge James J. Weems to get troops sent to the parish as he feared "to leave the helpless women and children to be slaughtered and butchered in a war of race against race." The local commander, Lieutenant Thomas Latchford, forwarded the request, but noted that the freedmen had not "committed any overt acts" to warrant interference and that the only troops he needed were on account of possible violence by jittery whites.²⁴ The local Bureau agent, Thomas Carey, confirmed Latchford's assessment, reporting "no hostile demonstrations made in this parish by the freedmen" and "no military companies or secret organizations." The only time any came armed it was because of threats from whites to break up their meeting. Carey met them outside of town and requested they

²³ 'July 26 1867, Bossier, Dobie to Sheridan,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4575, box 6.

²⁴ 'August 7, 1867, Shreveport, Latchford to Spalding,' NARA, RG 393, part 3, entry 287, box4; 'August 3, 1867, Mansfield, Boarman to Weems,' enclosed in Ibid.

leave their weapons in the military camp to avoid provocation, which they did. All other meetings he attended had been “quiet and orderly.”²⁵

A few weeks later, on August 16, tensions surrounding political meetings in Bossier nearly erupted into violence. According to a ‘statement of facts’ signed by dozens of prominent whites, hundreds of armed freemen attended the meeting, posting armed guards around the perimeter. They harassed the whites who tried to attend, briefly disarming two of them, B. B. Matlock and Thomas Smith, at gunpoint. Following the meeting they “marched from the grounds in military order” stopping and searching passing whites. They also released a black horse thief, arrested on warrant, from an acting constable’s custody. These incidents, claimed the petitioners, “prove the widespread spirit of lawlessness and incendiarism, which is caused by the example and teaching of two or three irresponsible white men.” Here too, the perceived threat of a black uprising, overrode the whites dislike of military interference and the petition requested “a small detail of troops to be stationed at Benton, at least temporarily.” Around the same time, near Black Bayou, in the northwestern tip of Caddo, a party of whites abused the freedmen “for holding political meetings. One was shot, 15 or 20 taken to Jefferson [Texas] and turned over to the post commander.” Thomas Monroe, the local Bureau agent, tended to sympathize with the whites in these matters, blaming the excitement on the political clubs, at which freedmen attend “all armed, parade and drill like soldiers, they have their pickets and patrols and stop all whom they have a suspicion of.” Although he deemed both races at fault in Black Bayou, he particularly blamed “the members of the political club [...] for all the disturbances which took place.”²⁶

Generals Sheridan and Joseph A. Mower, who commanded the District of Louisiana, distrusted these reports. Although they ordered the local military commanders to investigate, they also gave explicit instructions to find out whether whites had not themselves provoked the black militancy they complained of.²⁷ Latchford reported at the end of October that the arrest of Matlock and Smith had been committed by some “evil disposed freedmen” and one of the black leaders, James Hickory, immediately had them released. The release of the horse thief had also been committed by a few individuals en route to the meeting, but with no

²⁵ ‘August 30, 1867, Mansfield, Cary to Forsyth,’ NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4575, box 6.

²⁶ ‘August 19, 1867, n.p., Cummings et al. to Cutts,’ ‘September 15, 1867, New Orleans, Mower to Hartsuff,’ NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4498, boxes 3, 4; ‘August 20, 1867, Shreveport, Monroe to Parker,’ ‘September 10, 1867, Shreveport, Monroe to Parker,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 100, frames 405, 408.

²⁷ ‘Endorsement of September 3, 1867,’ in ‘August 20, 1867, Shreveport, Monroe to Parker,’ and ‘Endorsement of September 16, 1867,’ in ‘September 7, 1867, New Orleans Harper to Hartsuff,’ NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4498, box 3.

known connection to the Republican leadership. Latchford further concluded that the only reason the freedmen attended armed and posted guards, was because of reports that the meeting was to be broken up, their American flag to be taken away from them, and their registration papers and weapons to be confiscated. The freedmen had determined "that no body of men should take them away without a fight." Since then, no troubles had occurred, which "goes conclusively to show, that the arming of themselves (freedmen) at the meeting was done only for self-defense, as the rumors were of such a character as would justify it."²⁸

By September, as the date for the elections approached, military officials in charge of the Fifth Military District received conflicting signals as to what to expect. Lieutenant F. E. Pierce, the military supervisor for the registration in northwestern Louisiana, expected no difficulty except possibly in DeSoto, where "the rowdy element seems to have obtained the mastery" over the "disposition manifested by the respectable portion of the community to quell all outbreaks of lawless conduct." General Mower, commanding the District of Louisiana, on the other hand, warned that "serious trouble may be reasonably anticipated at the coming election," which he had not enough troops to deal with. The reports of trouble he forwarded clustered around two areas: the Florida parishes above Baton Rouge and the Red River region.²⁹

Following the election, Dobie reported from Bossier on "the failure of a legal election at three or four precincts in this parish." At Collinsburg and Rocky Mount precincts, local whites arrested the commissioners of election under false pretenses on the morning of the election. At Cotton Valley, a colored commissioner was induced to resign and the returns from Cane precinct were not signed by all three commissioners. In Caddo, the registrar and commissioner F. J. Burgess fled from Summer Grove precinct after Andrew Pickens ordered him to vacate the building designated for elections. Although later investigation showed that Burgess had been drunk and probably overreacted, no votes could be cast in his precinct.³⁰

Complaints from Spring Ridge, where planters dismissed numerous freedmen who voted the convention ticket, appeared more serious. Lieutenant Latchford sent a detachment to investigate. During the investigation, a party of eight white men rode up to the two privates

²⁸ 'October 24, 1867, Shreveport, Latchford to Gross,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4498, box 3

²⁹ 'September 5, 1867, Natchitoches, Pierce to Gentry,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4575, box 4; September 15, 1867, New Orleans, Mower to Hartsuff,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4498, box 4. On the Florida Parishes see: Samuel C. Hyde Jr., *Pistols and Politics: The Dilemma of Democracy in Louisiana's Florida Parishes, 1810-1899* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998).

³⁰ 'October 4, 1867, Bellevue, Dobie to Gentry,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4575, box 6; 'September 30, 1867, Shreveport, Monroe to Parker,' NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 100, frame 409.

guarding the detachment's wagon. After a brief exchange they "drew their revolvers and presented them to the heads and breasts of the soldiers, compelling them to give up their arms [...] and cutting the four mules from the wagon and taking the same away with them." This incident is particularly noteworthy, as it is one of very few cases in which militant whites directly attacked federal troops. Throughout Reconstruction, soldiers generally remained safe from aggression, as conservatives feared the increased intervention that a direct attack on the military might provoke. Not surprisingly, in an area where even federal troops were not safe, no one dared confirm the complaints of freedmen being discharged for voting, including a number who had come to Shreveport days earlier to sign an affidavit to that effect.³¹

Such incidents did not affect the outcome of the elections, even in the most troubled parishes. Bossier, Caddo, and DeSoto all returned substantial majorities in favor of the convention and elected large numbers of Republican delegates. In most of the Red River Valley, and throughout the state, the elections passed off without any large scale violence against black voters. With large numbers of whites disfranchised and many others refusing to participate, the Republicans won a huge victory, ensuring their dominance at the constitutional convention. However, the various incidents and tensions surrounding these first biracial election in Louisiana would prove an ominous portent for the massive violence to come in 1868.

Rehearsal for Terror

At the end of November 1867, a change in military command took place in Louisiana that significantly affected the administration of the state over the next year, including the elections in April and November. Philip. H. Sheridan had commanded either the state of Louisiana or the Fifth Military District since May of 1865 until Joseph Mower succeeded him in September 1867, a few weeks before the elections. Both these generals had behaved sympathetically towards the Republicans in the state, intervening when necessary in the voter registration and election process and removing officials who did not adhere to the terms of the Reconstruction Acts. On November 29, Winfield S. Hancock, a conservative Democrat, assumed control and immediately restored control of the state to the civil authorities. He used his appointive powers to place conservative whites in many key positions, including the

³¹ 'September 30, 1867, Shreveport, Latchford to Burbank,' NARA, RG 393, part 3, entry 287. Box 2.

governorship. He also loosened Sheridan's restrictions on voter registration for whites, allowing numerous minor antebellum officials to register. These changes in voter registration "speeded the recovery of the Democratic Party and the eventual demise of the Republicans."³²

Hancock's conservatism quickly brought him into conflict with Grant, and at the end of March 1868 he resigned in favor of his subordinate, General Robert C. Buchanan. Buchanan assumed command less than a month before the elections scheduled for April 16 and 17, when voters would cast ballots for ratification of the constitution as well as elect state and local officials. He allowed the changes in registration initiated by Hancock to continue, earning him the enmity of Republican organizer Stephen B. Packard, who chaired the statewide board of registration appointed by the constitutional convention. In response to Hancock's conservative policies, this board had appointed a board of supervisors for each parish, to gather evidence of any Democratic fraud that might be perpetrated. In its final report, Packard and his associates blamed the "hostile attitude assumed by the two Commanding Generals" for "much of the unfairness and outrages perpetrated by a class of men who lay such high claims to capacity for self-government."³³

The report by the Republican board stands in sharp contrast to Dawson's conclusions that Buchanan "was perhaps the most objective and fair-minded commander to serve in the state during the postwar years." More generally, it contradicts his and other historians' conclusion that these elections passed off quietly with little or "no reports of violence associated with the election even though blacks reportedly voted in large numbers." Packard and his associates, on the other hand insisted that violence, intimidation, and fraud marred the elections, costing the Republicans their majority in numerous parishes throughout the state, including DeSoto, Caddo, and Bienville. In other parishes, including Bossier, Republicans saw their majority drastically shrink compared to September 1867.³⁴ While Packard undoubtedly had partisan motivations for reporting disorders in parishes lost by the Republicans, there is ample evidence that the April 1868 elections did not pass off as peacefully as Dawson and other historians have claimed. In the northwestern parishes, in particular, conservative whites experimented with strategies of resistance that would

³² Dawson, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*, 69–73, [quote: 73]; CSS, 40-1, HOR. Ex. 291, 37-39.

