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

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6. Bulldozing the 'Usurpers'

The Rise of the White League and Federal Enforcement (1873-1875)

On Easter Sunday, April 13, 1873, two white men crept along the bank of the Red River some few hundred yards from the Colfax courthouse. They could clearly hear the gunfire being exchanged between the skirmish line of a force of whites attempting to take control of the Grant Parish court house occupied by an opposing force of entrenched blacks. They discovered a cut in the river bank from which their makeshift artillery could enfilade the blacks' defensive position, while a small detachment could provide secure covering fire for the men operating the cannon. The heavy fire soon routed the poorly armed blacks defending the court house. Some fled into the town or the surrounding fields, with mounted whites in hot pursuit, shooting down some of the fleeing blacks and taking others prisoner. The remainder fled into the court house and, for the time being, apparent safety.[1]

The whites, however, forced one of the captured black prisoners to set fire to the court house. The blacks inside soon exhibited a flag of truce and began to flee the burning edifice. The already violent day turned truly grim when two of the white leaders closest two the court house were shot down. Whether they were treacherously shot down by the blacks still inside the court house, as the white witnesses and press would persistently claim, or, as Charles Lane argues, by their comrades in arms who had already opened fire on the fleeing blacks, mattered little to the outcome. Seeing two of their own go down in a fight with their former slaves enraged the whites beyond reason and they opened fire indiscriminately on the blacks fleeing from the blaze.[2] That same night, after the senior leaders had left the scene, a smaller group of whites murdered most of the blacks taken prisoner in cold blood. By Monday morning some sixty to eighty blacks lay dead or mortally wounded in and around the charred rubble of the court house. James Hadnot's death, two days later from wounds received, brought the total number of white casualties to three, two of them quite possibly the victim of 'friendly fire.'[3]

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[1] For a more detailed account of the events leading up to and during the battle and massacre at Colfax see: CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 409-421., 847-851; Lane, *Day Freedom Died*, chap. 5; Joel M. Sipress, "The Triumph of Reaction: Political Struggle in a New South Community, 1865-1898" (PhD, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1993), chap. 2. Lee Ann Keith's account of the massacre is so riddled with factual, methodological, and interpretational errors as to be useless. (LeeAnna Keith, *The Colfax Massacre : The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror, and the Death of Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press US, 2008); Joel M. Sipress, "Review of The Colfax Massacre: The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror, and the Death of Reconstruction by LeeAnna Keith," *The History Teacher* 42, no. 1 (2008): 119–20.)

[2] LD, 73-05-14; Lane, *Day Freedom Died*, 102.

[3] On the varying estimates of the number of blacks killed and their reliability see *Ibid*., 265-266.

The massacre at Colfax - according to Eric Foner the "bloodiest single act of carnage in all of Reconstruction" – marked a turning point in the statewide struggle for political power that had followed the disputed election of 1872. Warmoth had succeeded in maintaining relative political and social stability throughout most of his tenure. Conservative whites, however, did not intend to yield their preeminence indefinitely and they believed to have a chance to regain power at the state level, after the state Republican Party fell apart in the summer of 1871. As intraparty disputes boiled over in August, Warmoth and his state machine organized one party convention, and the Custom House Ring, led by Kellogg and Packard, organized another, known as the Gatling Gun Convention for the federal guns that protected it. P. B. S. Pinchback, the state's most influential black politician, eventually joined Packard and Kellogg, allowing them to credibly claim the mantle of Republicanism. Warmoth initially sought a centrist position as a Liberal Republican, but by election time had joined the Democrats and a short-live, moderate party known as the Reform Party. They fielded a so called 'Fusion ticket,' headed by "last-ditch Bourbon Democrat" John McEnery, but also including Liberal Republicans D. B. Penn and George A. Sheridan, and even a black man from Caddo, Samuel Armistead, as candidate for secretary of state.[4]

Although the campaign and elections in 1872 did not see the widespread terror of 1868, "both the Fusionists and the Republicans defrauded one another" to such an extent that "no one ever had any idea who had actually won." Instead, the outcome of the election hinged on the returning board created by Warmoth, which itself soon split into two rival bodies, one declaring Kellogg elected and the other McEnery. On December 5, in a move of questionable legality, a federal judge, Edward H. Durrell authorized US Marshal Stephen B. Packard to take possession of the state house on behalf of the Kellogg regime. In January, both gubernatorial candidates took the oath of office and for a number of weeks rival legislatures met in New Orleans, but in late February, following a failed attack by McEnery's militia, Kellogg's Metropolitans seized control of New Orleans with the tacit support of the federal troops in the city. Although he now controlled the formal levers of state power, the white population of Louisiana would continue to resist Kellogg throughout his tenure. By April 1873, just a few months after Kellogg's inauguration, conservatives leaders throughout the state began organizing a statewide campaign of tax-resistance under the leadership of

[4] CSS, 42-2, HOR. Rep. 92, 1-7; Warmoth, *War, Politics, and Reconstruction*, 112–118; Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 216–218, 227–236; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 530; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 170.

conservative judge John Archibald Campbell, who had coordinated a similar effort in the early years of the Warmoth regime.[5]

Disappointed at their failure to gain control of the state government, and convinced that Kellogg had never legitimately been elected, militant whites increasingly turned to violence in order to 'redeem' their state once and for all. Organizing themselves in White Leagues, they rejected the kind of compromise that fostered the Fusion ticket. Instead they racialized political divisions, making it increasingly costly for whites to continue their support for Republican policies. They employed targeted violence and wide scale intimidation, challenging the authority of Governor Kellogg and myriad local Republican office holders. State authorities soon proved unable, and federal authorities eventually unwilling to meet this challenge, particularly in rural areas such as the Red River Valley. Although the military continued to prop up the facade of nominal Republican rule in New Orleans, they increasingly ceded power at the local level to conservative whites.

Escalation

Republicans and Democrats - as the Fusionists soon reverted to calling themselves - not only contested control of the state government, but also numerous local offices throughout the state. At the urging of men like Thomas C. Moncure, the Caddo representative-elect to the conservative state legislature, McEnery set out to "so perfect our government as to put it in a condition to assert and support its own pretentions." This meant not only commissioning all parish and local officers elected on the Fusion ticket, but also the removal of those judges who did not recognize the McEnery regime, and the establishment a militia. On February 8, a fortnight before the Metropolitans would defeat his militia force in New Orleans, McEnery sent out a commission to Rapides Democrat James Calvert Wise - and presumably to many others like him throughout the state - appointing him a militia colonel.[6] This militia force would provide both the organizational structure and a claim to legitimacy for the White League that emerged throughout the state some years later.

The disputed elections of 1872 provided the immediate pretext for the Colfax massacre, in which a force of whites, ostensibly acting as a posse for the sheriff elected on the

[5] CSS, 42-3, Sen. Rep. 457; 'April 5, 1873, Shreveport, Egan to Dear James,' Egan Family Collection, Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, Louisiana, folder 153;Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 241–246, 253–256; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 171–172; Ross, "Obstructing Reconstruction," 244–245.

[6] 'February 8, 1873, New Orleans, Moncure to Dear Wife,' Hardin Collection, box 9, folder 8; 'McEnery commission of James C. Wise,' Wise Papers, oversize folder.

McEnery ticket, attempted to wrest control of the court house from a force of blacks, who similarly had been summoned as a posse by the Republican sheriff of the parish. This conflict fed on longstanding political tensions, which had simmered in Grant for many years previous to these disputed elections. In September of 1871 these tensions had provoked a murderous attack on William B. Phillips and Delos W. White, two young, Northern born, white Republican organizers. Phillips had moved to Northern Louisiana as a law student following the war, but soon took up a career as a Radical Republican political speaker, while Phillips, a former Union soldier, came to the Red River Valley as a Freedmen's Bureau agent. Besides being outsiders, both shared a passionate conviction in support of equal rights for the freed slaves, well beyond what even many Republicans, let alone the vast majority of Southern whites, considered acceptable. Phillips, especially, had antagonized the local white population, both by openly living with a mulatto mistress and through his vigorous espousal of political positions which even White's erstwhile colleagues at the Freedmen's Bureau had found far too radical and inflammatory. An Alexandria agent, reported in 1867 that Phillips's extravagant promises of land redistribution caused "some of the freedpeople to get excited and threaten, if they did not get the land promised them, [to] fight the whites for it and cause a grand massacre of the whites."[7]

After Republican legislators carved out Grant Parish as a Republican stronghold in early 1869, Warmoth appointed Phillips as parish judge and White as sheriff, though a year later he replaced them with more conservative white Republicans. Willie Calhoun, the heir to the largest estate in the parish, shared Phillips's and White's political persuasions, and used his considerable financial assets in support of the local Republican Party and its policies. He invested in schools on his plantations, offered his employees fair – if not generous – contracts, and saw that they were well treated. The most important black leader in the Republican Party was William Ward, a former slave and Union soldier from Virginia, who had served as a police juror and later became a captain in the state militia.[8]

This Republican leadership, which could count on the majority black population of Grant Parish for electoral support, soon alienated the vast majority of the native white population - not only those opposed to racial equality of any kind, but also a number of moderate whites who had joined the Republican Party in the hope of forging some sort of

[7] 'September 20, 1867, Alexandria, Williams, trimonthly report,' NARA, RG 105, M1905, reel 53, frame 963. For background on White and Phillips see Lane, *Day Freedom Died*, 44–52.
[8] Ibid., 35–36, 54–55.

racial and political compromise, and possibly of procuring lucrative parish offices. On September 25, 1871, a mob of local whites - led by two nominal Republicans, Alfred Shelby, who had replaced White as sheriff, and his deputy, Christopher Columbus Nash - set fire to the house shared by White and Phillips, murdering the former as he fled the building. It was in the aftermath of this attack that Ward rose to particular prominence. Using his authority as captain of an all-black militia company, he arrested Shelby, Nash, and others suspected of involvement in the attack, and forced them at gunpoint from the courtroom of Republican district judge John Osborne onto a steamer bound for New Orleans to face federal charges.[9]

By early 1872, Federal District Attorney James R. Beckwith had released the prisoners on bail, as political and legal obstacles made further prosecution unlikely. State militia commander and former Confederate general James Longstreet, meanwhile, had relieved William Ward of his militia command and in the summer of that year permanently dismissed him for exceeding his authority. Conservative whites had employed violence to undermine the authority of the Republican leadership in the parish, and hoped to reclaim control in the November elections. Although a superficial calm had returned to Grant Parish, the events of 1871 severely polarized political landscape, with only the most Radical whites remaining loyal to the Republican Party. Ward's actions, despite his superior's disavowal of them, reinforced the always simmering fears among the vast majority of Southern whites of an empowered black population taking up arms against them, reinforcing their determination to reestablish political control at the next election.

Nash led the electoral campaign, as the Democratic/Fusion candidate for sheriff on a ticket that also included Alphonse Cazabat for parish judge and James Hadnot for Grant's sole representative to the state legislature. The Republicans nominated Ward as candidate for the legislature, perhaps hoping that his physical absence from the parish would diminish the tensions both within the Republican Party and between the Republicans and the white population, to whom Ward was anathema. For the most important local offices they nominated relatively moderate white Republicans, Daniel Shaw, who opposed Nash for sheriff and Robert C. Register who originally stood as candidate for Clerk, but would find himself a claimant for the parish judgeship when the original candidate relinquished his office shortly after the election.[10]

[9] LD, 71-11-01; Sipress, "From the Barrel of a Gun," 311–313; Lane, *Day Freedom Died*, 49–52.
[10] LD, 72-10-02; CSS, 44-2, HOR. Misc. 34, part 1, 118; Hogue, "1873 Battle of Colfax," 14.

