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

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7. Towards 'Redemption'

Federal Withdrawal and the Collapse of Reconstruction (1874-1877)

On September 28, 1876, Charles Boothby, a Union veteran and Republican activist from Maine who had settled in New Orleans after the war, wrote his brother regarding the upcoming presidential and congressional elections. The Democrats, should they prove victorious, would "then have accomplished through the ballot what they failed to achieve with the sword. To be sure, they will not have destroyed the Union, but the 3,000,000 of colored people will be in a state of semi-slavery, enough of a condition of servitude to answer to all practical purposes." In the South, he predicted, blacks would no longer vote, despite being counted for the distribution of congressional representation, giving Democrats 25 extra seats in the House of Representatives. "With the restoration of the Democratic Party to power all the results of the war will be reversed. There will be no Republican Party in the South."¹

Subsequent events, in large measure, proved Boothby right, even if the formal institutionalization of segregation and disfranchisement would not be completed for nearly two decades.² By the late 1870s, the vast majority of Americans, and the politicians that represented them, preferred to abandon the cause of racial equality in the South in pursuit of political stability and national unity. Nevertheless, the election of 1876, and the subsequent political compromise that gave Hayes the presidency in exchange for 'home rule' in the South, was less of a watershed than many historians have made it out to be. Even in those states, including Louisiana, that had not been 'redeemed' earlier, the compromise simply acknowledged a *fait accompli*, rather than a sweeping change in federal policy.³

For most Louisianans, the results of the 1876 elections and the formal withdrawal of federal troops made little practical difference, even if the conservative press celebrated it as a major symbolic victory. Effective Republican rule in the Red River Valley, as in most of rural Louisiana, had collapsed well before this time, and with it whatever enforcement of racial equality that existed. The violence and intimidation of the White League had already critically

¹ 'September 28, 1876, New Orleans, Boothby to Dear Brother,' Boothby Papers, folder 2.5.

² Woodward, *Strange Career*; Goldman, *A Free Ballot and a Fair Count*.

³ Summers, *Dangerous Stir*; Downs, "The Mexicanization of American Politics." The seminal work on the 1877 compromise remains C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (Boston: Little Brown, 1951). For alternative interpretations see: Allan Peskin, "Was There a Compromise of 1877," *The Journal of American History* 60, no. 1 (1973): 63–75; Keith Ian Polakoff, *The Politics of Inertia: The Election of 1876 and the End of Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973); Gerald W. McFarland, "Another Perspective on the Compromise of 1877," *Reviews in American History* 2, no. 2 (1974): 257–61.

weakened the local Republican Party organizations along the Red River. Following the 1874 elections and the subsequent withdrawal of federal protection, conservative whites soon reclaimed practical, if not always nominal, control over local government. For the daily lives of blacks (and for the few remaining white Republicans in northwestern Louisiana), the outcome of the 1877 compromise made little difference. They had already lost sight of the political and economic opportunities that Reconstruction had briefly, and however precariously, granted them.

Balancing Terror and Politics

The rise of the White League largely coincided with, and was intimately related to, the campaign for the 1874 midterm elections for local officials, the state legislature, and Congress. In order to secure an electoral victory in majority-black Louisiana, conservative whites had to pursue a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, they needed to ensure that a sufficient number of black voters either stayed away from the polls or voted the Democratic ticket in order to neutralize the 'natural' Republican majority. The economic intimidation and bulldozing of the White League served to achieve this purpose. The relatively limited scope of terrorism, compared with that of 1868, was intended to mollify Northern public opinion and avoid federal intervention. However, this cautious approach implied that a significant number of blacks would still vote the Republican ticket. The second prong of the conservatives' strategy, therefore, involved uniting and mobilizing the white electorate to ensure a victory at the polls in November.