³³ S. B. Packard, Chairman et al., *Report of the Board of Registration to the General Assembly* (New Orleans 1868), 1, 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4-8, 12-13, 15-17; BB, 68-05-09; LD, 68-04-29; Dawson, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*, 75, 77; Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 157–158; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 153–154.

subsequently spread across the state in the months leading up to the Presidential elections in November.

Although some few blacks may have voted against the constitution voluntarily, the vast majority of such votes, as well as blacks' significant levels of abstention, almost certainly represented the result of illicit white pressure. Whites, on the other hand, voted against the constitution nearly unanimously. Only in Winn, which had harbored significant numbers of Unionists during the war, did more than a handful of whites vote in favor of the constitution.³⁵ Even here, though, white support for Republicanism decreased sharply, from over 300 votes in favor of calling the convention in September to just 113 in favor of ratification in April, ensuring the defeat of the constitution and the election of Democratic officials in the parish. In Bienville, where blacks had held only a tenuous advantage over whites in the 1867 registration, 92 black votes against the constitution assured Republican defeat in that parish. In Bossier, about 300 fewer blacks voted in April than had in September and of the remainder about a quarter voted against the constitution. Although blacks outnumbered whites by two to one, the constitution passed by only 229 out of 1749 votes cast. Conservative whites' greatest victories, however, came in Caddo and DeSoto. Here, blacks had held an advantage in registration of 2210 and 1080 voters and won by 1828 and 1354 votes respectively in September 1867. In April, both parishes returned majorities of nearly 500 votes in opposition to ratification, with hundreds of blacks either staying away from the polls or voting with the Democrats. Only Natchitoches and Rapides parishes saw little or no decline in Republican support between September 1867 and April 1868.³⁶

Equally significant, the April elections saw the political organization of conservative whites under the banner of the Conservative-Democratic Party, aligned with the national Democracy. In the South, Democrats remained essentially a one-issue party, focused exclusively on overturning and undermining Reconstruction and reestablishing white supremacy. In Bossier, for instance, the parish party platform conceded equal protection of the law in rights of property and person for the freedpeople, but went on to claim that "the interest of neither [race] will be promoted by conferring upon the negro the power of an

³⁵ For evidence of wartime Unionism in Winn see: United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: GPO 1880-1901), Series 1, Volume XXX, part III (1880), 732-733.

³⁶ Election results for the September 1867 elections have been preserved only for Caddo, DeSoto, Bossier, Sabine and Winn. For the other parishes only registration results by race are available as a measure for the Republican strength in each parish. Statistics culled from: CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, xxix and part 2, 503-504; CSS, 41-2, HOR. Rep. 61, 4; Donald W. Davis, "Ratification of the Constitution of 1868 - Record of Votes," *Louisiana History* 6, no. 3 (1965): 303-304.

elector or juror, and we will use all lawful means to thwart the efforts of those who would place the intelligent white race of the South at the mercy of the ignorant negro.”³⁷ Blacks, in other words, were to enjoy only so much equal protection as a whites would grant them, without the privileges of citizenship that would ensure them the power to enforce such rights.

Since blacks formed a majority of the electorate in Louisiana, the party of white supremacy faced a dilemma, even in the absence disfranchisement of large numbers of white voters. Some whites sincerely believed they might attract sufficient black votes to overturn the constitution, “so soon as the negro was satisfied that he could do as he pleased, and that his doing as he pleased would not endanger his freedom, or bring upon him the authority of the government, he was immediately ready to unite with the old citizens of the state.” Many die-hard white supremacists, however, did not “believe in stooping to that, and I shall perhaps die with that feeling. I believe that God made a difference between the white man and the negro, and I do not believe that any law of the United States can change that.”³⁸ The logical consequence of such a position implied that a Democratic victory would involve either preventing large numbers blacks from voting or forcing them by violence or intimidation to vote against their inclinations. Throughout Reconstruction, conservative whites experimented with both strategies, trying to get blacks to vote for them voluntarily, but often resorting to violence, intimidation and economic blackmail when the freedpeople proved unamenable to persuasion.

In Natchitoches and Rapides parishes, whites tended to prefer persuasion over violence and intimidation. In Natchitoches, as elsewhere, whites founded a Democratic-Conservative party around which to organize their opposition to the constitution. The *Natchitoches Spectator*, a Democratic paper launched a few months before the election, attacked the entire federally supervised process as unconstitutional, but its opposition remained relatively civilized compared to that in surrounding parishes. The Bureau agent in the parish reported the elections to have passed off quietly, except for planters' complaints of freedpeople neglecting their duties in the week prior to voting.³⁹

In Rapides, the elections also passed off quietly. The local Bureau agent reported no disturbances in Alexandria except that a “few of the colored people had, owing to the idle talk of some worthless whites in the parish, anticipated violence on their way to the polls and

³⁷ BB, 68-02-22.

³⁸ CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 679-681, part 2, 290-296.

³⁹ NS, 68-02-27; ‘April 20, 1868, Natchitoches, Miller to Warren,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 91, frame 751.

came to town armed.” Some freedmen also reported their employers having threatened to fire them if they voted the Republican ticket, but the agent doubted such threats would be carried out.⁴⁰ The absence of physical intimidation or violence, however, masked a marked increase in rhetorical aggression towards Republicans in particular and blacks in general in the weeks and months leading up to the election. In November, a meeting of planters chaired by former governor Wells’s brother Montfort adopted resolutions that not only sought to undermine the freedpeople’s bargaining power by regulating wages, but also urged planters to refrain from hiring any freedpeople who “have organized themselves in political clubs and by their general demeanor on the plantations and at the ballot box discover a manifest opposition to the peace of society and the quiet enjoyment of our rights of property, advocating confiscation of our lands, whilst they are employed by us.”⁴¹

By February over a hundred prominent whites in the parish established a local Democratic-Conservative party to organize the “opposition to the destructive Radical Party” and “restore to the country constitutional government, and to ourselves our personal and political rights.” The newly minted party immediately denounced black enfranchisement as an “infamous scheme to subject the whites of the South to the domination of their former slaves.” Over the next weeks, the party appointed commissioners for each ward in the parish and together with the editors of the *Democrat* the party urged whites to take advantage of the less restrictive registration rules. As a result, over 458 additional whites compared to 138 blacks availed themselves of the opportunity to register. The conservatives, however, failed to strike from the lists the “thousands of fraudulent votes” they claimed had been enrolled by “corrupt individuals sent through the country by Sheridan.” Although no widespread aggression against black voters occurred, white voters in Rapides faced enormous pressure to vote the Democratic ticket. A few days before the election, the *Democrat* insisted that every white man should vote an open ticket, so that any whites voting for the Republicans could easily be identified. As a result, of 960 whites who voted, only 19 supported the constitution, nearly all of them candidates for office.⁴²

The virulence of the *Democrat*’s white supremacism paled beside that of the *Banner*. With the elections still months away, the editor proudly proclaimed that

⁴⁰ ‘April 20, 1868, Alexandria, Buttrick to Warren,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 52, frame 509.

⁴¹ LD, 67-11-20.

⁴² LD, 68-02-12, 68-02-19, 68-02-26, 68-03-25, 68-04-15, 68-04-22; Davis, “Ratification of the Constitution,” 303.

Before we would give our consent to such political degradation in Louisiana, before we would vote to open the white man's ballot-box in any State - the jury-box in any white man's court - the school rooms of Louisiana or elsewhere dedicated to white children, or the parlor of any white man's house, prepared for the comfort of white men, women and children, upon a political, educational or social equality with a negro mulatto or quadroon - male or female - we would herd all the negroes in America [...] and all their negro-equalizing aiders and abettors on some barren island, plant there a thousand fathoms in guano, picketed and posted with Greek fire on the inner lines, and with cholera, yellow fever, seven year itch and small-pox on the outer ones."⁴³

As in Rapides, Bossier Parish whites organized themselves under the Democratic-Conservative banner, in the hope of voting down the constitution. No means, fair or foul were to be shunned and the *Banner* urged its reader to kill the constitution "as you would kill a snake, with whatever you can lay your hands on - fire, fence-rails, mud, brimstone, Kluklux Klans, or the devil's walking cane." These means included publically slapping the Republican organizer John H. McVean from Shreveport - a "wholesale vender [sic] of radical poison, rape, murder, arson etc." when he tried to give a campaign speech in the towns of Bellevue and Benton.⁴⁴ Under such pressure, only two whites dared vote in favor of the constitution, while almost 350 blacks voted against it. 700 more registered blacks did not vote at all, but with a 1500 voter advantage in registration the Republicans still managed to carry the election by over 200 votes.⁴⁵

In Bienville, where whites had only a relatively small disadvantage in registration, they succeeded in voting down the constitution in part by getting 92 blacks to vote against it. According to whites this was the result of a stringent but peaceful effort by whites to convert blacks to their cause, but Packard's board reported that "bodies of armed men rode through the country, threatening to kill colored men if they went to the polls." Election supervisors feared for their lives and concluded that "the general conduct of the election, so far as an expression of the popular will is concerned, was the most perfect farce imaginable." Packard undoubtedly had partisan motivations for wanting the elections in Bienville revised, so that the Democratic representative to the state legislature and possibly Democratic local officials might be replaced by Republicans. Other evidence supports his contentions that at least some unwarranted influence was exercised by the whites to prevent the freedmen from giving the

⁴³ BB, 67-11-02.