As happened throughout Louisiana, both parties disputed the results of the election in Grant Parish, for which no official returns were ever announced. The Democrats/Fusionists claimed they had won the parish by a 240 vote majority, reversing a 360 vote Republican majority only two years before. By mid-January the Fusion candidates had taken possession of their offices under commissions issued by the lame duck governor Warmoth. Once it became clear, however, that Kellogg and not McEnery had secured the governorship both parties immediately began an intensive lobbying campaign to convince Kellogg to commission the candidates of their choice. The new governor initially gave the Fusionists a sympathetic hearing and appeared willing to issue commissions to their candidates for all offices, except parish judge, for which R. C. Register had already qualified. Ward, however, soon convinced him that Nash was an unacceptable choice, and the Fusionist leaders refused a compromise that did not include the sheriff's office. On March 24, Ward and Eli Flowers, another local black leader, returned to Colfax with fresh commissions for all the Republican candidates.[11]

The Fusionists, who had held the local offices for over two months, refused to relinquish possession of the Colfax court house, an old stable building on one of Willie Calhoun's plantations, which housed the parish records and served as office space for the judge, sheriff and other local officials. On March 25, under authority of their Kellogg commissions, Judge Register and Sheriff Shaw had a small black boy climb in through the window and open the latch from the inside, thus taking possession of the physical space symbolizing state authority in the parish. It is unlikely that the conservative forces of the parish would have been willing to simply give up power without a struggle, but their recalcitrance was undoubtedly reinforced when two days later the *New Orleans Republican*, the official state journal, published a list of commissions issued by Kellogg that erroneously included the names of Nash and other Fusionist candidates in Grant. According to the governor's testimony, it had mistakenly been taken from the original petition on his desk, which he had at first favorably considered but eventually denied.[12]

This publication provided Nash, Hadnot and other white leaders with political cover to dispute the legal authority of the Republican officeholders. They intended to retake the court house, by force if necessary, on April 1, and summoned whites from the surrounding countryside to their aid, boldly promising to "hang all of the republican office-holders." The

[11] LD, 72-11-20; Sipress, "From the Barrel of a Gun," 316; Lane, *Day Freedom Died*, 66–69.
[12] CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 261-262, 409.

Republicans, however, caught wind of their plans and Shaw uses his authority as sheriff to summon posse of mostly blacks men to help him defend the court house. Hadnot's force of no more than 25 white men encountered a similar number of blacks and, despite their bluster, they decided not to risk a fight.[13] A standoff ensued, with a growing force of conservative whites encamped a few miles outside of Colfax and blacks from the area flocking to the court house.

A series of incidents and skirmishes escalated the tension over the ensuing two weeks. Both before and after the massacre, conservative whites harped upon the ransacking of William R. Rutland's home by a squad of blacks and the alleged desecration of the remains of his infant daughter, which he had kept in a box in his home. The most reliable testimony, however, indicates that they had done little more than move the box to the porch as they searched the house. A few days later, a skirmish ensued between a band of white militants and some local blacks, who exchanged shots, though at distance well beyond the range of their weapons. Such stories fanned the fears and prejudices of the white population that the blacks were both savage and organized enough to "go into the country to kill from the cradle to the grave." The circulation of such stories in the press quickly brought large numbers of whites to Colfax, not just from the immediate vicinity, but also from surrounding parishes. They flocked to Nash and Hadnot's camp, swelling their numbers to anywhere from "125 to 300 men, well mounted and equipped." Following the massacre, conservative whites throughout the state continued to blame events on the Republicans who "took possession as it were of the parish and resolved to make it a battlefield." Rumors in New Orleans, moreover, "reported that this was but the beginning of what was contemplated for other localities."[14]

In retrospect, such fears, to the extent that they were not merely propaganda to justify a power-grab, seem groundless to the point of ridicule. The local black population, meanwhile, had to deal with growing fears of its own, and with far more justification. The botched assault on the courthouse by Hadnot on April 1 and the skirmish a few days later, proved that the Republicans would have to defend their offices by force. When a local laborer, Jesse McKinney, was murdered by a squad of whites from Nash's force, the trickle of blacks seeking protection in the courthouse turned into a flood. The first army officer to arrive at Colfax after the massacre estimated that at one point 400 to 500 freedmen had gathered at the

[13] LD, 73-04-16; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 410

[14] LD, 73-04-09, 73-04-16; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 409, 414, 532, 858, 895-896; 'April 29, 1873, Colfax, Smith to Gentry,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Canby, Letters Sent 1873-1877, vol. 1; April 26, 1873, New Orleans, Hyams to My Dear Henry,' Henry M. Hyams Family Papers, Mss. 1392, 1564, LLMVC.

courthouse, but that due to a lack of provisions these numbers had dwindled to no more than 150 by Easter Sunday.[15]

Significantly, by that point the entire Republican leadership of both races had abandoned the forces defending the court house. Register, Ward, Flowers and others had left for New Orleans, ostensibly in the hope of securing either state or federal troops to aid the embattled blacks in the courthouse, although it remains unclear why this required a delegation comprising all of them. Perhaps they had no stomach for the fight, like Daniel Shaw, a native Southern white and a moderate Republican. Following the massacre, Shaw publicly repudiated having been elected sheriff, undermining the legal authority on which the Republicans claimed to have defended the court house. This allowed the white press to claim that they had simply faced a mere mob, assembled "for no good reason except to plunder, rob, and murder." In return, conservative whites publicly exonerated Shaw from any blame in the affair, claiming he was only a figurehead, shanghaied into joining a black insurrection. The presence of the senior Republican leadership, particularly of either Shaw or Register, might have mitigated subsequent events. Captain Jacob H. Smith, the first federal officer to arrive in Colfax after the events, certainly believed so. He reported that the blacks defending the court house would not entertain offers for a negotiated settlement, "as they had been required to fight it out by the men who should have remained and counseled peace instead of war."[16] As it was, Nash's forces encountered some 150 poorly armed black laborers, commanded by the relatively inexperienced Levi Allen, half of whom lay dead the following morning.

Power Vacuum

While the absence of the local leadership aggravated the events of April 13, the absence of either state or federal authority in the region had made the conflict possible in the first place. Kellogg, whom the vast majority of whites considered an illegitimate usurper, received numerous indications in the weeks leading up to the massacre that trouble was brewing in Grant Parish. In theory, he had the authority to send a force of state militia to quell the disturbance and support the local officers he himself had recently commissioned. He did not do so, however, for two reasons. First, he "thought it not best to send a large force; and, second, if I wanted to send such a force, the condition of public sentiment was such that the

[15] Ibid.; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 409-410, 895.
[16] 'April 29, 1873, Colfax, Smith to Gentry,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Canby, Letters Sent 1873-1877, vol. 1; LD, 73-05-14; Lane, *Day Freedom Died*, 84.

boats would not have taken them." Neither could he purchase or charter a boat, as his administration lacked the financial wherewithal to do so.[17] Kellogg, in effect, admitted that he could not maintain order in large areas of the state nominally under his jurisdiction, because the only transportation available was controlled by private citizens, who refused to respect his authority. Both Kellogg and departmental military commander General William H. Emory would encounter similar difficulties over the ensuing months, greatly delaying the attempts to arrest the perpetrators of the massacre.

Kellogg did not elaborate on his other stated reason, that even if he had been able to, he did not think it best to send a large force. We can therefore only speculate as to his reasons, assuming his statement was more than a mere justification after the fact. In all likelihood, he feared that a mostly black militia force, acting under the authority of a state government most whites considered illegitimate, would only have exacerbated an already explosive situation. Moreover, the militia's involvement in a potentially losing battle would have irrevocably demonstrated his inability to project state power. Kellogg, who after all had only taken office a few months earlier, and whose position was shaky at best, may have considered the defense of Colfax as a test case best left to local forces. Had they won, the position of local Republican officeholders, and by extension his own authority would have been immeasurably strengthened. If they lost, he could disavow direct responsibility and use the incident as a pretext for requesting an increase of federal troops throughout the state to prop up his regime.

Such an interpretation casts a different light on two oft quoted editorials in the *New Orleans Republican* of April 12, which Lane interprets as a "hasty propaganda effort" by Ward, "intended to deter an attack on their men." Less than a day before the fatal attack, the newspaper claimed that a well-trained and armed colored majority in Grant Parish was "prepared to clean out the local minority […] in twenty-four hours or less, if not interfered with." And elsewhere: "The negroes, even plantation hands - are no longer the weak and simple creatures they were before the war. The years of freedom they have enjoyed, have had their effect; as also the training which many of them received in the United States army."[18] It is doubtful that Ward believed anything published in a Republican paper in New Orleans, which would take days to reach Colfax, would influence a fight that he must have known to be imminent. It also seems unlikely he could have 'planted' anything in the official state newspaper without, at the very least, Kellogg's consent.

[17] CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 263.
[18] Quoted in LD, 73-05-07; Lane, *Day Freedom Died*, 92.

More plausibly, Kellogg, perhaps after consultation with the Grant Parish leadership, hoped that the defenders of the courthouse would be able to fight the whites to at least a draw. Although such hopes seem far-fetched in retrospect, neither Kellogg nor Ward knew that the whites would have artillery at their disposal and be able to use it to such devastating effect. Without it, the whites might have balked at the casualties involved in attacking an entrenched position, even one defended by forces as poorly armed and inexperienced as the Colfax freedmen. In that case, the editorials in the *Republican* would have served as a rallying cry for embattled Republicans throughout the state. As it was, the whites used it as grist for their propaganda mill to blame the entire episode on the aggression of blacks and Republicans.

Factional struggles within the Republican Party also contributed to Kellogg's reluctance to intervene. Postmaster Samuel E. Cuney and Henry Kearson, local black Republican leaders who had been loyal to Kellogg's Custom House Republicans, had opposed Ward in the run-up to the 1872 election, and that summer the two factions had nearly come to blows. Cuney, like Shaw, would later provide statements to the white press in support of their contention that the entire affair was to blame on the local blacks and their pernicious Republican leaders.[19] Perhaps Kellogg felt some trepidation in risking his reputation and what little authority he had in support of Ward, who appeared to be a loose cannon and the cause of more trouble than he was worth.

Although failing to send a large force to enforce his authority, Kellogg did dispatch two senior militia officers, Colonels Theodore W. DeKlyne and William Wright, "with special and written instructions for an adjustment, so that bloodshed might be prevented." Such an adjustment would have included a division of the offices "so as to satisfy the people of the parish." More, Kellogg insisted, he could not do, as there existed a "combination, formed with premeditation, to prevent United States troops going to Colfax to prevent that massacre," as the whites attempted to "absolutely prevent my sending troops up there."[20]

If Kellogg's position prior to the massacre was ambivalent, that of General Emory was quite clear. Following orders from William T. Sherman, no troops had been stationed in Louisiana north of Baton Rouge since the summer of 1871. As late as January of 1873, as the dispute over the contested elections raged, Emory advised his superiors in Washington that the

[19] Ibid., 65; RG, 72-02-24, 72-07-13; LD, 73-05-07.
[20] CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 263

> use [of] the US troops 'to keep the peace' have attained the object intended. The further use of the troops for that end will not lead to a permanent and satisfactory settlement of the difficulties which disturb this unhappy city and state, besides their use as now practiced might be invoked by the local authorities to compass, under cover of them, ends not intended should be accomplished.