Michael Perman has argued that the rise of the White League in Louisiana, and similar organizations in other Southern states, signaled a turn from a 'competitive' to an 'expressive' electoral strategy. Following the unsuccessful attempt by conservative whites to regain control by violence in 1868, both Republicans and the Democrats in the South briefly competed for the political center. This resulted a convergence of their platforms, as well as intense factionalism and divisions within both parties. In the Republican Party, this resulted in the emergence of the Liberal Republican movement, which in the South attempted to woo the moderate white electorate at the expense of its predominantly black core constituency. Meanwhile, former Whigs dominated the Democratic-Conservative Party. They appealed to the same moderate white electorate, while attempting to secure an electoral basis among the

freedpeople by ostensibly supporting limited civil and political rights for the black population.⁴

This convergence reached its culmination in 1872, when the centrist Republicans, led by Warmoth, joined the conservatives to field a Fusionist ticket. The remaining 'regular' Republicans, now cleansed of their more centrist elements, pursued a more 'expressive' strategy, aimed at mobilizing their mostly black core constituency. Disappointed with the 1872 result, but encouraged by Republicans' national decline following the 1873 financial panic and political scandals, an increasing number of conservative whites argued that they should pursue a similar strategy aimed at shoring up and mobilizing their own base, rather than try to attract support from centrist Republicans. If the entire white electorate could be mobilized in support of the Democratic Party, then only a relatively small number of blacks would have to be 'persuaded' to join them or abstain from voting in order to restore white supremacy in the state. Advocates of such a 'straight-out' or 'white line' strategy gained their first victory in the summer of 1873, when conservative whites throughout the state overwhelmingly rejected the Unification movement, aimed at forging a "bipartisan and interracial" coalition that "wanted to provide a political vehicle for harmonizing the races, displacing the existing parties, and reviving the economic prosperity" of New Orleans and Louisiana.⁵

Perman argues that by the spring and summer of 1874, the White League and the straight-out strategy it represented had thoroughly defeated the Fusionists in their struggle for control of the Democratic Party. Events leading up to the Democratic convention in August of 1874, however, show that internal divisions still threatened to tear the Democratic Party apart. Despite these internal divisions, conservatives successfully developed and carried out a carefully calibrated strategy during the 1874 elections – which they repeated in 1876 – that both mobilized their core constituency and prevented a sufficient number of blacks from voting the Republican ticket to ensure a white majority, while at the same time avoiding the kind of widespread and public violence that might have provoked renewed federal intervention. The federal government, meanwhile, increasingly withdrew its support for Republican officials in the Red River Valley, limiting its involvement in Louisiana politics to

⁴ Perman, *The Road to Redemption*, pt. 1.. On the Liberal Republican movement and its role in undermining Reconstruction nationwide see: Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*.

⁵ Perman, *The Road to Redemption*, chap. 7 [quote: 154].

propping up the state government in New Orleans, which remained largely powerless to project its authority beyond the city's immediate environs.

As a result of The White League's success in northwestern Louisiana, tensions developed between conservative political activists in the region and the more moderate Democratic political establishment in New Orleans. Energized by the White League's effectiveness, political activists feared that an election campaign dominated by the more moderate Democratic Party apparatus in the state capital would dampen the momentum they had achieved. As the *Shreveport Times* editorialized, "the approaching canvass will partake, to some extent, of the character of a revolution [...] therefore we should put men in the lead who are not afraid of a revolution." Although the Fusionist legislature had been "one of the ablest and most conservative" in recent history, "its vascillations [sic.] lost the cause; its timidity betrayed the trusts the people reposed in it."⁶ With the White League's more radical strategy ascendant in northwestern Louisiana, local conservatives had no intention of repeating the same mistake.