⁴⁴ BB, 68-04-11

⁴⁵ Davis, "Ratification of the Constitution," 303.

Republicans a majority. The Bureau agent for the parish initially reported the elections peaceful “although some unprincipled, desperate characters of the white population here would not hesitate to resort to force and violence in order to prevent freedmen from casting their votes.” Once the election had passed, however, he received scattered reports of freedpeople who had been dismissed by their employer for voting the Republican ticket. Moreover, a month after the election the Republican candidate for sheriff, William H. Honneus, was shot, though not fatally, for his political activities.⁴⁶

While evidence of violence and intimidation in Bienville and Bossier is somewhat circumstantial, it is far clearer in Caddo and DeSoto. No more than half a dozen Republicans dared to campaign politically in those parishes and with good reason. When McVean, W. S. Mudgett and C. C. Antoine went from Shreveport to Mansfield to campaign there, four notorious murderers followed them, hoping to ambush them along the way. Only with the help of a local black man, who guided them through a swamp at night, did they evade their pursuers. After giving their speeches, under the protection of an army detachment, they quickly left Mansfield to return home. On the way back they picketed their campsite with armed freedmen, who repeatedly halted whites intent on murdering the Republican organizers.⁴⁷ The troops stationed in Mansfield had been sent at the request of Stephen Hill, the chairman of the parish’s board of registration, who had warned the military command that “but very few freedmen will have the courage to vote in favor of the constitution. The white men, almost to a unit, are bitterly opposed to it, and make open threats to the freedmen if they vote in favor of it, in fact, they are completely intimidated ad threats against their lives are made, if they should attempt to hold political meetings!” The very few white Unionists in the parish fared no better than the freedpeople. Conservative whites beat them up in broad daylight and openly threatened the Freedmen’s Bureau agent and the registrars with violence.⁴⁸

In DeSoto, as a result of the widespread violence cited at the beginning of this chapter, the constitution was defeated by nearly 500 votes, despite an overwhelming black majority in

⁴⁶ Ibid.; CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 656-657, 670-672, part 2, 438-440; Packard et al., *Report of the Board*, 12-13; ‘April 10, 1868, Sparta, Schayer to Warren,’ ‘April 20, 1868, Sparta, Schayer to Warren,’ ‘April 24, 1868, Sparta, Schayer to Norton,’ ‘April 28, 1868, Sparta, Schayer to Hattan,’ and ‘May 31, 1868, Sparta, Bean to Warren,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 102, frames 13, 15, 16, 22.

⁴⁷ ‘April 16, 1868, Shreveport, McVean to Warmoth,’ and ‘April 29, 1868, Shreveport, Mudgett to Warmoth,’ *Warmoth Papers*, reel 1, frames 1033, 1069.

⁴⁸ March 29, 1868, Mansfield, Hill to Gentry,’ and ‘March 31, 1868, Mansfield, Hill to Gentry,’ NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4498, box 6.

registration, and most local offices went to the Democratic candidates.⁴⁹ In Caddo, whites employed similarly blatant strategies in their efforts to swing the election. In one precinct, the planters simply refused to allow the registrars to use their land for the election. Elsewhere, “a band of armed men [stood] near the polls, who deterred voters from casting ballots except as they directed, actually taking in some instances the ballots offered by voters and tearing them in pieces in view of the commissioners and the voter.” Around Shreveport, armed whites guarded the roads into the city, while they laid up the ferries and skiffs on the river to prevent freedmen from the countryside coming into town to vote. Under such circumstances, about half of the 3000 blacks who had registered in 1867 did not vote at all and of the remainder about a third voted against the constitution, turning potential 2200 majority into a 500 vote loss for the Republicans.⁵⁰

The Organization of Terror

In the months leading up to the Presidential election in November of 1868 the political tensions that had gradually built up over the preceding electoral contests exploded into an orgy of violence aimed at white Republicans and black voters that engulfed much of Louisiana. The Red River, where conservative whites had experimented with strategies of violent resistance during the preceding elections, lay at the epicenter of this explosion. The experience of the preceding year contributed to conservative whites' willingness to use violence in a number of interrelated ways. First, they responded aggressively to the loss of local political power as a result of Republican success at both the state and local level in the April elections. White militants particularly targeted elected officials and Republican organizers of both races. Secondly, the effects of military Reconstruction convinced Southern whites that only by regaining power at the national level could they secure a continued white dominance of the South. A Republican president, on the other hand, entailed the threat of further federal interference. Finally, the outcome of the earlier elections proved that but very few freedmen would vote the Democratic ticket voluntarily in majority-black Louisiana. Only by preventing blacks from voting through violence and economic coercion, might conservative whites reclaim political dominion over their former slaves

⁴⁹ Davis, “Ratification of the Constitution,” 303.

⁵⁰ Ibid.; Packard et al., *Report of the Board*, 4-7; ‘April 21, 1868, Shreveport, McVean to Warmoth,’ *Warmoth Papers*, reel 1, frame 1044; CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, xxix.

The Democrats made little effort to hide their intention of overthrowing Republican rule by any means necessary, although they remained careful to avoid explicitly advocating violence, instead alluding to it through indirect or vague language. William H. Scanland, editor of the *Banner* and prominent local Democrat, came closest to an explicit call to arms, when he decried Radicalism as

a demon whose dangerous and destructive agencies must be counteracted and destroyed by the worst remedies that can be administered No 'medicine' is so efficacious as that which is leveled with concentrated fury. Our code of warfare corresponds with that of our oppressors - no concession - no truce as long as the black flag is unfurled upon the ramp of fanaticism.⁵¹

Two concomitant developments during the summer and fall of 1868 gave conservative whites the means and opportunity to turn the sporadic violence accompanying the earlier electoral contests into a virtual 'reign of terror' throughout much of the state. First, whites began to organize themselves in clandestine organizations that promoted the use of violence, most notably the Ku Klux Klan and the Knights of the White Camelia. Secondly, the military authorities in Louisiana increasingly refused to interfere in the political turmoil, particularly after Louisiana formally returned to civil rule on July 13, 1868, following the approval by Congress of the new state constitution and the legislature's ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment.

The Klan came to northwestern Louisiana relatively late, in the summer of 1868, and it never gained much organizational coherence or centralized leadership. Instead, militant white conservatives throughout the region appropriated various performative elements associated with the Klan in their ongoing campaign of intimidation of the black populace and white Republicans. Although one freedman, Solomon Thomas, testified to witnessing men "wrapped up in white sheets" hang two black women, most incidents involving Klan-like disguises were in fact relatively harmless. Morgan Burton, a freedman from Mansfield, DeSoto, reported a man "with a white shroud and a great long hat" who came into his cabin, but left when Burton called to his wife to get his gun. Whites in Klan disguise would pretend to be rebel soldiers raised from the dead. They rode out from graveyards and played parlor

⁵¹ BB, 68-05-16.

tricks to enhance the illusion, appearing to remove their heads from their bodies and to eat and drink in impossible quantities.⁵²

Conservative newspapers made every effort to reinforce the image of the Klan as little more than a theatrical performance doing no more harm than giving supposedly gullible blacks a good fright. The *Shreveport Southwestern* reported that “these bloody moon fellows, in full costume, headed by the grand cyclops entered the market house. [...] on their first appearance they appeared about the size of ordinary humans, but they suddenly shot up to the height of ten or fifteen feet.” They proceeded to drink “gallon after gallon of the boiling hot” coffee and ate “all the raw steaks in sight in less than no time” In April, the *Banner*, while falsely claiming the Klan to be still confined to Tennessee, quoted the testimony of a black man who claimed to have seen a Klansman unscrew his head both as evidence of the Klan’s harmlessness and blacks unreliability as witnesses. The next month the paper reprinted an editorial from the *Columbus Dispatch* that avowed the Klan to be essentially a practical joke and an inevitable reaction to the establishment of Loyal Leagues by Republicans throughout the South.⁵³

As Elaine Frantz Parsons has argued, the Klan and its supporters consciously emphasized the theatrical aspects of the organization, rooted in Southern minstrel tradition. They strategically used such “trivialization through comic or sensationalist framing” as a smokescreen for the very real violence being perpetrated. The claim that white men wrapped in bed sheets might be the ghosts of dead Confederate soldiers was not meant to scare the black population, who rarely if ever believed such claims. Instead, it provided whites with plausible deniability towards a Northern audience that feared a resurgent militancy of the South.⁵⁴ A. L. Hay, the editor of the *Shreveport News*, pursued such a strategy when he told congressional investigators, only “silly people” believed in the Klan: “We look upon ghosts as imaginary beings and we look upon Ku-Klux as imaginary.”⁵⁵ Banking on such misdirection, various conservative newspapers printed a call to violent resistance in the late spring and early summer of 1868 cloaked in seemingly comical references to the Klan:

⁵² CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 153-154, 527, part 2, 441, 442.