He further insisted that the governor "be made to understand that all requests must go through the president." When Emory first heard of possible disturbances at Colfax, by his own report on April 10, it was from Kellogg directly. The governor at that time stated his intention of sending General Longstreet, commander of the state militia, with "a sufficient force of state police to quell the disturbance." Whether or not Kellogg had such intentions at the time, Emory was not about to send any of his scarce troops hundreds of miles upriver without the governor's explicit request.[21]

Following the first reports of the massacre, Republicans in New Orleans hoped that the "strong arm of the state and national government will take good care of these rioters." In reality, the authorities had severe troubles to come up with an adequate response, even in the face of such massive violence. A month after the massacre, at Emory's explicit insistence, Kellogg finally made a formal appeal for troops to the president "on advice of my party and to restore peace as speedily as possible," although he continued to claim that state forces were strong enough to eventually quell the insurrection. By then, Emory had already ordered troops to be stationed at Colfax. Like Kellogg, however, the military encountered difficulty securing transportation upriver. Despite a determined effort, Emory reported being unable to get a steamer at "a reasonable rate" until April 19, four days after Kellogg first apprised him of the situation. A month later, Emory sent two more companies to be stationed near Shreveport, believing these necessary for the preservation of peace and order. He did so again upon the "urgent solicitation of the governor […] and respectable citizens from the parishes of Bossier and Caddo," although not before Kellogg had shown him letters from the Secretary of War and General of the Army explicitly authorizing Emory to do so on his own recognizance. [22]

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[21] 'January 9, 1873, New Orleans, Emory to Sherman,' NARA, RG 94, M666, file 1872-4882, reel 93, frame 96; 'April 17, 1873, New Orleans, Emory to AAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1965, vol. 139DSL; Dawson, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*, 107–108.

[22] 'April 18, 1873, New Orleans, Charles to Dear Mother' in Charles W. Boothby Papers, Mss. 4847, LLMVC [Hereinafter: Boothby Papers], folder 2.3; 'April 19, 1873, New Orleans, Emory to Kellogg,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1962, vol. 114DSL; 'New Orleans, 13 May 1873, Kellogg to Attorney General, Washington, DC' NARA, RG 60, M940, reel 1, frame 618; 'April 15, 1873, New Orleans, Kellogg to Emory,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1969, box 3; 'April 17, 1873, New Orleans, Emory to AAG,' 'May 12, 1873, New Orleans Emory to AAG,' and 'April 18, 1873, New Orleans, Emory to AAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1965, vol. 139DSL.

While he complied with Kellogg's requests for military assistance, Emory clearly envisioned a limited role for US troops. He instructed officers commanding the troops sent to Colfax and Shreveport to "use all your influence in the preservation of peace and order" but to "carefully refrain from entanglements in the political dissentions between the two parties in this state" and furthermore to "limit your active intervention" to furnishing posses comitati on proper requisition by US marshals. These orders clearly reflect the legal understanding of the time that only two legitimate uses might be made of federal troops within the confines of an established state. One was to assist US marshals and their deputies in the exercise of their duties. The other was, in the words of District Judge Aaron B. Levissee, "to suppress an insurrection while in action," but not "to prevent an insurrection or to punish those who participate." Such an intervention, strictly speaking, could only be ordered by the president on the request of the governor of a state. In the absence of unambiguous orders from Washington, Emory acted on this latter principle and sent two companies to Colfax to prevent further bloodshed. Even with such a limited mandate, however, he warned his superiors that more troops, and preferably cavalry, would be needed, as he feared a "general insurrection against the state authorities […] and if not promptly reinforced the United States authority may no longer be respected."[23]

Captain Smith's reports from Colfax, where he arrived on April 22 reinforced Emory's inclination to limit federal involvement to supporting federal law enforcement. The majority of blacks had fled the Colfax area and the "troubles have quieted down here with only the attendant excitement which necessarily follows such a fatal riot." Although he had only arrived the previous evening, he concluded that any troops required by US marshals as posses comitati would be needed nearer to Alexandria, while in Colfax itself only a sufficient forced needed to remain "to represent the authority of the US and establish a feeling of security which can only be secured by the regular forces." A few days later he reported that "people in and around Colfax seem to be getting over the excitement, which was occasioned by the riot" and by April 29 that "the riot is only spoke of as an occurrence of the past. The

[23] 'May 13, 1873, New Orleans, Platt to Lyster,' 'April 19, 1873, New Orleans, Gentry to Smith,' and 'May 13, 1873, New Orleans, Platt to Lyster,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1962, vol. 114DSL; 'April 18, 1873, New Orleans, Emory to Whipple,' and 'May 8, 1873, New Orleans, Emory to Taylor,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1965, vol. 139DSL.

negroes are rapidly returning to work with some degree of confidence that they will not be molested."[24]

By May 9, Smith had moved his command to Camp Canby near Alexandria, leaving only a detachment of one Lieutenant, three non-commissioned officers and seventeen privates at Colfax. A week later Smith recommended – and Emory subsequently so ordered - that even this detachment might safely be withdrawn, since troops had been sent to Shreveport and "the entire country between here [Alexandria] and there will be controlled by their presence."[25] Emory's limited interpretation of his mandate for federal intervention resulted in a complete withdrawal of troops from Colfax a little over a month after the local whites had demonstrated the utter inability of local Republican officeholders and Governor Kellogg to project their authority there.

Three factors, besides possibly wishing to conform to his superior's inclinations, contributed to Smith's sanguine interpretation of the conditions in Grant parish. The first is that Smith relied heavily on white informants, including those involved in the fight at the court house. Although he reported being aware of Nash's role as a leader of the white forces at Colfax, he did not dispute the latter's claim to be the legal sheriff and he believed he could "get more information from him than from any others I have conversed with, as he was the leader of the white men and remained on the battlefield after the fight was over."[26]

The efficacy of his small detachment of troops in restoring order in Reconstruction Louisiana reinforced Smith's impression that the situation in Colfax was under control. Although Smith reported some threatening rumors against his command and kept on the alert, he entertained "no idea that my authority will be resisted." This is not surprising, as even the most rabid and violent white leaders, such as KWC founder Alcibiades DeBlanc of St. Martinsville, counseled surrendering to federal troops, rather than offering them a pretext for further intervention.[27] Judge Levissee, looking back on the events of Reconstruction, wryly noted of this strategy that "in a state where insurrections are gotten up as systematically as party conventions, they are not likely to occur just where a body of troops is stationed. It is just as easy and much more judicious to have them take place elsewhere."

[24] 'April 22, 1873, Colfax, Smith to Gentry,' 'April 26, 1873, Colfax, Smith to Gentry,' and 'April 29, 1873, Colfax, Smith to Gentry,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Canby, Letters Sent 1873-1877, vol. 1.
[25] 'May 9, 1873, Camp Canby, Smith to Gentry,' and 'May 17, 1873, Camp Canby, Smith to AAAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Canby, Letters Sent 1873-1877, vol. 1; 'May 21, 1873, New Orleans, Platt to Smith' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1962, vol. 114DSL.
[26] 'April 26, 1873, Colfax, Smith to Gentry,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Canby, Letters Sent 1873-1877, vol. 1.
[27] Ibid.; LD, 73-05-28.

He went on to note that "troops, at best, can only be stationed at a few central points in a state," while "midnight raids could be planned and executed within five miles of a military camp." This scarcity of troops was the final factor motivating Smith's advice to withdraw from Colfax. He felt his men could be most effective around Alexandria, where he expected most arrests in the wake of the massacre to take place. He knew he need not ask Emory for more troops, as the entire 19th regiment stationed in Louisiana had been distributed among the disturbed areas, leaving Emory worried about the situation in New Orleans, where "peace reigns, but it is not a satisfactory peace and I cannot say how long it will last."[28]

Local Republicans soon felt the consequences of Emory and Smith's decision to withdraw troops from Colfax. In July, District Attorney J. Ernest Breda and District Judge John Osborne, exasperated by the delays in federal prosecution, decided to assert their jurisdiction in the case. They empaneled a grand jury at Colfax, which found indictments against no less than 140 men suspected of participation in the massacre. Their efforts ended abruptly, however, when dozens of armed whites "openly and violently threatened to break up the court." Breda complained that the troops, now stationed thirty miles away, did not interfere, despite his warning them of trouble. The proximity of troops, however, might not have made all that much difference, considering that local commanders, under restrictive orders from Emory, preferred not to interfere in civil affairs. The officer commanding the post of Greenwood, in Caddo Parish, for instance, refused to interfere when a judge's life was threatened in open court in Shreveport, claiming that "the disturbance, however serious it might be to particular individuals, was not one to call for the interposition of troops, it being a court room disturbance of a kind frequently seen in Southern and Northern towns addicted in the way of whiskey and pistols."[29]

That same night, Breda left Colfax to save his life, feeling "no disposition to offer myself as a sacrifice when the other officers, those of the US, would take no steps to protect or assist the courts." In early August he wrote letters to the federal district attorney and marshal for Louisiana and to the US attorney general in Washington, recounting these events and asserting that no civil court could be held in Colfax without protection by the US military.

[28] Levissee, "On Government [p. 91]," Levissee Papers, box 1, vol. 4; 'May 17, 1873, Camp Canby, Smith to AAAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Canby, Letters Sent 1873-1877, vol. 1; 'May 14, 1873, New Orleans, Emory to Sherman' NARA, RG 94, M666, file 1872-1882, reel 93, frame 172.

[29] 'August 11, 1873, Natchitoches, Breda to Williams,' J. Ernest Breda Letters, Special Collections, Manuscript Department, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana [Hereinafter: Breda Letters]; 'August 7, 1873, Shreveport, Hotch to commander US troops at Greenwood,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Greenwood, letters received; 'August 10, 1873, HQ Post Greenwood, Bradford to AAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Greenwood, letters sent.