In early June, the *Times* suggested holding the State Convention in Alexandria, instead of in New Orleans. Such a convention, it urged, should "unite democrats, reformers, liberal republicans and last-ditchers" - in other words: the entire white population of the state - "in one grand army, inspired by a single purpose, a common aspiration to redeem the State." If held in New Orleans, its editor, Albert H. Leonard, warned, but few country delegates would attend. "Professional politicians," who dominated the party in New Orleans, "must give way to an entirely different class of men, or the whole thing will be a dead failure." The *Alexandria Caucasian* and *Louisiana Democrat* quickly endorsed the proposal, citing the central location and excellent facilities of their hometown. By early July, *Democrat* editor Biossat formally issued a call for the holding of a convention in Alexandria on August 3. He reiterated the *Times* proposal for "a Convention of the people, independent of all party ties, or names, or creeds" outside the state capital. As the *Caucasian* put it: "We 'country bumpkins' have a right to have things to suit us once at least in a mighty long while."⁷

Other newspapers in northwestern Louisiana applauded the initiative and enthusiastically endorsed the call for a convention in Alexandria. The *Natchitoches People's Vindicator* identified itself as "another of the 'country bumpkins' that claim a little of the right in connection with our friend the Caucasian." New Orleans, the editor noted, had hosted state

⁶ ST, 74-07-10.

⁷ ST, 74-06-06; AC, 74-06-20, 74-06-27; LD, 74-07-08.

conventions "long enough, and as we have met with naught but defeat under the nominations made at her conventions, it is but fair that one trial should be made with a 'country' ticket." Among the conservative papers published in northwest Louisiana, only the *Bossier Banner* initially withheld its support. The editor vehemently denied allegations that its lucrative state printing contract might influence its decision, but nevertheless refrained from endorsing of the *Times*' proposal. He argued that "the ends that the Times would have brought about are [...] proper enough, but the methods it advises [...] are reprehensible." By mid-July, however, after a mass meeting of the white population of the parish heartily praised the *Times*' efforts and resolved that any state convention should be "held at some place to be designated outside of New Orleans," the *Banner* had little choice but to follow suit.⁸

The Democratic establishment in New Orleans, however, was not about to give in to the 'country bumpkins' without putting up a fight. On the same day the *Democrat* published its call for a convention in Alexandria, the Democratic State Central Committee in New Orleans issued a call for a convention in the capital, also on August 3. The language closely echoed that used by the rural newspapers' call for racial rather than party alignment, urging a convention of "all conservative voters, without reference to past political affiliations." The campaign platform proposed by the New Orleans Democrats was also similar to that of the White League conservatives, centering on resistance to "the tendency of Louisiana Radicalism [...] to establish negro supremacy," and opposition to "the incubus of excessive taxation" supposedly levied by the Republican state and local Governments.⁹ With few organizational and programmatic differences between them, the conflict over the location and nomenclature of the convention boiled down to a regional power struggle between the city and country wings of the conservative party.

Neither side, initially, seemed inclined to budge. Robert A. Hunter, a Rapides Parish delegate to the Democratic State Central Committee, published a searing rebuke to the *Democrat*'s call for a convention. By their opposition, he complained, the country parishes threatened the unity of the conservative campaign, at a time when "we cannot afford to drive one vote from us by *imprudent* denunciations." Hunter published his letter in the *Caucasian*, of which his son, Robert P. Hunter, was an editor. The paper responded the following week with an editorial, arguing that a convention at New Orleans "had not and will not accomplish the object that was intended, that of uniting the white people under the Democratic

⁸ NV, 74-07-11; BB, 74-06-13, 74-06-20, 74-07-18.

⁹ LD, 74-07-15.

standard.”¹⁰ By then it had become increasingly clear that the opposition to a New Orleans convention had garnered widespread support throughout the state. The *Vindicator* assured its readers that Natchitoches Parish would send no delegates to the state capital. The *Times* registered unanimous support from the north Louisiana press as well as at White League meetings throughout the region, and the *Democrat* claimed that four out of five country parishes would send no delegates to a convention held in New Orleans.¹¹

The New Orleans faction had little choice but to concede to the mounting pressure, or else risk a political confrontation within their own ranks that threatened to tear the party apart and strengthen the Republican regime just as it had gradually begun to crack under mounting White League pressure. On July 29, a group of Rapides citizens “identified in the past with the movement of the Democratic Party, and acknowledging still our allegiance to that Party in all its national and legitimate issues,” came out in support of the Alexandria convention. Their goal, they stated, was to prevent “the further rule of the State by corrupt and ignorant officials, and to adopt such measures, and to take such steps, regardless of old party names and party lines, as may be deemed necessary to place the government of Louisiana in the hands of her intelligent and honest citizens.”¹²