⁵³ SW, 68-05-06; BB, 68-04-25, 68-05-09.

⁵⁴ Elaine Frantz Parsons, “Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan,” *The Journal of American History* 92, no. 3 (2005): 813–814; Elaine Frantz Parsons, “Klan Skepticism and Denial in Reconstruction-Era Public Discourse,” *The Journal of Southern History* 77, no. 1 (2011): 68, 71.

⁵⁵ CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 342.

The Ku-Klux klan are kalled upon to kastigate or kill any kullered kusses who may approve the konstitution on being konkocted by the kontemptible karpet-baggers at the Kapitol. Each klan is kommanded by a karnivorous kernul, who kollechts his komrades with kare and kaution kommensurate with the magnitude of the kause. Whenever konvened they must korrekctly give four kountersigns. these are: kill the kullered kuss; klean out the karpet-baggers; krush the konvention; karry konservatism; konfusion to kongress; konfederates will konquer. Of kourse the klan kreates konsiderable konsternation among the kongos and their kunning konduktors, who kalkulatte that their kareer may be kut short by katastrophies. Kowardly kurs, they kan't complain.⁵⁶

The Klan's intended victims took a very different view of these activities. Blacks and white Republicans interviewed by congressional investigators unanimously disclaimed believing in either the supernatural provenance or the harmless character of the Klan.⁵⁷ While conservative whites downplayed the Klan, some Republican witnesses emphasized the extent to which they believed it had penetrated northwestern Louisiana. Charles Keeting, a former deputy US marshal and Republican organizer from Shreveport, considered all whites in the area to be Ku-Klux. The DeSoto agent for the Freedmen's Bureau, similarly reported that a purported planters' association was in fact "a branch of the Ku Klux Klan, an organized band of murderers and swindlers."⁵⁸ Merrill Gardner, a freedman from Natchitoches, insisted that the Klansmen were landowning farmers and businessmen, not just the "wild, reckless young men" various white witnesses implied. Gardner also claimed to have seen men go out 'Ku-Kluxing' on the night Republican politicians Alfred Hason and Richard Faulkner were brutally attacked.⁵⁹

Given the secrecy surrounding both organizations, it remains almost impossible to determine the exact relationship between the Klan and the Knights of the White Camelia (KWC). The Klan - or at least Klan-like activities - existed throughout the South, but the KWC remained unique to Louisiana (and possibly a few bordering areas in Arkansas and Texas). Former Confederate colonel and prominent antebellum politician Alcibiades DeBlanc

⁵⁶ BB, 68-05-09; LD, 68-06-03; *Sparta Rural Times*, 68-06-13, quoted in CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 2, 438-440.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, part 1, 154, 311, 523, 531.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, part 1, 128; 'June 10, 1868, Mansfield, Curry to Warren,' NARA, RG 393, part 3, entry 287, box 3.

⁵⁹ CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 195, 525, part 2, 146.

from St. Mary Parish, together with local newspaper publisher Daniel Dennet, founded the KWC in May of 1867, long before the Klan had reached the trans-Mississippi states.⁶⁰

The KWC served as a bridge between the formal Democratic Party organization and the violent, illegal, and disreputable Klan. Although nominally secret, numerous prominent whites, including local political elites throughout the state, freely admitted to its existence, as well as their own membership, while dismissing the Klan as a figment of the overworked imagination of the blacks. James G. Dauphine takes this testimony as evidence that precludes “the possibility of any co-existence between the KWC and the KKK in Louisiana.” A contemporary report by the Republican state legislature, on the other hand, concluded that the KWC is “the real organization which is known to the public as the ‘Ku Klux.’” A white Unionist testifying some years later similarly identified “what was called by some the White Camelia organization, and by others the Ku Klux” as one and the same thing.⁶¹ Whether the KWC displaced the Klan in Louisiana or was in fact identical with it, is merely a semantic distinction. The Reconstruction era Klan lacked organizational unity everywhere outside of Tennessee, and the adaptation by established KWC chapters, or individual members, of typical Klan practices was not dissimilar from the way the Klan spread throughout the South.⁶²

The existence of the KWC, meanwhile, allowed whites to further confuse the Northern public as to the reality of the Klan, attributing reports of a secret organization to the existence of the more placid KWC, rather than the militant Klan. White witnesses from the Red River region who admitted to membership of the KWC generally claimed that it was a civic organization, which aimed to preserve “the superiority of the white race over the black, to prevent amalgamation, and keep the races pure, if possible.” Only the “purest white blood” might gain membership. Others claimed the organization was purely defensive, to protect the whites from “a rising of the colored people” and the Loyal Leagues condoned by Warmoth. Although some admitted that the Knights’ objectives included the maintenance of a white man’s government, most insisted that its purposes were purely social, rather than political. Eugene R. Blossat, the editor of the *Democrat*, mayor of Alexandria and prominent Democratic kingmaker in Rapides, only reluctantly admitted that the oath he took upon

⁶⁰ Trelease, *White Terror*, 93; Dauphine, “Knights of the White Camelia,” 179.

⁶¹ *Supplemental Report*, xxxii; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 324; Dauphine, “Knights of the White Camelia,” 181–182.

⁶² Trelease, *White Terror*, 51–52.

entering the order included a pledge to “do all in your power to prevent the political affairs of this country, in whole or in part, passing into the hands of negroes, or other inferior race.”⁶³

As conservative whites stepped up their opposition, both legal and extralegal, to Reconstruction, the army continued to disengage itself from the political process and administration of the state. The military bill had placed Louisiana under direct military rule, but this was a constitutional anomaly that not only infuriated Southern whites, but also made many Northerners and military officers themselves profoundly uncomfortable. Therefore, as soon as Congress had readmitted Louisiana to representation and Warmoth had formally entered upon his duties as governor, General Buchanan took a step back. Although Buchanan gave his full support to Warmoth and Dawson credits him with preventing major disturbances in New Orleans like the riot of 1866, the army proved far less effective at keeping the peace in rural areas. Despite reports of increasing violence and lawlessness in remote areas such as DeSoto parish, Buchanan decided to concentrate the small number of troops he had at a few larger towns on the major riverways.⁶⁴

Buchanan could count on the President's support as he withdrew military support for Reconstruction. Since the April election, Warmoth had received numerous reports of violence, intimidation, and electoral fraud from his informants along the Red River and in other troubled areas of Louisiana.⁶⁵ On August 1, the recently inaugurated governor sent a letter to President Johnson through his trusted associate John F. Deane, outlining the situation and warning that such disruptions now threatened to engulf the entire state as the presidential elections approached. Deane was to verbally brief the president on the details of the secretive KWC, which, according to Warmoth, existed “for the purpose of placing and keeping the colored people in a condition of inferiority, and, with a view to this end, contemplates and designs the precipitation of a conflict between the two races.” The young governor, deprecating the expediency of a possible state militia, went on to request at least two regiments of federal cavalry and one of infantry, and an artillery battery, “with orders to

⁶³ CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 275-276, 280-281, 284, 680, 739-40, part 2, 146-147, 318; BB, 68-09-05.

⁶⁴ Dawson, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*, 81, 83.

⁶⁵ ‘April 16, 1868, Shreveport, McVean to Warmoth,’ ‘April 21, 1868, Shreveport, McVean to Warmoth,’ ‘April 20, 1868, Bayou Boeuff, Walls et al. to Warmoth,’ ‘April 29, 1868, Shreveport, McVean to Warmoth,’ ‘April 29, 1868, Shreveport, Mudgett to Warmoth,’ and ‘May 28, 1868, Mansfield, Garrett to Warmoth,’ *Warmoth Papers*, reel 1, frames 1033, 1044, 1047, 1065, 1069, 1106; Francis Wayne Binning, “Henry Clay Warmoth and Louisiana Reconstruction” (PhD, University of North Carolina, 1969), 117-121.

cooperate with me in suppressing disorder and violence, arresting criminals, and protect the officers of the law in trying them.”⁶⁶

Within a week, Dean reported to Warmoth that Johnson had received his request with skepticism. The president “somewhat sarcastically commented on the late anxiety to be relieved from military control as compared with my present cry for military help.” Although not denying the request outright, Johnson seemed in no hurry to take action, instead preferring to await of Secretary of War John Scofield’s return to Washington a week later. Meanwhile, Warmoth’s letter had leaked to the press, and conservative editors and politicians loudly denounced his allegations as “a positive misrepresentation of facts and a libel upon the character of the people of Louisiana,” both in the press and in private letters to the president.⁶⁷

Back in Louisiana, Buchanan proved determined to narrowly interpret what mandate he did have for assisting civil authorities. When Warmoth requested him to send a few dozen soldiers to assist the judge and sheriff of an unnamed parish, Buchanan claimed his orders did not allow such “precautionary steps.” He claimed he could provide the governor with military assistance only “should any special case of resistance to the rightful antiauthority of the State occur, and I be properly informed that the authority of the State in the premises has been exhausted.” This reply was particularly disingenuous, as Buchanan had received orders just a few days previous allowing all officers to give military assistance to civil authorities such as sheriffs or federal marshals, so long as he deemed such assistance “lawful and necessary and compatible with the proper discharge of his ordinary military duties.”⁶⁸

Over the following years, however, Buchanan’s line would come to dominate the policy of the military leadership in Louisiana. Military commanders would only send troops to a locality after a serious disturbance had occurred and rarely, if ever, would allow the army to assist civil officers in the day-to-day maintenance of law and order. White militants effectively exploited this reactive policy of the military, by temporarily limiting their activities in areas where military forces had been stationed, while ratcheting up the violence elsewhere. In the ensuing game of cat-and-mouse, the military always lagged a step behind Southern militants, who enjoyed widespread support among the white population. This

⁶⁶ ‘August 1, 1868, New Orleans, Warmoth to Johnson,’ reproduced in NS, 68-08-18.