Even federal officers "are scorned, scoffed, and abused when they go to Colfax alone" let alone "those who have only a Kellogg commission for authority and no US troops to protect them." The passive response of federal authorities, moreover, seemed to the whites as a "sanctioning of their acts."[30]

Only federal authority, backed by military force, could ensure that Republicans would have more than nominal control over Louisiana and that the Reconstruction legislation passed in New Orleans and Washington would be enforced throughout the state. The Enforcement Acts, for the first time in history, made possible the criminal prosecution of individuals before a federal court, which in the antebellum era had been strictly a state matter.[31] The responsibility for such prosecution fell to the recently created Department of Justice, which in Louisiana was represented by Federal District Attorney Beckwith. Prior to the Colfax massacre, Beckwith had had little experience in prosecuting cases under the Enforcement Acts, having instigated less than a dozen proceedings under its provisions. The only two of these to go to trial, moreover, resulted in acquittals. It is not entirely evident why Louisiana saw so few cases under the Enforcement Acts, while states such as Mississippi and North Carolina saw hundreds of prosecutions, resulting in dozens of trials and numerous convictions. One reason may be that in the early 1870s, when the Department of Justice most vigorously prosecuted such cases, Louisiana experienced a period of relative quiet under Warmoth. New Orleans, moreover, as the largest port in the South, provided plenty of other duties for Beckwith, whose office was chronically understaffed.[32]

The Colfax case, however, could not be ignored. Even before the failed attempt by Breda and Osborne to try the case under state law, Beckwith had convened a federal grand jury which found incitements against 72 suspected perpetrators. He also agreed with Breda that only swift punishment would prevent a repetition of such violence in the future. Those indicted expected swift action, and as early as May of 1873 rumors circulated in Shreveport that "a large force of Metropolitan police had been expected to arrive on the Ozark," a steamboat belonging to the state of Louisiana. Beckwith's office, however, lacked the

[30] 'August 11, 1873, Natchitoches, Breda to Williams,' 'August 11, 1873, Natchitoches, Breda to Beckwith,' and 'August 11, 1873, Natchitoches, Breda to Packard,' Breda Letters.
[31] On the revolutionary nature, as well as the limited application, of the Enforcement Acts see: Foner, *Reconstruction*, 454–455; Goldman, *Reconstruction and Black Suffrage*, 19–21; Kaczorowski, *Politics of Judicial Interpretation*, 53–54; Hyman, *More Perfect Union*, 525–532.
[32] 'January 2, 1871, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,' 'January 6, 1872, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,' 'January 11, 1873, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,' 'September 30, 1873, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,' and 'August 20, 1874, New Orleans, Gurley to AG,' NARA, RG 60, M940, reel 1, frames 105, 320, 514, 768, reel 2, frame 31. See also: Kaczorowski, *Politics of Judicial Interpretation*, 102–107.

resources to effect the swift justice he desired. He understood the situation in northwestern Louisiana well enough to realize that arrest might only be made by a mounted force, as "the worst of the accused will see to themselves in the pinewoods in the rear of the parishes where they reside and defy arrest." The US marshal, the executive arm of the Department of Justice, depended on fees for his payment and these were "so small that he would be ruined if he called on a mounted militia force" for which he himself would have to pay.[33] As a result federal enforcement stalled throughout the summer.

Only in September, possibly in response to Breda's letters, did Beckwith and US Marshal Packard renew their effort to secure a mounted force. Since they had insufficient funds, they set up an arrangement in which the state and federal authorities would share the burden. Kellogg would supply the manpower out of the state militia and the state steamer Ozark as transportation, but as his regime was cash starved, all operating costs, including rations for the men and horses and fuel and pilots for the boat, would have to come out of federal military appropriations. Packard also desired federal troops to guard the prisoners and as "reinforcements in case of a serious fight." Emory did not feel authorized to meet such expenditures without explicit authorization from his superiors and only after repeated requests by Packard did officials in Washington approve the plan.[34]

So, on October 26, half a year after the murder of dozens of blacks, the Ozark finally landed opposite Alexandria and a detachment of troops joined Deputy US Marshal DeKlyne and twenty-five mounted militiamen already on board. The Ozark continued on to Colfax and Montgomery, where the militia succeeded in arresting seven of the suspects, whom they brought on board to be guarded there by federal troops. Following a failed expedition to Harrisonburg, DeKlyne made a final attempt at additional arrests in Alexandria. None of the suspected whites were to be found in their homes, however, despite earlier assertions by white leaders that a single federal soldier or marshal would be sufficient to make any arrests necessary. Although Lane has qualified the mission of the Ozark as a partial success, the local army commander at Pineville emphasized that the militia did not succeed in making a single arrest outside of Colfax and "the smoke from her chimneys was still in sight, when the first

[33] 'June 11, 1873, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,' NARA, RG 60, M940, reel 1, frame 676; 'May 21, 1873, HQ Post Greenwood, Bradford to AAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Greenwood, letters sent.
[34] 'September 21, 1873, Holly Springs, Emory to Packard,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1962, vol. 114DSL; 'September 10, 1873, Brief in New Orleans Case,' NARA, RG 94, M666, file 1872-4882, reel 93, frame 191; 'September 10, 1873, New Orleans, Packard to AG.,' and 'October 9, 1873, New Orleans, Packard to AG,' NARA, RG 60, M940, reel 1 frames 754, 828.

fugitives began to return to their homes."[35] The best mounted force that a joint effort of state and local authorities could cobble together hardly served to inspire respect for either among the white citizens of the Red River region.

While the Ozark expedition mostly failed in its attempts to bring the Colfax perpetrators to justice, the presence of black militiamen attempting to make arrests did succeed in fanning the flames of white indignation. Lieutenant George T. Towly, in charge of the forces near Alexandria, reported that the Ozark's arrival destroyed the dead calm which had reigned over the area. Soon, reports and rumors of various crimes, either perpetrated or encouraged by the militia, began to circulate. The most vivid of these rumors involved the alleged rape of three white women by members of the state militia. The details of these rumors quickly proved exaggerated. The case involved the rape of a single white woman, a relation of former governor Wells, perpetrated by a local black man named Hamp Henderson, who, along with four other blacks allegedly involved in the affair, was soon captured and lynched. Even though the militia was in no way involved, the local white press, led by the *Louisiana Democrat* accused the DeKlyne and the metropolitan police of applying selective justice in going after the whites' suspected in the Colfax case and not attempting to arrest Henderson for his crime. Eventually, a greatly exaggerated version of the incident - which resonated with the sexualized fears of blacks that informed the post-Reconstruction imagination of Southern whites – found its way into popular accounts of the events leading up to, and therefore justifying, the massacre at Colfax, even though it took place month afterwards.[36]

Dosia Williams's memoirs, which present one example of such an account, also recall how the Ozark moored near Alexandria for nearly a year while whites had to hide out in the woods to prevent arrest. In reality, the entire expedition only spent a little over two weeks in northwestern Louisiana. Her account, however, captures the intensity of the local resentment it inspired. The white citizens of Rapides quickly organized an 'indignation meeting' at which they passed numerous resolutions which, according to Lieutenant Towly, "were mostly no more than denunciations and a protest against the existing state of things political." They

[35] LD, 73-05-07, 73-10-29; 'May 21, 1873, HQ Post Greenwood, Bradford to AAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Greenwood, letters sent; 'November 3, 1873, Camp Canby, Towly to AAG ,' and 'November 13, 1873, Camp Canby, Towly to AAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 5 Post Canby, letters sent 1873-1877, vol. 1; Lane, *Day Freedom Died*, 153.

[36] LD, 73-11-05, 73-11-12, 73-11-26; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 515, 896; 'November 3, 1873, Camp Canby, Towly to AAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Canby, letters sent 1873-1877, vol. 1; Dosia Williams Moore, *War, Reconstruction, and Redemption on Red River: The Memoirs of Dosia Williams Moore*, ed. Carol Wells (Ruston: McGinty Publications, 1991), 69.

included a demand that Congress reverse President Grant's decision recognizing the Kellogg government; and expressions of sympathy with, and pledges of legal support for, the arrested men "dragged from their peaceful homes by the Metropolitan Police [...] for political and for no other purposes." The white press went even further. The *Democrat* accused the Metropolitans of searching homes without legal warrants, and proudly noted that the members of the expedition from "prudential motives refused to spend the night." To emphasize the spirit of resistance to both state and federal authorities, the editors further insisted that "passivity under Metropolitan invasion [was] not to be construed as acquiescence in or voluntary submission to usurped government"[37]

As soon as the Ozark left, General Emory ordered the post near Alexandria broken up. One company was to return to barracks and the other to set up post at Colfax. In January the post at Greenwood was reduced to a single company and in March it was discontinued, leaving the company at Colfax the only federal presence in Louisiana north of Baton Rouge. These troops, moreover, operated under strict orders not to interfere except on requisition by a federal marshal. A request from Packard for troops to be stationed in "certain parishes in Louisiana to preserve the public peace" was summarily denied on the grounds that such a request had to be authorized by the president himself.[38] The Colfax massacre and its aftermath had clearly shown the state authorities incapable of preserving law and order, or even of maintaining the integrity of legitimate local officeholder in the face of white violence. The army, while practically capable of filling this gap, proved unwilling to take on these responsibilities, beyond the minimal constitutional requirements of assisting federal civil authorities and suppressing large scale insurrections. Their meager resourced, however, proved hardly adequate even to such a limited task.

'Peacefully If Convenient, Forcibly If Necessary'

The failure of authorities to respond vigorously to the events at Colfax and the continues campaign in the white press in opposition to Kellogg's supposed 'usurpation' created a perfect breeding ground for further extra-legal, and often violent, opposition to

[37] Ibid., 80; 'November 3, 1873, Camp Canby, Towly to AAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Canby, letters sent 1873-1877, vol. 1; 'November 13, 1873, New Orleans, Kellogg to AG,' NARA, RG 60, M940, frame 857; LD, 73-10-29, 73-11-05, 73-11-12, 73-11-19.

[38] 'November 14, 1873, New Orleans, Platt to commander Post Alexandria,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1962, vol. 114DSL; 'January 31, 1873, New Orleans, Platt to Commanding Officer Colfax,' 'March 16, 1874, New Orleans, Platt to Commander Post Greenwood,' and 'July 31, 1874, New Orleans, Platt to Packard,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1962, vol. 115DSL; 'January 14, 1874, New Orleans, Platt to Commanding Officer post Greenwood' NARA, RG 393. Part 1, entry 1965, vol. 140DSL.

Reconstruction in northwestern Louisiana. Disappointed in the results of the strategy of accommodation pursued in the 1872 campaign, a growing number of white leaders began advocating in favor of an explicitly racial political program and resistance to the existing Republican order. In April of 1874 this resulted in the formation of the first of many local White League organizations, in Saint Landry Parish. The ideas inspiring the movement originated earlier, however, and most historians trace the beginnings of the White League to the first publication of the *Caucasian* in Alexandria.[39] Its salutary urged a

> fair, square, stand-up fight of the honest intelligent white people against negro incompetence and carpet-bag rascality; a white man's party, seeking to secure and foster the interests of the white people, and turning the negro over to the tender mercies of his friend and boon companion the carpet-bagger[40]

Other newspapers soon joined the *Caucasian* in advocating a strict adherence to this so-called white line strategy, including a number of publications from the Red River region, such as the *Natchitoches People's Vindicator* and the *Shreveport Times*.

Their fight, so the *Caucasian*'s editors claimed, was "not upon the negro *per se*, but upon his political record […] not because his skin is black, but because his deeds have been of a darker hue than even the cuticle which his creator gave him."[41] Such verbal finesses mattered little to the black population in Louisiana, once the White League began its campaign of electoral fraud, economic intimidation and outright violence. They served an important purpose, however, as the White League maneuvered along a fine line between appealing to the racist worldview of the vast majority of Southern whites, while justifying itself on such themes as good governance, law and order, and financial retrenchment, aimed to appeal to Northern audience as well as those whites who had been attracted to the Liberal Republicans in 1872.