A few days later, the Committee of Seventy, a body of prominent New Orleans conservatives, urged the State Central Committee to withdraw its call for a New Orleans convention and instead suggested a convention on August 24, at the compromise location of Baton Rouge, about equidistant from New Orleans and Alexandria. The *Times* immediately ramped up the pressure on the State Central Committee, noting that seventeen country newspapers had already endorsed the Alexandria convention, and urging parish delegates to ignore the New Orleans convention if the compromise were rejected. A day later, when news had reached Shreveport that the Baton Rouge convention had been accepted, the *Times* changed its tone. White League leader and *Times* editor Albert H. Leonard reassured his readers that the conflict had nothing to do with a “spirit of hostility to the *principles* of the democratic party, with no petty country jealousy of the city, and with no schemes of our own to further.” The White League accepted “most of the principles of the democratic party, and [...] *when these principles are militant* [my emphasis] we shall support them to the best of our

¹⁰ AC, 74-07-18, 74-07-25.

¹¹ NV, 74-07-25; ST, 74-07-21, 74-07-23; LD, 74-07-22.

¹² LD, 74-07-29.

ability.” The other country papers similarly accepted the Baton Rouge compromise, ensuring conservative unity at the upcoming election.¹³

Party unity, however, did not signify universal agreement, and the White League organizers and newspaper editors along the Red River continued to exert pressure to ensure that the Baton Rouge convention would represent their views. A conservative mass meeting in Rapides only agreed to send a delegation to Baton Rouge after the convention dropped the Democratic label in favor of the White Man's Party. “Had the call been made by the Democratic Central Committee alone,” the *Caucasians* speculated, “it is doubtful whether this meeting would have sent delegates, as anxious as it was to secure peace and harmony.” When Democrats in New Orleans prevented “liberals, the White Leaguers and independents - all opposed to carpet-bag and negro rule” from participating in the election for convention delegates, Leonard immediately voiced his protest, warning that “to attempt to wrap the great uprising of the people in the garments of Louisiana democracy, would be as vain as to attempt to robe a giant in in the swaddling clothes of an infant.”¹⁴ In the end, the White Leaguers from the country parishes dominated the convention, as indicated by the nomination of one of their own, Shreveport lawyer J. C. Moncure, for state treasurer, the only statewide office at issue in the election. A subsequent White League meeting in Shreveport, organized and headed by Leonard, quickly ratified the convention proceedings without much fanfare and went on to organize for the upcoming registration.¹⁵

An Electoral Farce

All those wishing to vote in November 1874 had to renew their voter registration, and conservative whites campaigned vigorously to ensure a full registration among their supporters. Without “the solid, compact voting of every white man,” the *Democrat* warned, “we can't win. Beaten again by the inexcusable neglect of some few to do what is right and is expected of them, we may as well hang our harp on the willows, and search for the place where the wood[b]ine twineth.” Invoking the discourse of honor, Leonard's *Times* noted that those who fail to register “may have physical courage to resent an insult, but nevertheless he

¹³ ST, 74-08-01, 74-08-06, 74-08-07; LD, 74-08-12; NV, 74-08-15; AC, 74-08-08, 74-08-15.

¹⁴ AC, 74-08-15; ST, 74-08-20.