⁶⁷ ‘August 5, 1868, Washington, DC, Deane to Warmoth,’ *Warmoth Papers*, reel 1, frame 1239; ‘August 10, 1868, New Orleans, Day to Johnson,’ ‘August 10, 1868, Opelousas, Hudspeth to Johnson,’ ‘August 13, 1868, DeSoto, Campbell to Johnson,’ in Paul H. Bergeron (ed.), *The Papers of Andrew Johnson* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), vol. 14, 493-196, 504-506; ‘September 20, 1868, Dunboyne, Butler to Johnson,’ in *Ibid.*, vol. 15, 67-68; Binning, “Warmoth and Reconstruction,” 145–146.

⁶⁸ August 31, 1868, New Orleans, Buchanan to Warmoth,’ NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4482, vol. 266; August 25, 1868, Washington, DC, Kelton to Buchanan,’ NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4501, box 1.

increasingly fostered the impression that the army was helpless to prevent the violence that wracked the South, demoralizing Northern public opinion, Southern Republicans, and the army's own personnel.

Once Louisiana had returned to civil rule, the new state authorities became responsible for organizing the Presidential elections in November, including a new registration under state law that posed far less severe restrictions on whites than had the rules imposed by Congress. Only those who had held office for a year or more under the Confederacy, had signed the ordinance of secession, had led guerrilla units, or had actively promoted treason remained disenfranchised - and even they could have their political rights restored by filing a written statement that "he acknowledges the late rebellion to have been morally and politically wrong, and that he regrets any aid or comfort he may have given it." Though many whites found the required oath distasteful, most complied with it, in order to "put down negro equality, negro supremacy, and place Seymour and Blair in the White House."⁶⁹

The subsequent registration proceeded extremely chaotically, as numerous obstacles plagued the inexperienced Republican state government. By time the requisite laws had been passed and the necessary administrative preparations completed, no more than two weeks - and in some places just one - remained for the parishes along the Red River to conduct the actual registration. The military authorities exacerbated this delay by refusing to provide the secretary of state with the records of the previous registration. The board of registration, moreover, suffered from a chronic lack of funding due to the state's poor credit. This caused additional delays in having the necessary registration books printed and complicated the already difficult task of finding qualified registrars, as these would be obliged to pay their own expenses.⁷⁰

Although the statewide voter rolls grew from 1867 as a result of the far more lenient conditions imposed on whites, registration nevertheless dropped in fifteen parishes, including four parishes - Bienville, Bossier, Caddo and Winn - of the seven on the Red River, while in a fifth, DeSoto, the registration increased by a mere 41 voters. Unlike in 1867, the board of registration published no racial data, but it is safe to assume that white registration increased throughout the region, meaning that in these five parishes a significant number of blacks were

⁶⁹ 'Article 99,' in *Constitution Adopted by the State Constitutional Convention of the State of Louisiana, March 7, 1868* (New Orleans: Republican Office, 1868), 14-15; 'August 1868, Randolph to Wise,' Wise Papers, box 2, folder 13.

⁷⁰ William Baker et al., *Report of the Board of Registration to the General Assembly of Louisiana, Session of 1869* (New Orleans: A. L. Lee, State Printer 1869), 4, 7.

prevented, or at least discouraged, from registering. The Republican majority of the board emphasized in their report that registration remained incomplete particularly in those parishes where

for some time past there has existed such a state of society, as to deter many from offering to register. It is not reasonable to expect that men who are dependent upon their labor for their daily bread, will consent to expose themselves to the loss of employment, and incur the hatred of those who, whenever they feel disposed, will not hesitate to shoot or stab those who differ from them politically. The terror is aggravated by the confidence the lawless feel of escaping unwhipt of justice, while the poor and helpless become more and more timid when they fail to find that protection and security from the law they are entitled to, and have a right to expect.⁷¹

In northwestern Louisiana, registration increased significantly only in Natchitoches and Rapides, the two parishes that remained relatively free of violence. Local election supervisors from Winn, Caddo and Bossier, all reported that many freedmen either declined to register or else "voted as their masters did." Whites did not limit their violence to potential black voters, but also threatened, and in at least one instance cow-hided, Republican election officials who encouraged blacks to vote. In Caddo, many blacks refused to register, having become "disgusted with politics" as a result of the widespread violence, while others "were afraid their old registration papers would be taken from them, which some of them looked on as a kind of free paper."⁷²

'An Everyday Occurrence'

The effects of violence, intimidation, and economic blackmail on registration would prove marginal compared to the havoc they wreaked on actual voting results. Whites succeeded in reducing Republican turnout to a single vote in Caddo, Bossier and Bienville and eliminated it entirely in DeSoto. In Winn, where a white majority made suppressing Republican votes less urgent, whites nevertheless reduced the 232 Republican votes of April to just 43 in November, while the Democratic total shot up from 281 to 711. Only in Natchitoches and Rapides, both of which continued to avoid large scale violence, did Republican voting approach the levels of

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 26, 27.

⁷² *Ibid.*, xli, xlvii-li.

April, securing a victory for the Grant and Colfax ticket in both parishes despite large increases in white registration and consequently in Democratic voting.⁷³

These general trends, however, mask a variety of strategies pursued by conservative whites in various parishes. DeSoto, with little or no military presence and with Democrats in control of local government, saw a massive crackdown on all black political organizing, while in Bossier and Caddo militant whites used a combination of large scale riots, severe economic pressure and targeted murders of Republican leaders to overwhelm the military forces stationed in Shreveport. In Bienville and Winn, meanwhile, where a white majority ensured a Democratic victory regardless, many blacks opted to support the party of white supremacy in return for protection and employment. In Rapides, too, Democrats made an all-out effort to lure black voters into the Democratic fold. Although blacks gratefully attended barbecues hosted by conservative whites, and a small number of blacks apparently campaigned actively for the Democracy, the vast majority of the black electorate nevertheless voted for the Republicans come election day. In Natchitoches, finally, the lack of large scale violence and the Republican victory obscure the fact that shortly before election day white militants attacked prominent black political leaders in the northern end of the parish, as the violence from DeSoto spilled over into its more peaceful neighbor.

In DeSoto parish, in particular, Republicans suffered from a lack of qualified leadership. Charles Lowell, the chairman of Caddo's board of registration, reported to Warmoth in May that the sole Republican member of DeSoto's board of registration, John Beaty, and the Freedmen's Bureau agent for the parish, J. J. Walsh, "are neither of them men of much stamina." Although he had sent John McVean, the veteran organizer from Shreveport, to assist them, he doubted whether there would be enough politically reliable and competent election commissioners who could qualify as such. He considered the parish a "perfect den of pirates" where it would be difficult for blacks to vote as they wished. A month later, Walsh left the parish to take up a seat in the state legislature, fearing for his life were he to return.⁷⁴ In his first report from Mansfield, Walsh's successor, Michael Cary, expressed his shock at the state of the parish:

From my experience as a soldier through Virginia, North Carolina and Texas, I never witnessed such bitter hatred towards Union men and freedmen as I have experienced

⁷³ CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 2, 503, 614, 616, 622-625, 651.

⁷⁴ 'May 31, 1868, Shreveport, Lowell to dear judge,' *Warmoth Papers*, reel 1, frame 999; April 9, 1868, [Shreveport?]. Lowell to Chandler,' NARA 393, part 1, entry 4505; CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, 135.

for my short stay in this Parish. [...Outrage on freedpeople in this parish is looked upon as a common necessity and an everyday occurrence, without some notice of these outrages is taken by the proper authorities it will be impossible for a Union man or freedman to live in or near this parish, the freedpeople in this Parish are almost considering themselves again in bondage as it appears the planters are doing as they please with them.⁷⁵

At Cary's request a small detachment of troops was sent to Mansfield, commanded by Lieutenant Charles O. Bradley, to assist the Bureau agent and the civil authorities. Bradley confirmed that the freedpeople suffered grave injustices which the Bureau agent was powerless to stop "from a system of terrorism held by the whites over the freedmen." Although the detachment's arrival temporarily "had the desired effect of cooling their heretofore boisterous conduct," Cary saw no point in requesting Bradley's assistance in bringing guilty parties to justice. The detachment had orders to remain but ten days, and without permanent reinforcements he feared any action they might take would result in repercussions as soon as they returned to their camp in Shreveport. Bradley fruitlessly wrote his superiors in support of Cary's request for a permanent detachment military force to provide him with "the moral support which he needs."⁷⁶

The temporary presence of troops only served to further enrage white conservatives who began to openly threaten Cary with his life after Bradley and his men returned to Shreveport. In response Bradley dispatched another detachment to Mansfield, commanded by Sergeant Ryan, with orders to protect Cary from any personal harm. Trouble continued despite the troops' presence, and Bradley promised Cary that when Ryan's detachment returned to camp, another would be sent to relieve him. Although sympathetic to Cary's plight, Bradley also reprimanded him for employing the troops in discharging Bureau duties. He reminded the agent that "civil law predominates in the land and until different instructions received you must go to civil authorities for aid in discharging your duty." Despite his promise, orders from higher up forced Bradley to withdraw all soldiers from Mansfield less than a week later, leaving DeSoto without any military presence in the two months before the election. Left without protection, Cary soon had to flee the parish in fear of his life and his

⁷⁵ 'June 10, 1868, Mansfield, Cary to Warren,' NARA, RG 393, part 3, entry 287, box 3.