The White League, as Carole Emberton argues, not only had to outgun local Republicans, but even more importantly, they required "coordination *and* a politically viable justification for igniting armed conflict with the state authorities […] if Republicans' greatest strength - federal support - was to be broken."[42] The White Leaguers themselves fully realized their predicament. "The public sentiment," one White League activist privately wrote to a

[39] Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 281; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 193–194.
[40] 'Salutatory' from Alexandria *Caucasian*, 74-03-28, reprinted in CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 906-907.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Carole Emberton, "The Politics of Protection: Violence and the Political Culture of Reconstruction" (PhD, Northwestern University, 2006), 238.

confederate, "especially of the North has to be appealed to by a certain enumeration of wrongs, oppressions and exactions, that will unite the sympathy and public sentiment of the world." The armed aspect of the League, he warned, must be kept secret. Such machinations did not fool all observers. In an unpublished report, State Senator Marshall Harvey Twitchell related how the League "intended to seize and possess the [local government] peacefully if convenient, but forcibly if necessary." Republican congressmen who investigated the White League in 1875 published a pamphlet accusing the organization and its supporters of a "stupendous effort […] at home and abroad to conceal from the world the nature and designs" of the organization.[43]

Tax reform and good governance proved most effective both as a rallying call for Southerners and a justification aimed at Northerners. Conservative whites repeatedly harped on exorbitant tax rates under supposedly corrupt Republican state and local authorities as an excuse for what they claimed was justifiable civil disobedience.[44] The validity of such claims remain disputed, as the evidence is clouded by partisan propaganda. Captain Allyn, commanding federal troops at Colfax in the summer of 1874 investigated such complaints and found "both state and parish tax (the latter payable in deprecated currency) to be relatively light." J. Mills Thornton III, on the other hand, has argued that with end of the antebellum slave tax a larger percentage of the tax burden fell on the poorer and middling white farmer, who, he claims, were "correct in believing that he was paying much more in taxes, and was generally receiving no more - in fact, often less - in return than he had received before the war."[45] Even if the absolute fiscal burden was not exceptionally severe, taxes paid to a regime that most whites considered illegitimate in the first place undoubtedly provoked resentment, particularly if a significant portion of the expenditure of those taxes benefited the black population and the political opponents of the Southern whites.

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[43] 'Extract from the letter of Archibald Mitchell,' and The true character of the Organization - Its objects and the design of its originators and leaders,' in George Frisbie Hoar, W. H Wheeler, and William P Frye, *The White League in Louisiana: Examined by the Light of White League Testimony* (n.p., 1875), 1, 5; 'Statement by Marshall Harvey Twitchell on Red River Parish,' in 'Report of Special Committee of the [Louisiana] Senate on Political Persecution and Outrage, March 2nd, 1875' Marshall Harvey Twitchell Papers, Collection M-067, Special Collections, Prescott Memorial Library, Louisiana Tech University, Ruston Louisiana [Hereinafter: Twitchell Papers], box 3, folder 5.

[44] See, for example: 'undated political speech,' Alexandre E. DeClouet and Family Papers, Mss. 74, 258, 461, 756, LLMVC, folder 1.13.

[45] CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 160; J. Mills Thornton III, "Fiscal Policy and the Failure of Radical Reconstruction in the Lower South," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction : Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 381–382.

Tax resistance and opposition to supposedly corrupt Republican officials inspired the earliest tangible success of the White League, in June of 1874, in Natchitoches Parish. This parish, even Republicans admitted, had experienced relative stability and friendly race relations during much of Reconstruction. Simmering tensions, however, came to the surface in the spring and summer of 1874, sparked by what conservative whites considered an exorbitant level of parish taxation and an illegal takeover of the parish government by a clique of local white Republicans headed by the tax collector D. H. Boullt. Boullt, so the conservatives alleged, had used his influence to fraudulently enrich himself and his cronies at the tax-payers' expense in schemes involving, among others, the building of a bridge, the commissioning of a map book for the parish, the remuneration of police jurors, and an immigration bureau. In the summer and fall Boullt found himself the target of various civil suits resulting from these affairs. Although the district judge for Natchitoches was a Republican, John Osborne, who had attempted to hold court in Colfax in the summer of 1873, he had proved willing to pass judgment in a number of cases against Boullt and his associates.[46]

Two events in early 1874 brought these simmering conflicts to a sudden boil. Following the disputed elections of 1872 and the violence in Grant Parish, the political leadership of both parties in Natchitoches had avoided a similar conflict by a negotiated compromise in which the parish offices and police jury membership was divided between Republicans and Democrats. In early 1874, however, Kellogg appointed a new, entirely Republican police jury to replace the bipartisan body commissioned after the compromise. Conservatives alleged that Kellogg had packed the new police jury with political allies of Boullt, including a number of illiterate blacks. Around the same time the state legislature ordained a judicial reorganization in which Natchitoches was detached from the ninth judicial district and combined with Sabine, DeSoto and Red River parishes into the newly formed seventeenth district. This allowed Kellogg to appoint a new district judge of his choosing, for which position he selected Henry C. Myers, a Republican who had gotten the parish judgeship in the 1873 compromise.[47]

Like the new police jurors, Myers was a close political ally of Boullt. Members of the tax collector's family, moreover, held numerous other offices in the parish: Boullt's eldest son,

[46] CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 214, 294 537-539, 542, 913, 916, 918, 919; NV, 74-06-27, 74-07-25.
[47] LD, 73-07-05; NV, 74-08-01; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 537, 551, 552; 'Act No. 23' in *Acts Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana at the Second Session of the Third Legislature, Begun and Held in the City of New Orleans, January 5, 1874* (New Orleans: State Printer, 1874).

D. H. Jr., already a deputy sheriff, was appointed to the parish judgeship vacated by Myers; William H. Boullt served as both deputy tax collector and deputy parish judge, as well as holding the positions of surveyor and parish auctioneer; H. B. Boullt also was deputy sheriff, as well as deputy US Marshal; and an unnamed relative was supervisor of registration. With such a concentration of power in the hands of a small clique, conservative felt cornered. They had endured what they considered a barely tolerable degree of mismanagement by Republicans since 1871, but, following the dismissal by Myers of indictments against Boullt, renewed fraudulent appropriations by the police jury "came so thick and fast that the people could not really stand it."[48]

Republicans, not surprisingly, told a different story. They emphasized that Democratic police juries incurred 80% of the debt for which taxes had to be raised; that the new Republican police jury in fact slashed by half the parish tax, which the Democratic compromise jury of 1873 had raised to two percent; and they accused Democratic speculators in parish bonds of responsibility for "the most onerous taxation." Myers also emphasized that the state supreme court cleared the tax collector of all accusations of corruption. Recent Republican convert Edward L. Pierson noted that while he had heard of corruption charges against Myers, as a lawyer he had never personally experienced any misconduct.[49]

Such justifications by Republicans made little impression on the white population, who determined to rid the parish of Republican rule once and for all. To this end, they organized themselves into a 'taxpayers association,' which first met on June 13, 1874. Michael Perman has argued that such taxpayer associations represented a final attempt by centrist whites to regain control of the party from White League extremist. In Louisiana, however, they functioned more as a public, non-partisan smokescreen behind which the White League could organize its racist and often violent political campaign. In July of 1874, in fact, the *Times* explicitly opposed organizing the political campaign under the moniker of taxpayers' associations, rejecting the notion that "the white movement must be cloaked or covered up. The call for the organization of a white man's party," after all, "is what has aroused the present enthusiasm of our people."[50]

Around the same time, in Natchitoches, James Cosgrove founded the *People's Vindicator*, a newspaper closely associated with both the taxpayer movement and the White

[48] CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 101, part 2, 110; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 551-552.
[49] Ibid., 214, 144, 287-289.
[50] ST, 74-07-21; Perman, *The Road to Redemption*, 166–167.

League. Its publications further fanned resentment against Republican rule, claiming that the white population paid 99% of the taxes, while reaping none of the benefits. The *Vindicator* played a pivotal role in mobilizing the white population to attend a mass meeting on June 27, to urge the resignation of the police jurors appointed earlier that year by Kellogg. The Republican police jurors complied, but the conservatives were not yet satisfied. They insisted that Kellogg appoint replacements of their choosing to fill the police jury. A month later they called another mass meeting to demand the resignation of Myers, Boullt, and other Republican officials.[51]

In the weeks leading up to this meeting, pressure was put on the Republican officials to resign, including threats of violence if they did not comply. To show the Republicans they meant business, the white conservatives claimed C. C. Nash, of Colfax notoriety, was at hand with 16 men "to do the murders and go to Texas." Myers and Boullt Jr. took such threats seriously and fled the parish prior to the 'mass meeting,' in fact an invasion of the town by hundreds of armed whites, from both Natchitoches and many surrounding parishes. District Attorney J. J. Bossier and Boullt Sr. did not dare resist the overwhelming show of force and resigned the same day. The *Vindicator* jubilantly proclaimed that the "power of the Radical party is completely broken here, not one of the would *dare* attempt to organize a club of negroes, for he is known to be a corrupt man even by them, and his influence has passed away with his power."[52]

Governor Kellogg - perhaps grateful that the conflict had not escalated into violence as in Colfax - offered a far from forceful response to the ousting of the Republican officials in Natchitoches parish. He implicitly recognized the resignations, by appointing others to fill the resulting vacancies, including Boss Burke as tax collector and Pierson, a recent convert to the Republican Party, as the new parish judge. Conservative whites did not lightly forgive Pierson his 'betrayal' and he quickly came to bear the brunt of their ire. He testified before congressional investigators that the white population ostracized him socially and that Democratic leaders informed him his life was in danger if he attempted to enter upon the duties of his new office. Pierson did not attempt to call their bluff and declined to act as judge. Colonel Levy, a leader in the Democratic Party and Pierson's brother-in-law, urged him to

[51] NV, 77-04-07, 74-07-18; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 538.
[52] Ibid., 281-282; NV, 74-01-08.

leave the Republican Party, warning him that he might "at any time […] be shot or have a knife run in your back" and that he could not begin to protect him, despite being family.[53]

As no violence was involved, federal authorities did not take formal notice of the events in Natchitoches. The leaders of the Natchitoches uprising could thus defend the legitimacy of their actions, while asserting their continued loyalty to the federal government, which, they argued, had no right to intervene with citizens merely exercising their right to self-government. Only when troops were sent to northern Louisiana in response to the Coushatta massacre some months later did the disturbed condition in Natchitoches come to the attention of federal authorities. Deputy Marshal J. B. Stockton reported a rumor that a Democratic meeting had selected twelve Republicans to be assassinated as soon as the cavalry would leave, including Boullt and his sons, District Attorney Breda, the black Republican leader Raford Blunt, and Pierson. The permanent military post he recommended was never established, however, and a year later *Vindicator* editor Cosgrove murdered Pierson. Although ostensibly a personal feud fuelled by the South's culture of honor, their clash, as Adam Fairclough has argued, was, in fact, "first and foremost a political conflict."[54]

The 'bulldozing' of Natchitoches Parish – as such removal of Republican officers through intimidation came to be called - served as a further inspiration and rallying call for conservative whites throughout the region. Publications associated with the White League praised Natchitoches whites, both for their success in 'redeeming' the parish and their forbearance in not resorting to armed conflict. The *Caucasian* asserted that under similar circumstances in Rapides, the Democrats there would have "quietly hung up the scalawags and carpetbaggers and ring masters engaged in it to a lamp post as we would other highway men." At the same time reports of the events in neighboring parishes became conflated with fears of black uprisings and rumors of arms being shipped by Kellogg to northwest Louisiana to arm the freedpeople for the purpose of "the indiscriminate murder of our people."[55] Such inflammatory language and deep seated fears of a rebellious black population proved to be a toxic mix, ensuring that the next attempt to rid a north-Louisiana parish of its Republican officials would end far more violently than the bloodless coup in Natchitoches.

[53] CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 132-133, 554. Although sharing a surname, David and Edward Pierson were not related.
[54] ST, 74-10-03; 'November 1, 1874, New Orleans, Packard to AG,' NARA, RG 60, M940, reel 2, frame 267; Fairclough, "'Scalawags,' Southern Honor, and the Lost Cause," 801..
[55] ST, 74-07-10; AC, 74-06-20, 74-11-07.