¹⁵ LD, 74-09-02; ST, 74-09-02. Michael Perman mistakenly identifies the Alexandria convention as the object of a White League boycott and the move to Baton Rouge as a maneuver by New Orleans moderates to prevent White League domination of the convention. Although no longer taking place in the White League heartland along the Red River, the Baton Rouge convention was still, as Joe Taylor has argued, “in effect [...] a White League convention.” Perman, *The Road to Redemption*, 159; Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 297.

is but half a man.”¹⁶ This proved successful in every parish, except for Natchitoches, Rapides, and Red River parishes, where a significant military presence during registration - in response to the Coushatta massacre - encouraged blacks to register, while forcing many whites to go into hiding to avoid arrest.¹⁷

Indeed, conservatives loudly and repeatedly insisted that the arrests in the fall of 1874 served no other than political purposes. *Vindicator* editor James Cosgrove's arrest, in particular, was interpreted as an attempt to muzzle the freedom of the press. More generally, conservatives claimed, Republicans used the arrests, just a few days prior to the election, to promote their partisan objectives. They cited various incidents as evidence, such as Deputy Marshal J. B. Stockton's inspection of registration books in Natchitoches and his speech to a Republican meeting there. The authorities, conservatives claimed, hoped to force those most strongly opposed to Governor William Pitt Kellogg to flee to the woods from fear of arrest, thus breaking up the Democratic leadership just prior to the election. US marshal Stephen B. Packard, who had to answer for the actions of his deputies, vehemently denied any such political motivations, noting that he explicitly ordered his deputies not to allow arrests to interfere with the rights of those arrested and to “see that they had an opportunity to vote.”¹⁸

Parishes without a military presence saw a relative increase in white registration relative to 1872. In Bienville and Winn, whites increased their registration advantage by 134 and 468 respectively. In DeSoto a 402 black majority was reduced to just 12, and in Grant a 114 black majority flipped to a white majority of 12. With White League pressure ensuring that whites would vote the Democratic ticket nearly unanimously, while at least some blacks could either be kept from the polls or persuaded to vote the Democratic ticket, a conservative victory was all but assured in these four parishes. In Bossier, Caddo, Natchitoches, Rapides, and Red River parishes, however, blacks still enjoyed a registration advantage of between 563 and 1226 voters. In order to win these parishes, whites would either have to keep blacks away from the polls en masse, or otherwise else convince or force them to vote the Democratic ticket.

Leonard staunchly opposed the courting of black votes by conservative candidates through concessions or promises of racial equality.

¹⁶ LD, 74-08-26, 74-10-21; NV, 74-09-05

¹⁷ Registration data for 1872 and 1874 collated from 'Registration and Election Statistics.'

¹⁸ NV, 10-24-74, 10-31-74; ST, 10-29-74; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 101, part 2, 24.

Every man nominated should be required to make no canvass with the negroes. The emphatic position taken in this and surrounding parishes by the whites, has set the negroes to scratching their wool, and the very effects we anticipated are being produced. But if any candidate of the white people, in his greed of office, shall go to hob-nobbing with these people, all the effects, or at least very much of the effects of the white movement will be destroyed.

In the northernmost parishes, particularly Bossier and Caddo, the primary strategy for converting the black majority at registration into a white majority at the polls was the use of economic pressure, as evidenced by the boycott petition that set off the political struggle between Major Lewis Merrill and the white conservatives of Shreveport. As a result, election day passed off relatively quietly, although Merrill warned his superiors that "threats of assassination and local disturbance, especially against leading men of Radical party, [are] constantly reported. Some, no doubt, will be carried out." He conceded, however, that "no general Riot [...] will occur at any point."¹⁹

Even Leonard, though, had no objection to appealing to black voters to support the Democratic ticket, so long as this appeal was based on criticism of the existing Republican regime, rather than on promises of concessions regarding blacks' civil and political rights. In October, a black man from Shreveport named Dudley Fox disappeared and was suspected to have been murdered. Suspicion quickly fell on Caesar Hamilton, who in 1872 had been convicted of the murder of a white man by a jury that included Fox. Hamilton's attorney had written Lieutenant Governor C. C. Antoine, a black politician from Shreveport, who had prevailed on Kellogg to pardon Hamilton.²⁰

The *Times* wasted no time in making political hay of Fox's murder. Leonard profusely praised the White League volunteer police force for quickly arresting Hamilton and an accomplice, while supposedly preventing a negro mob from lynching the men. Moreover, he hoped the case would "teach [the freedmen of this city] how infamous is radical rule in Louisiana." Would the black voters of Shreveport, he concluded, "not [be] perfectly well satisfied that Kellogg is responsible for the murder of the old man Dudley in having pardoned

¹⁹ ST, 74-07-10; 'November 4, 1874, Shreveport, Merrill to AG,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1970, vol. 151.1DSL.