⁷⁶ 'July 21, 1868, Shreveport, Bradley to Farrand,' NARA, RG 393, part 3, entry 287, box 3; 'June 20, 1868, Mansfield, Cary to Bradley,' and 'July 10, 1868, Mansfield, Cary to Bradley,' NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 84, frames 304, 309.

replacement, Edward Henderson, saw no other choice than to keep his head down and pretend to be a Democrat in order to save his own skin.⁷⁷

With no effective federal presence, conservative whites had free play to prevent blacks from voting. Most Republican clubs had already been broken up prior to the April election; white planters threatened to dismiss any freedman who attended meetings or voted the Republican ticket. White militants, meanwhile, waylaid Anderson West, a courier sent from Natchitoches with Republican tickets for Sabine and DeSoto parishes. They not only destroyed the tickets, but also severely beat up West and hung him by the neck until he told them who had sent him. The few freedmen who risked coming to Mansfield despite these threats and the lack of Republican tickets, did not succeed in voting as they wished. Armed whites either turned them back at gunpoint before they reached town or forced them to vote for Greeley.⁷⁸

Although Caddo and Bossier did not suffer the complete collapse of federal and state authority that DeSoto did, the small number of soldiers stationed just outside Shreveport and the single Bureau agent responsible for both parishes proved woefully inadequate to deal with the widespread violence that wracked the northwestern tip of the state. The *Southwestern* kicked off the campaign for the presidential election on April 15, even before the state elections commenced. "Radical legislation" the editor insisted, necessitated a new "system of electioneering [...] to keep no one in our employ who votes against our interests." He urged planters to "refuse any longer to grind the hatchet which is to be used to chop off our heads." Any freedpeople joining Republican clubs or voting for Republican candidates should be dismissed immediately.⁷⁹

Such threats were no idle boasting. A month after this publication, Shreveport Bureau agent Monroe reported that "freedman have been prosecuted with unrelenting vigor since the election," with the white population "determined to avoid everything which tends to give the freedmen justice unless he has voted against the constitution." Monroe continued to report "very bitter" feelings against the freedmen throughout the spring and summer, due to growing political tensions. In May, Democratic clubs used "coercive measures towards the colored people to force them to join, and those who have the courage to refuse, they endeavor to drive

⁷⁷ 'August 22, 1868, Shreveport, Bradley to Cary,' and 'August 28, Shreveport, Bradley to Cary,' NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 84, frames 489, 493; CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 673-674; *Supplemental Report*, 161-163.

⁷⁸ CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 117, 521, 527-535.

⁷⁹ SW, 68-04-15.

from their home.” By July such economic pressures had devolved into outright murders, with freedmen “taken from their homes at night and murdered in cold blood.” By August, when the crops had been laid by and planters had less work to be done around the plantation, any laborers still determined to vote Republican had difficulties remaining on their land to harvest the crop in which they had an interest.⁸⁰

Those blacks that continued to attend political meetings only dared do so armed, further fanning white fears of a black insurrection. On Monday morning, August 24, the sheriff of Bossier, W. H. Hill, a conservative appointed by Wells almost two years earlier, called on Captain Charles C. Farrand, commanding the post at Shreveport, for assistance in suppressing an impending riot by armed blacks near Bossier Point. Conservatives claimed that Isaac Williams, a freedman and local Republican leader, had summoned the members of various Republican clubs in order to take control of the parish and “kill the white people ‘from the cradle up.’” By the time Farrand, Monroe and a detachment of soldiers arrived at the scene, a posse of 150 whites had already commenced arresting the leaders of this supposed insurrection.⁸¹

Democrats quickly turned the Bossier Point ‘riot’ into a perfect public relations coup. They arrested dozens of blacks without resorting to violence and brought 49 of them before two justices of the peace within days. Although numerous black witness insisted that the intentions of the meeting were entirely peaceful, others confirmed whites’ claims that the blacks had been plotting an armed insurrection. Many of the freedmen testifying for the prosecution--whom no one bothered to cross-examine-- answered in stock phrases culled from the editorial pages of the conservative press. Two witnesses specifically claimed to have heard the leaders of the insurrection threaten to kill the whites ‘from the cradle up,’ a phrase first reported in the *Banner* three months earlier in an excerpt from the *Sparta Rural Times*. Years later, conservatives would claim that blacks had made threats in very similar language to justify the massacre at the Colfax courthouse.⁸²

The justices remanded twenty defendants to the parish jail to await trial before the district court in October, while a similar number were allowed to remain free in the interim, as a “humanitarian gesture” to prevent overcrowding of the jailhouse. At the subsequent trial, a

⁸⁰ ‘May 20, 1868, Shreveport, Monroe to Warren,’ ‘May 30, 1868, Shreveport, Monroe to Warren,’ ‘July 10, 1868, Shreveport, Monroe to Warren,’ ‘July 20 1868, Shreveport, Monroe to Warren,’ and ‘August 20, 1868, Shreveport, Monroe to Warren,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 100, frames 420, 421, 423, 424, 426.

⁸¹ ‘August 31, 1868, Shreveport, Monroe to Warren,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 100, frame 426; BB, 68-09-05, 68-09-19.

⁸² BB, 68-06-13, 68-09-05, 68-09-19; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 896

jury of eight blacks and four whites found over thirty of them guilty, and the judge sentenced those convicted to a year in the state penitentiary at Baton Rouge. The *Banner* printed the testimony before the justices in full, as evidence of the danger posed by a black population not controlled by the whites as well as of the forbearance of the local elites. White witnesses before congressional investigators emphasized that a mostly-black jury had passed down the final verdict. Even the Bureau agent sympathized with the whites, describing the black leaders as criminals who used the political clubs as protection against arrest.⁸³

Whatever the justification for the Bossier Point arrests, they resulted in the destruction of what Republican organization had remained in the area. With much of the black leadership in jail or on the run, whites ratcheted up the level of violence against the freedpeople. One of the first victims of this new wave of terror was Henry Jones, one of the leaders of the supposed insurrection who had succeeded in evading capture and prosecution. On September 2, a group of whites took him from his home and after being shot he was “placed upon a brush pile which had been fired and left there, by his would be murderers supposing him to be dead. He succeeded in crawling off, but not until he was badly burned.” By the end of September, freedmen in northern Caddo, near Texas, were “constantly being taken from their houses at night by gangs of desperadoes and either killed or forced to leave their crops and everything they possess. There is not the least sign of any law being enforced.”⁸⁴

The tensions that had mounted in northwestern Louisiana over the preceding months, exploded at the end of September. At Shady Grove Plantation, blacks resisted attempts at political intimidation more forcefully than usual during Reconstruction, and in response whites unleashed a bloodbath that left scores, possibly hundreds, of blacks dead. This would prove a recurring pattern throughout the era, as blacks and white Republicans faced a stark dilemma of either giving in to violence and intimidation, thereby forfeiting their legitimacy in the eyes of many Northern observers, or attempting to resist against superior force and thereby risking a bloody massacre.

The affair began on September 27 or 28, when a drunken Arkansan named Gibson rode up to Shady Grove and demanded “if there was any Radical niggers there.”⁸⁵ Someone

⁸³ ‘August 31, 1868, Shreveport, Monroe to Warren,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 100, frame 426; BB, 68-08-29, 68-09-05, 68-10-03; SW, 68-10-14.

⁸⁴ ‘September 10, 1868, Shreveport, Monroe to Warren,’ and ‘September 20, 1868, Shreveport, Monroe to Warren,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 100, frames 427, 428.

⁸⁵ Although witnesses differed as to some of the details of the affair, the general progression of events leading up to the massacre can be reconstructed fairly accurately. The following is compiled from: ‘27 November, 1868, Shreveport, Farrand to Bradley’ and enclosures thereto, in NARA, RG 393, part1, entry 4501, box 1 and in

pointed in jest to an old freedman named Bradley, whereupon Gibson immediately fired off a shot at the old man, though failing to harm him. A number of freedmen from neighboring plantations chased Gibson down the road and apprehended him near J. M. Vance's plantation. Vance tried to mediate, offering to hold Gibson until the arrival of a magistrate, but the freedmen refused to relinquish their prisoner whom they took back to Shady Grove where they chained him to a tree and took about two hundred dollars from him.

That evening, a party of white citizens came to Shady Grove and secured the release of Gibson. They brought him before a justice of the peace, but no witnesses came forward, either out of fear of retribution or because they distrusted the local magistrates. The justice of the peace had no choice but to release Gibson, who soon returned with a large party of men from his home state. On the night of the September 29, they captured and killed a number of freedmen from Shady Grove and the plantation of Dr. Vance for their alleged involvement in capturing and robbing Gibson. Blacks responded the following day by arresting two white youths, Beverly Ogden and James Brownlee, who had played a part in releasing Gibson and possibly in the murders the previous night. The blacks held a summary trial of Brownlee and Ogden before fatally shooting both men, setting off a rampage by local whites that lasted for weeks and left dozens, and possibly over a hundred, blacks from Bossier and Caddo parishes dead.