Red River Parish, like Grant, had been carved out of the surrounding parishes during Warmoth's governorship and gerrymandered to ensure Republican control. Control of the parish rested with a small clique of mostly Northern born white Republicans, led by former Union soldier and Freedmen's Bureau agent Marshall Harvey Twitchell. Following the rout of the Republican officeholders in Natchitoches, the White League turned its attention to this other Republican stronghold of northwest Louisiana. Influential whites of Red River had joined the mob in Natchitoches. One of them, Ben Wolfson, told Twitchell that militant whites had warned them that "if they did not go to work and clean out that radical stronghold of North Louisiana in Coushatta they would go and do it for them."[56]

Ted Tunnell has painstakingly detailed the escalation of tensions in the parish in the course of the following month. Twitchell himself spent most of his time in New Orleans, but his associates, including the parish sheriff Frank Edgerton and the tax collector and Marshal's brother, Homer Twitchell, felt increasingly threatened. Meanwhile, rumors began to circulate among the white population of an impending black insurrection, fuelled by a report of armed blacks gathering at Homer Twitchell's house, under Edgerton's command, and one of them firing at one of the many parties of mounted white sentries scouring the area in the night of Thursday, August 27. The next day, armed White Leaguers arrested Twitchell, Edgerton and five other leading white Republicans, most of whom also held local offices. In the course of the following weekend, the White League pressured six of them into resigning their offices and pledging to leave the parish, never to return, while the seventh cooperated with the White League leadership and was released. On Sunday, August 30, 1874 these six men set off from Coushatta together with an armed escort of about twenty-five White Leaguers. Soon after they crossed the parish line into Caddo, they were overtaken by a second armed and mounted party, about twice the size who murdered all six of the Red River Republicans in cold blood.[57]

The massacre at Coushatta was merely the most extreme and visible manifestation of the increasing lawlessness and violence raging throughout the Red River Valley as the White League wrested control from Republican officials in parish after parish. In June, a petition from a parish 'taxpayer association' in Caddo, signed by some 175 white citizens, pressured the police jury there into rescinding a contract it had made for the construction of a new parish jail, despite the poor state of the existing lockup. Then in August, in Shreveport, a similar 'tax-payer meeting' induced Republican city officials to dismiss the paid police force. In its

[56] 'Act 39,' *Acts Passed, 1871*; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 386; Tunnell, *Edge of the Sword*, chap. 9.
[57] Ibid., chap. 11.

stead, a 'volunteer force,' composed of dozens of White Leaguers, kept the peace in the largest town of the region, and probably the surrounding countryside as well. It also insisted that a citizens committee review the accounts of the Caddo police jury, while the city passed an ordinance prohibiting the issue of new municipal indebtedness, except for "certificates issued by the taxpayer association." Although the ostensible reason for this move was a lack of funding necessary to maintain a paid police force, the tax-payer meeting urged all white property holders to contribute a voluntary tax of one percent of their property value. Moreover, following the 1874 elections a new Democratic city board immediately reinstated a paid police force, with comparable salaries to the one dismissed a few months earlier. Whites were willing to pay for the enforcement of law and order, just not for enforcement controlled by Republicans.[58] Although Republican officials in Caddo and Shreveport nominally retained their offices, the conservative white leadership controlled both the financial management and the enforcement of law and order.

The White League offensive also disrupted the operations of the district court in DeSoto, which, under Levissee, had operated reasonably effectively as a biracial institution for two years. Levissee's personal and political enemies in Shreveport ensured he was counted out when he stood for reelection in 1872, counting in R. J. Looney in his stead. Although nominally a Republican, Looney attracted far less criticism from Democrats than Levissee had done. John C. Moncure, a prominent Democratic politician, admitted of the district attorney elected on the same ticket as Looney, that he was in fact a conservative, although "not a party man." Levissee himself considered his successor a likable personality, but a failure as judge due to his laziness and lack of courage.[59]

Looney held court for just one term before the legislature removed DeSoto to the newly formed 17th judicial district under Judge Myers from Natchitoches, who never held court in DeSoto, however, as a result of the bulldozing of the Natchitoches Republicans. No district court whatever was held, in fact, for two years, until C. Chaplin, a conservative lawyer from Natchitoches gained the office as part of the Wheeler compromise. The lack of a district court did not overly bother the young Mansfield lawyer E. W. Sutherlin, who saw no connection between the breakdown of the court system and the violence and disorder caused

[58] 'Caddo Police Jury Minutes [June 2, 1874],' WPA PJ Minutes, reel 62; 'Statement on Caddo Parish' in 'Report of Special Committee of the [Louisiana] Senate on Political Persecution and Outrage, March 2nd 1875', Twitchell Papers, box 3, folder 5; ST, 74-08-15, 74-09-15, 74-09-25; SPCC, Book D: August 11, 1874, August 29, 1874, November 19, 1874.
[59] CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 428, 437, 448, 453; 'Levissee Diary,' 30.

by the White League. Sutherlin, like the white population of DeSoto generally, were happy to be rid of the only outside force interfering with white control of the parish. As the Republicans conceded control over local government to whites, either as a result of outright violence or credible threats against the political leadership, blacks and the few remaining white Republicans in the region became increasingly insecure. The widespread violence and the forcible ouster of local Republican officials throughout the state belied Kellogg's claim to the US attorney general that despite the absence of federal troops, he had successfully "enforced and executed the laws, and maintained order […] in all the remote border parishes of the state."[60]

Having learnt from the mistakes of the Ku Klux Klan, the White League pursued a strategy less likely to provoke federal intervention. The Klan's secrecy and theatrical displays of wanton violence had shocked a Northern public still bitter over the Civil War. The White League, often under the label of White Man's Party or Tax-Payers Association, presented itself as a legitimate political organization, aimed at defending local autonomy, good governance and fiscal discipline. They preferred intimidation and economic pressure to outright violence and specifically targeted a small number of political leaders for their campaigns. In those instances when the White League did resort to violence, they usually targeted leaders of the Republican Party or the black community and went to great lengths to publicly justify their actions. In Caddo parish, for instance, they murdered a Spaniard named Manuel Muñes, a Republican recently moved there from New Orleans. They claimed Grant had sent him to Caddo Parish for the explicit purpose of arming the black population to prepare them to "make war on the whites." Although Kellogg offered a thousand dollar reward for the capture of his murderers, there is no record of their ever being apprehended. Instead, the *Times* published a series of article applauding their actions on both political grounds and as a justified act of self-defense against the Spaniard, who supposedly fired at them first.[61]

In Northwestern Louisiana an atmosphere existed by the late summer and early fall of 1874 in which whites could easily practice private violence against blacks and white Republicans with little fear of reprisals – in fact often increasing their stature in the community - while denying an immediate political motive to their actions. The White League

[60] 'DeSoto Minutes;' de Vries, "Between Equal Justice and Racial Terror"; CSS, 44-2, HOR. Misc. 34, part 3, 194; 'August 26, 1874, New Orleans, Kellogg to AG,' NARA, RG 60, M940, reel 2, frame 32.
[61] 'September 25, 1874, New Orleans, Muñes to Beckwith' NARA, RG 60, M940, reel 2, frame 159; ST, 74-07-28, 74-08-07, 74-08-19.

was thus both more dangerous and more effective than the Klan, while appearing less threatening to a Northern populace and federal government increasingly weary of Southern entanglements. Federal authorities, however, would make one last attempt to salvage what remained of Reconstruction, before effectively surrendering to the White League strategy.

The Government's Last Stand

The massacre of six white Republican officials from Coushatta was a clear break with the White League's predominantly low-key strategy, and it immediately provoked a relatively vigorous response from federal authorities. Days before the murders, Kellogg alerted the attorney general in Washington that conservatives in Louisiana had reverted to terrorism in their attempt to reclaim political power in the state. McEnery, he warned, had toured the states on the Texas and Arkansas border, telling his audiences that the federal authorities had refused a requisition for troops and abandoned the Republican state regime to its fate. Although he was adding hundreds of handpicked whites to his militia force, he bluntly conceded that his forces remained "of course inadequate to suppress or prevent domestic violence in the distant border parishes of the state." If the black majority attempted to organize in its own defense, even when so authorized by state militia laws, "the cry of 'negroes arming' and 'war of the races' is raised and a 'negro riot' is telegraphed north, with the usual result of ten, twenty, fifty negroes killed and perhaps one white man wounded."[62]

In his letter, Kellogg also complained of the absence of troops in the state since the withdrawal of the 19th infantry months before. Indeed, as Emory reported to his superiors a few days after the Coushatta massacre, he had only two companies stationed in the entire state, one at Colfax and the other at Baton Rouge, with a detachment posted at Jackson Barracks outside New Orleans. Following the Coushatta massacre, Kellogg renewed his plea for troops, joined by Packard and a few days later Beckwith, who offered specific recommendations on the disposition of troops, including – in addition to the company already stationed at Colfax - two companies at Shreveport and two at Alexandria, as well as another seven companies to be stationed in parishes just to the south and east of those bordering on the Red River. Within a week of Beckwith's request, Emory ordered troops to all but one of the points designated, albeit in smaller numbers than requested. A company originally designated for Catahoula

[62] 'August 26, 1874, New Orleans, Kellogg to AG,' NARA, RG 60, M940, reel 2, frame 32.

parish, moreover, was soon redirected to Coushatta. Thus by the end of September five companies of infantry were stationed in or en route to the Red River region.[63]

Although the increase in troops restrained the worst of the White League aggression, events in New Orleans soon drew the attention of both state and federal authorities away from northwestern Louisiana. On September 14, 1874, the White League violence which had plagued the more remote areas of the state erupted in its political center. A small army of well-armed, trained, and organized White Leaguers from throughout the state decisively defeated the state militia and Metropolitan police forces in pitched battle. Kellogg had abandoned the state house even before the violence erupted, surrendering control of the capitol to an armed coup. In the same way that the Colfax massacre and subsequent White League uprisings in Natchitoches, Shreveport and elsewhere had proven the inability of the state government to project authority in rural Louisiana, the Battle of Liberty Place, as the September 14 uprising became known, showed that Kellogg could not even maintain the semblance of a state government in his own capital without federal support.[64] Only a forceful proclamation by President Grant, backed by federal troops, allowed Kellogg to return to at least nominal power within a week of the coup.

The coup in New Orleans had an immediate effect on the parishes in northwestern Louisiana. Conservatives claiming to have been elected on the McEnery ticket in 1872 swiftly took control of local offices in numerous parishes. As late as mid-October, General Emory received requests from Kellogg to have troops reinstate the Republican officeholders in, among others, Rapides, Bossier, Red River, DeSoto and Caddo parishes. In Colfax, the whites organized a mass meeting to demand the Republican parish officials to resign and openly threatened to fight federal troops should they interfere. The post commander, Arthur W. Allyn, took these threats seriously. He informed D. J. Compton, chairman of a 'citizens meeting' that had resolved to reinstate the McEnery officials, of President Grant's order for all citizens to retire peaceably and for the military to "under no circumstances [...] recognize the McEnery government." Although Compton reassured him that the whites had no intention of violently taking the parish offices or directly challenging the military, Allyn considered the situation so

[63] 'September 2, 1874, Holly Springs, Emory to AAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1962, vol. 115DSL; 'August 30, 1874, New Orleans, Kellogg to AG,' 'August 30, 1874, New Orleans, Packard to AG,' and 'September 5, 1874, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,' NARA, RG 60, M940, reel 2, frames 49, 57, 112; 'September 11, 1874, Holly Springs, Platt to Chief Commissary of Subsistence,' and September 25, 1874, New Orleans, Emory to AAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1965, vol. 140DSL.