²⁰ ST, 74-10-27; 'February 25, 1873, Shreveport, Scott to Antoine,' William Pitt Kellogg Papers, Mss. 195, 543, 575, LLMVC [Hereinafter: Kellogg Papers], folder 1.4.

Caesar Hamilton out of the penitentiary? And do they not know that had there been an honest white man's government in Louisiana he would not have been pardoned?"²¹

As in 1872, the actual voting results of 1874 are impossible to determine, with Republicans and Democrats each reporting their own tallies. Following the bulldozing of Republican officials in the summer and fall of 1874, White Leaguers retained de facto control of the local government machinery in many parishes along the Red River. In Rapides, for example, the candidates on the 1872 McEnery ticket took control of the local offices on September 19, following the attempted coup in New Orleans, and did not relinquish them until after the election. Conservatives thus controlled the election process in many of these parishes and subsequently claimed victories, not only in Rapides, but also in black majority Caddo and Natchitoches, and, not surprisingly, in the four parishes where whites had succeeded in out-registering blacks: Winn, Bienville, DeSoto, and Grant. The only parishes along the Red River that conservatives conceded were Red River and Bossier. The *Times* blamed the loss in Bossier on a hundred whites who refused to vote and forty who voted the Republican ticket. Even so, conservatives lost the parish by a mere handful of votes, despite a black advantage in registration of over 1100, a remarkable achievement in itself. The loss in Red River Parish, on the other hand, the *Times* blamed on Republican fraud, reporting that the Coushatta box "contained a hundred more tickets than there were voters."²²

By Christmas, the Republican-controlled Returning Board, chaired by former governor James Madison Wells, had reversed every conservative majority reported along the Red River, as well as numerous other conservative victories throughout the state, providing the Republicans with a two seat majority in the state house of representatives.²³ The long, well documented history of political fraud, violence, and intimidation practiced by conservative whites during Reconstruction - as well as the massive election frauds of the subsequent Bourbon 'restoration' - seem to amply justify the Returning Board's measures. The actual evidence from the 1874 elections in northwestern Louisiana, however, presents a more ambiguous picture. While the terrorism and economic pressure employed by conservative whites over the preceding years contributed to large numbers of blacks either staying away from the polls or voting the Democratic ticket, they did so largely in indirect ways that

²¹ ST, 74-10-30.

²² CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 101, part 2, 92, 94-95; LD, 74-11-04, 74-11-11; NV, 74-11-07; ST, 74-11-05; BB, 74-11-07.

²³ ST, 74-12-25; AC, 75-01-02. According to Taylor and others an equal number (53) of Democrats and Republican Representatives would be certified, the original Returning Board results reported along the Red River claimed a majority of two for the Republicans: Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 304.

allowed the conservative whites to portray the subsequent Returning Board proceedings as arbitrary and unjust. The Returning Board itself, moreover, contributed to this perception by making blatantly partisan decisions in order to ensure a Republican majority in the state House of Representatives.

The official results promulgated by the Returning Board suggest its partisan motivations in two distinct ways. The first is the extremely narrow margin by which the results favor the Republicans at all levels. Not only did the statewide results determined by the Board give Republicans a bare two seat majority in the legislature, but Wells and his colleagues also returned extremely slim Republican majorities in Caddo (132 votes), Natchitoches (312 votes), and Rapides (110), the three parishes where whites had claimed victory despite an average black registration majority of over a thousand. Republicans claimed that blacks, if left unmolested, would have voted the Republican ticket nearly unanimously as they had done in previous elections. However, if the Returning Board had consistently 'restored' all the votes supposedly lost due to intimidation, the Republican majorities would have ended up much higher. As it is, the Returning Board appeared to throw out exactly enough white votes to ensure a Republican majority in each parish, basing their decision on the number of votes needed rather than on concrete evidence of terrorism. The state senate race for the district comprising Natchitoches, DeSoto and Red River parishes presents another striking example of this dynamic. Here, the Board threw out just enough votes to convert Joseph B. Elam's originally reported majority of over 1400 votes into a 22 vote majority for the Republican candidate Marshall H. Twitchell.²⁴