Despite a significant military presence near Shreveport, federal authorities remained largely powerless to interfere. On September 30, Charles W. Keeting, the deputy US marshal and a prominent white Republican from Shreveport, requested military assistance to quell the breach of the peace at Shady Grove. The Shreveport post commander, Captain Farrand, sent Captain John M. Coe with about 40 men, to assist Keeting. However, on the arrival of Hill, the Bossier sheriff, Keeting returned home, leaving the military with no authority to interfere except at Hill's request. The sheriff initially requested Coe to station his troops near Benton, but then, on October 2, informed him that "the persons (supposed to be Arkansas men) who had committed the outrages in Bossier parish, and who he had hoped to arrest at that place, had left and gone in the direction of Arkansas." Although local whites continued to murder any and all blacks suspected of involvement in the killing of Ogden and Brownlee, Coe could

NARA, RG 393, part 3, entry 287, box 4; 'September 30, 1868, Shreveport, Monroe to Hutchinson,' 'October 10, 1868, Shreveport, Monroe to Hutchinson,' 'October 31, 1868, Shreveport, Monroe to Hutchinson,' NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 100, frames 429, 430, 434; *Supplemental Report*, 85-92; CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, 126-127, 338, 472-474; BB, 68-10-03.

do nothing and he returned his detachment "without having been called on to assist in quelling any disturbance or making any arrest."⁸⁶ Although violence accompanied the fall campaign throughout the state, no other locality saw carnage on the scale of the Shady Grove massacre, except possibly St. Landry parish, the birthplace of the KWC, where a supposed negro insurrection led to similarly bloody retaliation just a few days before the explosion of violence in Bossier.⁸⁷

Conservative whites from Bossier and Caddo conveniently blamed the killing spree on the strangers from Arkansas, claiming that the local citizens only targeted "the murderers of Messrs. Ogden and Brownlee and dispersed armed negroes."⁸⁸ Two weeks after the events, the *Southwestern* was more concerned with the effect of the 'Bossier War' on the productivity of the plantations than with the number of blacks "actually killed."⁸⁹ In reality, local whites not only unleashed an unparalleled reign of terror on the black population, but also used the ensuing chaos as an excuse to specifically target the local Republican leadership for violent retribution. In Bossier, Charles Keeting fled the parish following the Shady Grove massacre. He had believed himself "protected by the better class of people, but when these disturbances took place a great many stories were circulated that I instigated the riots, and the better class of men then, though they would not take an active part in such proceedings themselves, I thought would protect those who did." Around the same time, George Harris, a black preacher and Republican leader from Bellevue, fled to New Orleans after receiving numerous death threats and witnessing numerous fellow freedpeople murdered for their political principles.⁹⁰ As a result of all this, both Bossier and Caddo each polled but a single Republican vote come November. In Caddo, moreover, the sole freedman who dared defy the white terror, Sam Watson, was promptly murdered.

In Bienville, where the races were near equally divided, whites had already succeeded in securing a victory in April, through a combination of intimidation and economic pressure. Following the election they nearly murdered the Northern born Republican candidate for

⁸⁶ '30 September, 1868, Shreveport, Keeting to Farrand,' 'October 1, 1868, Benton, Hill to Coe,' 'October 9, 1868, Shreveport, Coe to Farrand,' all enclosed in '27 November, 1868, Shreveport, Farrand to Bradley,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4501, box 1 and NARA, RG 393, part 3, entry 287, box 4,

⁸⁷ Carolyn E. DeLatte, "The St. Landry Riot: A Forgotten Incident of Reconstruction Violence," *Louisiana History* 17, no. 1 (1976): 41-49.

⁸⁸ 'November 20, 1868, Benton, Cummings, Carter, and Vance to Farrand,' enclosed in '27 November, 1868, Shreveport, Farrand to Bradley,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4501, box 1 and NARA, RG 393, part 3, entry 287, box 4.

⁸⁹ SW, 68-10-15.

⁹⁰ CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 125-126, 132; *Supplemental Report*, 92-93.

sheriff, W. H. Honneus, and beheaded local black Republican leader Moses Lawhorn. Some freedpeople from the parish, moreover, reported being driven off their land for having voted the Republican ticket in April.⁹¹ Whites combined such violence and intimidation with an active campaign to coopt blacks into the Democratic Party. Not all conservatives, many of whom openly admitted to membership in the white supremacist KWC, approved of organizing such

barbecues and big meetings, and have them attended by negroes and have negro speeches made, and use the same mild persuasion with the negroes as we heretofore used over white men, to get them to vote the democratic ticket. I did not believe in stooping to that, and I shall perhaps die with that feeling. I believe that God made a difference between the white man and the negro, and I do not believe that any law of the United States can change that.⁹²

Despite such objections, the strategy succeeded to a great extent, probably because blacks realized they could never win the elections and opted to buy their personal safety by at least publicly supporting the Democratic Party. Freedmen's Bureau agent Bean estimated that ninety percent of the freedmen had joined Democratic clubs by the end of July, securing "a better feeling between the whites and blacks than has existed heretofore." Bureau Inspector Jesse M. Lee also found Bienville the quietest of the parishes he visited in northern Louisiana. Bienville's peacefulness was a reflection more of its political homogeneity, than of any willingness on the part of the white population to tolerate dissenting political opinions. All the freedmen Lee spoke with told him they planned to vote the Democratic ticket only "in order to save themselves" and he encountered not a single white Republican in the entire parish, the result of a campaign of intimidation against any "white men who it is supposed will vote the Republican ticket."⁹³

Similarly, in Winn parish, the white majority of which guaranteed a Seymour and Blair victory, many freedmen joined the Democratic Party over the summer. Some were even enthusiastically "traveling about among the plantations, talking politics, and calling themselves 'champions of Democracy' and are trying their utmost to persuade the freedmen to join Democratic clubs." Delos W. White, the local Freedmen's Bureau agent, complained

⁹¹ *Supplemental Report*, 109; CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 656-657; 'May 31, 1868, Sparta, Bean to Warren,' NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 102, frame 22.

⁹² CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 680.

⁹³ 'July 20, 1868, Sparta, Bean to Warren,' and 'October 31, 1868, Sparta, Bean to Hutchinson,' NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 102, frames 30, 41; CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 475.

that this political activity distracted the freedpeople from their work on the land. White, a Republican activist and the parish registrar, might not have minded political organization by the blacks had he not been convinced that “both the freedmen and the whites will vote unanimously for Seymour and Blair.”⁹⁴

Conservative whites in Winn Parish targeted both white and black Republican leaders. The most prominent victims were the black Republican leaders Hall Frazier, a free-born black who had successfully established himself as the owner of a saw mill, and his son Brantley Allen, who briefly taught the only freedmen’s school in the parish. At the end of August a party of whites came to Hall Frazier’s house, where his son was staying, and opened fire through the window, forcing Allen to give up his work as a teacher. A month after the election, two unidentified whites murdered Frazier and his employee Jesse Robinson, mistaking the latter for Brantley, who had voted the Republican ticket despite relentless intimidation. The murderers came to Frazier’s Mill pretending to place an order, and when Frazier rose up after drawing a plan on the ground, “one man blew out his brains and the other killed the engineer [Robinson] in the mill.”⁹⁵

The small clique of vocal white Republicans from Winn that centered around local planter Willie S. Calhoun, Bureau agent White, and Republican organizer William Phillips also faced increasing pressure. Calhoun’s residence across the parish line in Rapides and his status as a scion of a prominent planter family protected him from direct threats; Phillips was in New Orleans during the election as a member of the state board of registration. White, however, had to flee the parish in fear of his life shortly after the murder of Frazier and Robinson. He and Phillips did not return until Calhoun’s landing had been rechristened as the town of Colfax, the seat of the newly formed parish of Grant, gerrymandered to ensure a large black and therefore Republican majority.⁹⁶

Natchitoches long avoided the systematic political violence that plagued many of the parishes surrounding it. An outbreak of racial hostility had appeared imminent in September, after a colored constable named Labazan had shot and critically wounded two young white men suspected of brutalizing a freedman. Bureau agent Hosner predicted that “it will require the interposition of the bayonets, or of divine providence, to prevent a serious disturbance,”

⁹⁴ ‘July 20, 1868, Montgomery, White to Warren,’ and ‘July 30, 1868, Montgomery, White to Warren,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 89, frames 416 , 418.

⁹⁵ ‘September 11, 1868, Natchitoches, Hosner to Pierce,’ and ‘September 12, 1868, Natchitoches, Hosner to Pierce,’ NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 90, frames 650, 652; ‘January 21, 18689, Grand Ecore, McLaughlin to Neil,’ NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4501, box 4.; CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 2, 445-446.

⁹⁶ *Supplemental Report*, 111-112; CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 376-377.

but Labazan and members of his posse were arrested and tried by the parish judge within a fortnight, preventing any further escalation. The parish's Bureau records contain some other scattered reports of political intimidation, though none of them lethal, but as late as August 31 the local agent, Charles Miller, concluded that the freedmen "when not interfered with by politicians and political meetings" worked diligently and "generally, could not be better treated by whites than they are." The parish results appear to confirm the peacefulness of the parish, with only about 200 - roughly ten percent - fewer Republican votes cast than at the April election.⁹⁷

On the night prior to the election, however, white vigilantes, some from Sabine and DeSoto across the parish line, targeted two leading black Republicans in the remote fifth ward of Natchitoches, murdering one and severely beating the other. These attacks resulted from the earlier assault on Anderson West, the courier sent to deliver Republican tickets to Sabine and Desoto. After taking the tickets he was carrying, the whites tortured and nearly killed him, until he gave them the name of the man who had sent him. To save his life, West finally gave up Richard L. Faulkner, the president of the Republican club in the fifth ward of Natchitoches, a member of the parish police jury, and a teacher of a freedmen's school.