[64] An in depth study of the September 14th uprising is beyond the scope of this study. It has most recently - and excellently - been dealt with in Hogue, *Uncivil War*, chap. 5.

volatile that he prepared for the possibility of fortifying and entrenching his position, fearing his "little force might prove a tempting morsel to try and swallow, in order to bring on martial law, an end which the people seem to desire."[65]

Indeed, by this time the White Leaguers openly pursued a strategy aimed at forcing the federal government's hand. As the *Vindicator* put it, "we are determined upon one of two things. That Louisiana must be governed by white citizens, or that in sixty days she will be blotted from the map of free States, and a military force sufficient to conquer us shall be stationed in every neighborhood." The conservative whites gambled that the northern electorate, and hence the federal government, would not be willing to expend the resourced needed to call their bluff. Emory's recommendation to President Grant that he pardon all those involved in the New Orleans street battle no doubt reinforced the White Leaguers' conviction that the federal government lacked the stomach for a prolonged fight. Emory conceded that

> the outburst embraced nearly every white man in the community, but the promptness with which they yielded to the mandates of your proclamation, when they were made to know that it applied to them, even when laboring under the most maddening impulses, prompts me to make this request.[66]

So long as conservative whites did not directly challenge federal authority, so it seemed, they hardly needed to fear serious repercussions from the army against even the most blatant and aggressive challenges to Governor Kellogg, let alone local Republican officials in distant rural parishes.

Once the situation in New Orleans had stabilized, federal authorities could once again turn their attention to northern Louisiana, from where reports of lawlessness, violence, and intimidation against blacks and white Republican officials continued to come in. The authority of federal troops, as had been the case in the wake of the Colfax massacre, remained limited to quelling violent uprisings and assisting deputy US marshals in executing federal processes. Such limitations meant, for instance, that the White League acting as volunteer

[65] 'October 14, 1874, New Orleans, Emory to Kellogg,' NARA, 393, part 1, entry 1962, vol. 115DSL; 'October 15, 1874, New Orleans, Kellogg to Emory,' NARA, RG 94, M666, file 1874-3579, reel 170, frame 271; 'September 21, 1874, Colfax, Allyn to Compton,' 'September 21, 1874, Fairmount, Compton to Allyn,' CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 101, part 2, 62; 'October 2, 1874, Post Colfax, Allyn to Platt,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Colfax, Letters Sent.

[66] 'October 25, 1874, Shreveport, Merrill to AAG,' in CSS, 43-2, Sen. Ex. 17, 4; NV, 74-09-12; 'September 17, 1874, New Orleans, Emory to President of the US,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1962, vol. 115DSL.

police force of Shreveport needed to fear no interference from the federal troops stationed just outside the city.[67]

Despite the *Vindicator*'s appeal to provoke martial law, the White League in fact proved reluctant to engage in large scale violence or create serious disorder in the immediate vicinity of federal troops. As a result, the troops primary purpose would be to serve as posses comitati to federal marshals arresting suspects in the Coushatta murders. Both Beckwith and Packard realized that the infantry companies would be next to useless for such a task, and at their insistence Attorney General George Henry Williams reluctantly requested the Secretary of War to provide the marshal with mounted troops. In early October, Emory ordered two companies of the seventh cavalry, commanded by Major Lewis Merrill to Shreveport, with explicit orders to "execute criminal process in the Red River parishes or those adjacent at any point north or west of Natchitoches."[68]

Merrill had already acquired a reputation for aggressively combating the Klan in South Carolina in 1871. J. Michael Martinez has argued that he and his men "arguably did more than any other person or entity to expose the identity of the Invisible Empire as a group of hooded, brutish, homegrown terrorists." Merrill exhibited the same energy and employed the same, at times unconventional, methods against the White League. As a result, he succeeded, in the short term, in making a number of arrests and restoring a semblance of law and order to the region. In the long run, however, his aggressive strategy and at times self-righteous attitude backfired and his mission failed in the all-important area of public perception.[69] From the start, moreover, Merrill's troops suffered from the usual lack of resources that plagued federal enforcement throughout Reconstruction. Following the September 14 coup, Emory could hardly afford to leave New Orleans unprotected and, to his chagrin, two additional companies that he had intended to dispatch north were ordered to Alabama by his superiors. Emory was also chronically short of mules and other means of transportation and the cavalry that did arrive in Shreveport first needed to have its horses shod, before they could be of any service.[70]

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[67] ST, 74-10-13.
[68] 'October 10, 1874, Washington, DC, Williams to Secretary of War,' NARA, NARA, RG 94, M666, file 1874-3579, reel 170, frame 100; 'October 4, 1874, New Orleans, Emory to Packard' NARA, 393, part 1, entry 1962, vol. 115DSL.
[69] James Michael Martinez, *Carpetbaggers, Cavalry, and the Ku Klux Klan: Exposing the Invisible Empire during Reconstruction* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), xiii.
[70] 'October 5, 1874, New Orleans, Emory to AAG,' 'October 10, 1874, New Orleans, Emory to AGA,' 'October 13, 1874, New Orleans, Platt to Parker,' and 'October 6, 1874, New Orleans, Emory to AGA,' NARA, 393, part

Beyond these practical impediments, Merrill faced a more fundamental obstacle to his mission, when he discovered that civil law in northern Louisiana had broken down to the point where victims hardly dared to swear out affidavits against the perpetrators White League atrocities, for fear of reprisals once the troops had again left the region. Merrill concluded that in Shreveport a small group of "reckless, passionate men of broken fortune," led by Albert H. Leonard of Shreveport, enflamed the passions of the vast majority of whites in the hope of gaining political power. The community, he concluded, was little more than "an armed mob, governed by a few reckless men" where "for months no such thing as the existence of law, or of any authority, save individual will, has been recognized." He believed that if he could somehow neutralize the most radical leaders, "which would give time for thought and for the influence of calmer minds, there was every prospect the leaders would fail of their purpose to precipitate violence."[71]

Merrill found the pretext for implementing such a strategy in the publication in Leonard's newspaper of an agreement by almost all leading merchants of the town not to employ any blacks who would vote the Republican ticket at the upcoming election, nor to provide supplies to planters who employ them, and to ostracize any whites who did not abide by the requirements of this pledge. This boycott pledge clearly violated the Enforcement Acts and Merrill promptly instituted legal proceedings. Former district judge Levissee, now as US commissioner, supported Merrill's strategy, but warned him that no one would be willing to risk swearing out an affidavit as it "would be certain death to any native here to initiate proceedings." Under the circumstances, Merrill concluded, there was nothing else for it but for him to swear out the necessary affidavits himself. As his intention was to reduce tensions, Merrill took especial care not to further incite the white population. Together with Levissee he selected five of the leading figures for whom to have warrants issued as an example. They were not arrested, but merely requested to appear before the commissioner at their own convenience. Within a week, Merrill felt, his actions had begun to pay off and that it had been the only means of avoiding a "bloody fight" on the day of elections.[72]

Despite Merrill's efforts not to further excite the situation, the white League press, particularly Leonard's *Times*, could, in Merrill's words, "be seen like bees, working to use

1, entry 1965, vol. 140DSL; 'New Orleans, 15 October 1874, Emory to AGA' NARA, RG 94, M666, file 1874-3579, reel170, frame 277.

[71] 'October 25, 1874, Shreveport, Merrill to AAG' in CSS, 43-2, Sen. Ex. 17, 4-5.

[72] ST, 74-10-16; 'October 25, 1874, Shreveport, Merrill to AAG,' in CSS, 43-2, Sen. Ex. 17, 5-6.

this act as a means of fomenting disorder." Leonard claimed that Merrill intended to arrest all those who had signed the pledge, some 75 men, and his editorial threatened to have within a month a force of three hundred "white draymen and warehousemen, who will stand by us […] if the negroes continue their war on us." The *Times* warned its readers that Merrill's actions would result in the black population becoming "insulting, arrogant and intolerable, led by their chiefs, they will literally ride rough shod over the community and this section of the state will be carried by them in the election." It went on to urge anyone arrested to refuse posting bond, as doing so would justify the proceedings. When the court issued warrants for only five men out of the ninety against whom Merrill had sworn affidavits, Leonard – who also served the suspects legal counsel – used Merrill's moderation against him. He argued that the court could not pick and choose whom to arrest as such a policy violated the principle of impartial justice.[73]

Meanwhile, Leonard and others White League leaders worked hard to collect additional signatures to the boycott pledge that had set the entire matter off, knowing that Merrill, who had thought it best to arrest only a handful of the original signees, certainly would hesitate to prosecute many hundreds. The case against the five men arrested thus appeared even more arbitrary, while Leonard highlighted the inability of the federal authorities to effectively prosecute infringements of federal law, even when these were publicly perpetrated. When Merrill asked Leonard whether he intended to defy the federal government, Leonard simply asserted to be as loyal as the major himself and claimed that if the pledge were a "defiance of anything it is of radical rascality and military lawlessness."[74]

These press reports reached New Orleans and Washington DC, before Merrill's own account of the events and Emory immediately telegraphed his subordinate to warn him that these reports "are exciting much discussion and comment, and are mischievous in their effect, and that the circumstances that would justify him in departing from an established rule of service and appearing personally as a prosecutor must be peculiar." By that time Merrill had mailed his initial report, cited above, but it had not yet arrived in New Orleans. So on October 26, a day after his initial report was written, he sent a lengthy telegram to Emory, in which he justified his actions as "the only course which promised to prevent future trouble" and asserted that "the effect has been in the highest degree valuable in restoring respect for the law, and promises to prevent bloodshed." He noted that no one else could be found to swear

[73] Ibid., 5; ST, 74-10-21, 74-10-23, 74-10-25.
[74] ST, 74-10-23.

out affidavits, and claimed any other course would have shown him "grossly lacking in foresight, prudence, and ability to cope with difficult circumstances." In case Emory did not approve his actions, Merrill noted, he would be more than happy to be "relieved of a great responsibility which I did not seek, but shall not shirk." The following day he sent an additional report by mail, emphasizing further the utter lawlessness prevailing in the Red River region on his arrival, and the soothing effect of his actions on the sentiments in Shreveport At a meeting of white citizens, a few days after the initial hearing against the five men charged,

> instead of the usual cheers which have heretofore followed threats of resistance to law, and violence in certain events, these were received in silence, and were instantly followed by other speeches counseling quiet and good order, and respect for the law, and these were heartily cheered.[75]

Merrill's reports made their way up the chain of command and in early December the adjutant-general of the army briefly informed him that the secretary of war considered his actions justified by the circumstances.