The second indication of the Returning Board's partisan proceedings is that they threw out the results entirely for four parishes along the Red River where whites had a majority (or in the case of DeSoto a near majority) of registered voters. In the case of Grant and DeSoto such action may well have been justified. In Grant, the blacks vividly recalled the courthouse massacre perpetrated just 18 months prior. By the time registration had commenced, moreover, Supreme Court Justice Joseph P. Bradley had granted a stay of judgment in the resulting court case, severely complicating enforcement prosecutions in Louisiana. In DeSoto, meanwhile, law and order had broken down almost entirely, giving whites free reign to use any means to prevent blacks from registering and voting. It seems highly unlikely, however, that conservative whites - who by this time carefully calibrated their activities to minimize

²⁴ Results collated from 'Registration and Election Statistics'; ST, 74-12-23.

Republican and federal backlash - would have risked the use of violence and intimidation in either Winn or Bienville, parishes that they had handily won at every election since 1868 based on the comfortable white majorities in both parishes. Nevertheless, the Returning Board threw out the returns of these parishes in their entirety "for fraud and violence," in all likelihood because no combination of individual polls would have resulted in a Republican majority.²⁵

All this is not to say that the campaign of intimidation and violence pursued by the White League following the Colfax massacre did not play a critical role in determining the outcome of the 1874 elections. Indeed, the black leaders from northwestern Louisiana, after organizing their own investigation into racial violence in the region, sent a petition to President Grant in September, asserting it to be "impossible, Mr. President, for we colored people to live in the condition that we now stand in." They warned that "in some parts of the southern states the colored people has nothing to do with the laws of the southern states." A few weeks earlier, Governor Kellogg wrote both President Grant and Attorney General George Henry Williams to warn them of an "organized system of intimidation of colored voters and white Republicans." Having failed in their attempts to woo black voters away from the Republican fold, Democrats now "returned to the policy of violence and intimidation which in '68 cut down the Republican vote in this states from 75,000 to barely 6,000."²⁶

Although racially and politically motivated violence and intimidation continued to plague the region, the strategy pursued by conservatives in 1874 differed subtly but significantly from the reign of terror in 1868. Despite the ongoing intimidation and repression practiced against the black and white Republican leadership, conservative whites had developed a public facade - as Kellogg's termed it, a "flimsy attempt to cover up their real design" - that provided them with an electoral majority, while avoiding the widespread and highly visible violence that the Returning Board was intended to prevent. "The scheme," wrote US Commissioner and former district judge Aaron Levissee, "was to expel from the country the Republican leaders and thus to frighten the negroes into acquiescence."²⁷

Economic pressure played a crucial part in this strategy. Conservatives in Shreveport publicly pursued such a strategy by publishing their boycott pledge in the *Times*. After the election, landowners made good on their threats. Levissee reported employers "driving the

²⁵ Results collated from 'Registration and Election Statistics;' LD, 74-12-30.

²⁶ 'August 26, 1874, New Orleans, Kellogg to AG,' 'August 19, 1874, New Orleans, Kellogg to Grant,' and 'September 26, 1874, n.p., Anonymous to Grant,' DOJ, reel 2, frames 32, 95, 179.