On the night of November 2, a party of at least eight to ten armed men surrounded Faulkner's house. Although he hid under a floor board, the whites searched the house and finally found his hiding place. After taking all his money, his personal papers, and the Republican tickets he still held in his possession, they dragged him out to the nearby woods and "whipped and beat him until they were satisfied," letting him go only after he promised to resign his office and vote the Democratic ticket the following day. They then went on to Alfred Hason's house, a mile away, whom Faulkner had identified as his adjutant in the Republican club. Here too, the white men demanded the tickets he had in his possession, and after firing a load of buckshot through the window, Hason's wife went out and surrendered them. They demanded Hason come out, which he refused in fear of his life. Only when the whites commenced to set his house on fire did he go out to save his family and the whites immediately fired three shots at him, killing him instantly before the eyes of his wife and children.

⁹⁷ 'September 20, 1868, Natchitoches, Hosner to Warren,' and 'September 30, 1868, Natchitoches, Hosner to Warren,' NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 90, frames 653, 658; 'June 30, 1868, Natchitoches, Miller to Warren,' 'July 10, 1868, Natchitoches, Miller to Warren,' and 'August 31, 1868, Natchitoches, Miller to Warren,' NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 91, frames 779, 784, 803; 'December 3, 1868, New Orleans, Lee to Hutchins,' in CSS, 40-3, Sen. Ex. 15, 38-40.

While the elections in the rest of the parish passed off quietly, hardly any Republicans dared vote in ward 5, accounting for as much as three quarters of the 200 votes lost relative to the April election. Militant conservatives, moreover, broke up the Republican clubs “by threatening to kill them” in the area, undermining the party’s ability to organize in the future.⁹⁸ As violence and lawlessness spilled over from neighboring Sabine and DeSoto, these incidents provided a dangerous example of the effectiveness of political intimidation to conservative whites in Natchitoches. Although they had lost the elections in 1868, conservatives had laid the groundwork for ‘bulldozing’ the parish’s Republican leadership in the future.

In Rapides, as in Bienville and Winn, conservative whites made a concerted effort to gain black support by organizing barbecues for the freedpeople throughout the parish at which white and black Democratic orators spoke. Blacks attended these festivities in large numbers, at least according to the conservative *Democrat*.⁹⁹ Unlike Winn and Bienville, however, Rapides had a large black majority and the freedpeople had enough experience with white supremacy to realize that whites might easily “feed you with the corn and choke you with the cob.” They were more than happy to eat the Democrats’ food, but had no intention of relinquishing political power by voting the Democratic ticket.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, whites in Rapides did not resort to personal violence, although the printing press of the Republican *Rapides Tribune* in the parish was vandalized both shortly before and again shortly after the election.¹⁰¹

Despite the absence of widespread violence in Rapides, the parish received extensive attention from the congressional investigation prompted by the elections. At the November elections, voters not only cast ballots for President and Vice-President, but also for members of the House of Representatives. Most of the parishes on the Red River fell into the fourth

⁹⁸ ‘November 12, 1868, Natchitoches, Hosner to Lee,’ 1905, reel 90, frame 410; ‘November 5, 1868, extracts from letters of James Cromie,’ NARA, RG 105, M1027, reel 34, frame 333; ‘November 7, 1868, Grand Ecore, McLaughlin to Bally,’ NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 4501, box 1; CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 116-117, 521-522, 525.

⁹⁹ LD, 68-07-08, 68-07-29, 68-08-05, 68-08-12, 68-09-09, 68-10-14.

¹⁰⁰ CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 523.

¹⁰¹ *Supplemental Report*, 102. Years later, conservatives in Natchitoches would claim that the KWC chapter in that parish had also considered vandalizing the Republican printing press there, suggesting this was a common strategy of the order. The veracity of these claims is dubious, however, coming, as they, did, long after the fact and as part of an ongoing campaign to discredit local Republican leaders by painting them as former militant leaders of the KWC. Moreover, as the following chapter will show, the destruction of the printing press in Rapides most likely resulted from a personal and political vendetta between the respective editors of the *Democrat* and the *Tribune*, rather than from organized political terrorism. NV, 74-07-11, 77-01-13, 79-01-18; CSS, 44-2, HOR. Misc. 34, part 3, 127.

congressional district, and the Democratic candidate for this district was Michael Ryan, a longtime resident and prominent planter of Rapides, who had served as a state senator before the war and was appointed district judge by Wells after the surrender. While Grant and Colfax easily won their election even without Louisiana's seven electoral votes, the intimidation and violence ensured victory for Ryan over his Northern born Republican opponent Joseph P. Newsham. Newsham challenged the results, claiming first of all that Ryan was ineligible under the fourteenth amendment, because he had held office prior to the war and then supported the Rebellion. Secondly, Newsham argued that he only lost the election due to the "reign of terror, intimidation, fraud, and lawless violence" in Caddo, Winn, Bossier, DeSoto and Sabine. He had received a total of just 46 votes from these parishes, compared to over 3000 for Warmoth a few months before, and 6000 in favor of the constitution in 1867.¹⁰²

Where the testimony in other parishes relates mostly to episodes of violence, fraud and voter intimidation, the main question in Rapides was the eligibility of Ryan. In nominating Ryan, the Democrats had hoped to have found a compromise candidate who was conservative enough to appeal to white voters while at the same time being eligible under the fourteenth amendment. Since Ryan's having held office prior to the Civil War was not in dispute, the question revolved around his loyalty or disloyalty during the conflict. Although Ryan never actively participated in the hostilities, numerous witnesses confirmed that he had given a speech of encouragement to a company of Confederate soldiers, had publicly worn a Confederate uniform, and had acted as officer to a unit of home guards in his parish. Although the evidence indicates that he never enthusiastically supported secession and had feared for its success from the outset, he never suffered persecution by the Confederate authorities as did a number of outspoken Unionist in the area. The committee particularly drew a comparison with Ryan's friend and neighbor James B. Sullivan, an elderly and sick man whom the Rebels arrested and imprisoned under harsh circumstances for a number of months. Although Sullivan and other conservative whites testified on Ryan's behalf, the congressional committee concluded that "Mr. Ryan did, by the facts recited, give aid and comfort to the enemies of his country" and was therefore ineligible to his a seat in Congress. Even had Ryan not been disqualified, the committee recommended discarding the entire vote of Caddo, Bossier, Winn, DeSoto and Sabine as well as specific precincts in other parishes where violence marred the election.¹⁰³

¹⁰² CSS, 41-1, HOR. Misc. 32, 2, 4.

¹⁰³ CSS, 41-2, HOR. Misc. 154, part 1, 596-598; CSS, 41-2, HOR. Rep. 61, 2-8.

Conclusion

The violence that erupted throughout Louisiana leading up to the presidential elections of November 1868 did not appear out of thin air. As soon as Congress passed the Reconstruction Acts in early 1867, conservative whites set out to reclaim the political dominance they felt they were entitled to. With black enfranchisement guaranteed by the federal government, conservative whites in majority-black Louisiana could not expect to regain political powers simply by galvanizing white voters around the issue of white supremacy as occurred in many other states in the South. Instead, they either had to move towards the political center, in the hope of siphoning of enough black votes from the Republicans to regain control of the state, or else they had to directly control the black electorate through force and economic coercion.

Only in Bienville and Winn, where blacks did not form a clear majority of the population, did whites succeed in gathering significant black support, in exchange for relative safety and employment for the freedpeople. In Caddo, Bossier and DeSoto parishes, white militants quickly began experimenting with the violent and extralegal strategies, even during the reputedly peaceful elections of September 1867 and April 1868. These parishes, along with the Florida parishes above Baton Rouge, were the epicenter from which much of the violence spread across the state in the summer and fall of 1868. In Natchitoches and Rapides, finally, conservative whites attempted, but failed, to garner black support through mostly legal means throughout the 1867 and 1868 elections. Blacks consistently voted almost unanimously for Republican candidates in all three elections, while the more violent parishes succeeded in almost entirely eliminating Republican voting.

Although conservative whites had demonstrated their ability to dominate the black voters and Republican leaders through violence and economic pressure, by the beginning of 1869 they faced not only Republican controlled state and, in many parishes, local governments, but also a national government dominated by the party of Reconstruction. Conservative whites realized that in order to regain power, they not only had to effectively eliminate or control the black vote, but also do so in a way that would not provoke interference by the federal government. As a result, subsequent elections during Reconstruction never saw the same levels of widespread violence. Instead, conservative whites more selectively targeted Republican leadership of both races for intimidation, a strategy that provoked less public outcry but eventually proved at least as effective in undermining the party's political effectiveness. The reign of terror that had swept the state in the fall of 1868, however, would continue to serve as a reminder to the freedpeople and their

white allies of the extremes to which conservatives were willing to go if they felt it served their purposes. Its legacy, moreover, would severely complicate the brief period of political stability under Republican rule discussed in the following chapter.