By then, however, other events within Merrill's command had eclipsed his actions in Shreveport and further undermined the authority and legitimacy of federal enforcement in northern Louisiana. While Merrill attempted to restore law and order in Shreveport, detachments from his command accompanied US marshals to various localities in northern Louisiana in an attempt to arrest persons connected with the Coushatta massacre. One such detachment, commanded by Lieutenant Donald McIntosh, accompanied Deputy Marshal Stockton to Coushatta and Natchitoches and arrested 25 men in the course of a month long campaign. Although McIntosh complained that Stockton, through a "want of energy" did not succeed in capturing as many of the White League leaders as might have been possible, the arrests still provided plenty of fodder for the White League's publicity campaign.[76]

The press loudly proclaimed, first of all, that the arrests had no legal basis. Stockton and the troops assisting him had put "an end to law" by usurping the prerogatives of the local and state authorities and, to make matters worse, by arresting men without legal warrant. The *Caucasian* went so far as to publish a story, almost certainly fabricated, of an officer, on being asked his warrant for the arrest of *Vindicator* editor Cosgrove, answering by "slapping his

[75] 'October 26, 1874, Shreveport, Merrill to Emory,' and 'October 27, 1874, Shreveport, Merrill to Emory,' in CSS, 43-2, Sen. Ex. 17, 3-4, 7-11.
[76] 'November 14, 1874, Shreveport, McIntosh to AAG,' in Ibid., 13-15.

pistol "and claiming "that that was his warrant!" The *Times* encouraged its readers, in response to the arrests, to "resort to their own strong arms to protect themselves and their families from outrage." Not only were the arrests illegitimate, but, according to the white press, federal officers treated their prisoner with unnecessary brutality. McIntosh vehemently denied such charges, noting that Cosgrove was treated by Stockton and himself with the utmost forbearance, despite his having spit in the marshal's face. Stockton, meanwhile, advised Packard to have a company of infantry stationed in the area over the winter, as "there is more and greater disloyalty here openly avowed than […] In any other part of the US and the moment we leave […] a large number will be killed, because these White Leaguers say the leading Republicans have been at the bottom of these arrests."[77]

Around the same time, just outside of the Red River region, another of Merrill's Lieutenants, B.H. Hodgson, acting with his squad as posse comitatus for Deputy Marshal Edgar Selye, became the center of an incident even more damaging to the reputation of the federal forces. The civil authorities of Lincoln Parish accused Hodgson and Selye of illegally cutting a telegraph wire and the Lincoln Parish sheriff, with a posse of two hundred men, rode into Monroe in neighboring Ouachita Parish to arrest them, ostensibly for contempt of court in refusing to obey a writ of *habeas corpus* issued by the district judge. The case immediately became a *cause célèbre* throughout the region. The press not only accused Hodgson and Selye of the same abuses they had McIntosh and Stockton, but their arrest by local authorities offered the perfect pretext to vociferously assert the authority of local authorities and courts over federal officers.[78]

Making matters considerably worse, Merrill had to admit to his superiors George A. Head, the local infantry commander to whom Hodgson had been temporarily attached, seriously mismanaged the case. Instead of ensuring that it was removed to a federal jurisdiction, they allowed Hodgson to be convicted and sentenced to time served and a small fine by a local magistrate. As a result, Selye's appointment as deputy marshal was revoked by Packard. Moreover, since Selye and Hodgson had formally been tried by the civil courts, the military was barred from further investigation, making it impossible to determine the facts of the case beyond what the White League claimed and, more importantly,

[77] Ibid.; AC, 74-10-31; ST, 74-10-22, 74-10-24; 'Extract from October 22, 1874, Natchitoches, Stockton to Packard,' enclosed in 'November 1, 1874, New Orleans, Packard to AG,' NARA, RG 60, M940, reel 2, frame 267.
[78] CSS, 43-2, Sen. Ex. 17, 32-34;The reaction to these events by the White League press is exemplified by ST, 74-11-08.

> what has been a judicial outrage upon two Government officers, concocted and carried out by the White League leaders here, aided by the State judge as their pliant tool, must fail of proper punishment, and instead of being made a conspicuous warning to corrupt judges not to lend their offices to illegal interference with and embarrassment of United States officers in the discharge of their duties, becomes an incentive and temptation to attempt the same thing whenever a posse goes out.[79]

As he was wrapping up the Hodgson affair, Merrill confronted yet another public outbreak of violence, this time in DeSoto Parish. A white man named Fisher, pretending to be an officer of the law, nailed up the corn crib of black man named Peter Alston, claiming to do so under legal attachment. Alston fled to Shreveport to seek help from Merrill, but his brother, John Alston, a leader among the black population and hated for it by the whites, remained and confronted Fisher and his gang when they returned to take away his brother's corn. The whites beat Alston, took him prisoner, and, once they thought they were out of sight, murdered him in cold blood, emptying their guns into his prone body. A few black bystanders, however, had followed the party by a roundabout route and witnessed the murder, which set off a rampage of white violence throughout the parish, forcing numerous blacks to flee to the woods and swamps. The white press reported nothing more than that Fisher had shot and killed Alston in the legitimate exercise of his duty on Alston's forcibly resisting arrest, a conclusion upheld by a local coroner's jury.[80]

Merrill ordered a cavalry company under Lieutenant J. M. Bell to accompany Deputy Marshal O'Neal to make arrests in the case. The first night, they succeeded in making three arrests, but when they attempted to arrest Fisher and other ringleaders over the following days, they had all fled their homes and could not be found. Bell expressed shock at finding in DeSoto "a perfect condition of lawlessness, and the negroes [...] in a continual state of terror, and hopeless as to their prospect of obtaining justice from the parish court." The whites universally belonged to the White League "and are bitter in their enmity to the blacks." Unless the federal government took prompt and severe action to punish the brutal murder of Alston, "other crimes still more atrocious will unquestionably follow." Merrill agreed, reporting that this incident merely represented an "episode in the general drift of events, and

[79] 'November 8. 1874, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,' and 'November 26, 1874, New Orleans, Packard to AG,' NARA, RG 60, M940, reel 2, frames 275, 334; 'November 22, 1874, Shreveport, Merrill to AdG,' in 43-2, CSS, *43-2*, Sen. Ex. 17, 25-29.
[80] 'November 26, 1874, Shreveport, Merrill to AdG,' in CSS, 43-2, Sen. Ex. 17, 51-53; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 179; 'December 3, 1874, Shreveport, Bell to Merrill,' CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 101, part 2, 77; ST, 74-11-26.

indicated the not distant point toward which they are shaping themselves." Eventually, he prophesied, such outrages could only result in the blacks turning on their persecutors, igniting a race war that might well conflagrate the nation.[81]

The continual disturbances and difficulties encountered by Merrill and the troops under his command, prompted him to request reinforcements from Emory. Although Emory promised to send him more troops as soon as some came available, he also received reports from other informants, "some claiming to be Republicans, [who] represent a different state of things and aver that any respectable deputy US marshal can travel through that country and serve writs without opposition or molestation." He decided to send a senior officer, Colonel H. A. Morrow, to the Red River area to provide an independent report and confirm whether reinforcements were indeed called for, as well as "the necessity of employing so large a number of troops as has been done as posse comitatus to US marshals in serving civil process."[82]

Morrow, who was inclined to gather information mostly from what he called 'respectable' and 'prominent' citizens, offered little support for Merrill's robust policies. Although he agreed with Merrill that nearly the entire white population felt "violence to any extent will be justifiable, and should be resorted to, to secure the people a change of local administrators" and that the opposition to Kellogg's regime would "manifest itself in open violence whenever and wherever it asserts itself" he also concluded that "*there is not the slightest disposition to oppose the General Government*" and that an arrangement reached between the US civil authorities and prominent citizens ensured that there would be no more need for troops in assisting federal marshals. Nor did Emory need to fear "serious disturbance of any kind – at least for the present."[83]

Morrow's final report, sent out just before Christmas, essentially confirmed these findings. The immediate threat of mass violence had abated, as law-abiding citizens had regained some control over their communities. He did not feel that any increase in troop strength was needed and even went so far as to recommend the withdrawal of forces from Alexandria, Colfax and Natchitoches. He also believed that few, if any troops would be needed in assisting federal marshals and recommended that such assistance only be provided

[81] 'December 3, 1874, Shreveport, Bell to Merrill,' 43-2 H. Rep 101, part 2, 77; 'Shreveport, 26 Nov. 1874, Merrill to AG', CSS, 43-2, Sen. Ex. 17, 51-53.
[82] 'November 28, 1874, New Orleans, Platt to Morrow,' and 'November 28, 1874, New Orleans, Emory to AGA,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1962, vol. 115DSL.
[83] 'December 11, 1874, Shreveport, Morrow to AAG,' CSS, 43-2, Sen. Ex. 17, 68.

after the marshal had actually tried and failed to make arrests unassisted, so as to prevent charges of political interference such as had been leveled against McIntosh, Hodgson, and Merrill himself. All this, however, referred only to the necessity of troops for enforcing federal law. In order to compel obedience to state authority, "troops will be required […] in nearly every section of the State."

Morrow considered the general condition of northwestern Louisiana to be unequivocally bad, the state government being unable to "maintain itself in power a single hour without the protection of federal troops." Although he claimed to have spoken with prominent citizens of all political persuasions, his report clearly reflected the sentiment of the conservative whites, blaming such conditions primarily on the corruption of Republican office holder, oppressively high taxes and even concurring in their criticism of undue interference by federal troops. Morrow's reports led Emory to conclude that the army's exiting mission "to keep the peace without the power of removing the causes which disturb it has, I think, been carried as far as practicable." He had earlier reminded Merrill that the state government and not federal troops held primary responsibility for "the peace and good order of the communities in which they are stationed" but the state authorities, even when kept in formal possession of their offices by the military, simply were not up to the task. He bluntly informed his superiors that they would have to either greatly expand the military's mandate or else "some other measure be resorted to obtain the desired end."[84]

Conclusion

The White League, through a combination of targeted violence, persistent intimidation, and effective 'marketing,' challenged both state and federal authorities for the de facto control of rural Louisiana. Nowhere was this challenge more pronounced or more violent than in the Red River Valley, which witnessed the Colfax and Coushatta massacres, the first and most vehement of the White League publications, and persistent attempts to overthrow Republican government, by intimidation if possible and by force if necessary. The state authorities, as the events in Colfax, and later at Liberty Place and Coushatta, amply demonstrated, lacked the resources to guarantee even the nominal power of its officers. Although even a small contingent of federal troops might restore order within its radius of action, the army, and the

[84] 'December 24, 1874, New Orleans, Morrow to AAG,' 'December 27, 1874, New Orleans, Endorsement by Emory', CSS, 43-2, Sen. Ex. 17, 70-74; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 197-198; 'December 3, 1874, New Orleans, Platt to Merrill' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1962, vol. 115DSL.

political forces controlling it, proved unwilling to call the White League’s bluff to place Louisiana under effective martial law. Instead, they increasingly yielded local control to the conservative whites, who commanded the necessary resources to effectively project authority at the local level.

Republicans faced an agonizing dilemma. They could either give in to the mounting pressure brought to bear on them by the White League, and thereby relinquish the control over local government, or else, they could resist, and run the realistic risk of sacrificing their lives. In either case, they increasingly lost legitimacy in the eyes of Northern politicians and federal officials, who felt disinclined to support a state government that could not effectively project its own authority. Southern whites’ propaganda provided them with a convenient excuse to justify their retreat from enforcing the civil and political rights of the black population that they had enshrined in federal law just a few years earlier.

Morrow ended his final report by prophesying that the organization of the new legislature in January 1875 would lead to renewed troubles. In fact, it led to a final embarrassment for the federal authorities in Louisiana, this time on the national stage, presaging an effective, though informal, withdrawal of federal interference beyond the absolute minimum necessary to prevent large scale riots and the collapse of the Republican state government. In combination with the results of the 1874 elections, which brought Democrats to local power in much of northern Louisiana, this spelled the effective end of Reconstruction in the Red River Valley. The combination of targeted violence and intimidation, masked behind a narrative of democratic empowerment and good government that achieved this victory, had been honed along the Red River for the previous two years.