²⁷ 'December 16, 1874, Shreveport, Levissee to AG,' DOJ, reel 2, frame 386.

freedmen from their homes, naked and penniless, to survive the severities of winter as best they may." He personally encountered a

colored man, of honest and intelligent expression, [whose] employer, a white man (well known to me) by force (displaying a pistol and threatening to use it) put him and his wife and three helpless children out of their house to spend their night as best they might in the [public] highway – which they did under the open canopy of heaven and what may be put down as a special aggravation of the offence is that two of the children were ill and taking medicine and one of them so ill that it was not expected to survive. These people (turned out) were partners in the crop which they had raised on the lands of the man who turned them out and the crop has not yet been divided and is all in possession of the land owner who turned them out.²⁸

Elsewhere, conservative whites shielded such economic intimidation from public scrutiny. In Rapides, which saw an extensive congressional investigation into the 1874 elections, the planter John W. Prescott told the investigators that "some of my friends, a little hot-headed [...] wanted to get an expression of opinion from the members of the party as to co-operating with each other about the non-employment of negroes who voted the radical ticket." Prescott quickly nixed the suggestion, not because he opposed it on principle, but because "it would be very impolitic to do anything of the kind, and that if we attempted anything of the kind, it would be used as a pretext for counting out our candidates after they were elected." Another planter, James Jeffries, denied any knowledge of blacks being threatened with dismissal. Such blunt and explicit threats were hardly necessary, however, as whites increasingly found more indirect, but equally effective, ways to leverage their economic power over black laborers. As Jeffries put it, whites would make to their employees

some such remark as this: that our lives and property are involved in this struggle; it is a life and death struggle for us; we are hopeless if we are not successful this time. If you go with us we consider you our friends. If you do not go with us, but vote for those who are robbing both of us, we will consider that you are instrumental in taking from us our rights and our property, and that we will have to treat you accordingly. If your family is sick, you must go to your Radical friends for medicines, and for assistance and protection. Our relations instead of being friendly and kind will be hereafter at arm's length. You will have to look to your other fiends for that charity

²⁸ Ibid.

which we have been extending to you. We will employ you and pay you your wages, and that is all.²⁹

Immediately following the election, the *Caucasian* profusely thanked those black voters "who broke loose from their old political masters [...] and joined with us on Monday last." The editor went on to urge "every planter, merchant and employer [to] give the preference in employing laborers of any kind to those colored people that supported our ticket [...] Some distinction is due, and it should be made, on every occasion." As elections generally took place in November, when annual contracts came to an end, planters could use their economic leverage without actually dismissing any laborers, but simply refusing to rehire them. "While they are perfectly free to exercise the ballot as they see fit, we have the same right to give preference to those who have exhibited a desire to relieve us of our burdens and do away with the unnatural state of affairs that has existed for the last six years."³⁰ Such an approach, which veiled economic blackmail behind the discourse of free labor, was far less likely to attract federal interference than physically and violently running laborers of the plantation, even though the effect was practically indistinguishable.

In the atmosphere of intimidation created by the White League over the summer of 1874, such relatively subtle pressure may well have sufficed for many of the freedpeople to vote the Democratic ticket or simply to stay home on election day. Even Republican witnesses, such as Stephen B. Packard and State Senator George Y. Kelso, admitted that far more blacks had voted the Democratic ticket in Rapides and elsewhere than at previous elections, explaining this as a direct consequence of White League violence and economic intimidation.³¹ Numerous conservative whites - as well as Christopher Hunt, a black Methodist minister who had come into conflict with the Republican organization during the campaign - told a different story. They argued that Republican mismanagement at the local level had created fissures within the black electorate, which conservative whites exploited in order to create a biracial electoral majority. Conservatives routinely made such claims, but these witnesses presented far more precise complaints than the usual White League propaganda, including the loss of \$10,000 from the school fund deposited in a bank that failed, and the subsequent refusal by Republican school board members to take responsibility; high taxes that both affected black directly and also created downwards pressure on laborers'

²⁹ CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 101, part 2, 44, 52.

³⁰ AC, 74-11-07.

³¹ CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 101, part 2, 24, 28-29, 45.

wages; and, finally, dissatisfaction among rank-and-file Republicans with the parish leadership.³²

Other white witnesses emphasized the collapse of law and order, and particularly the inability of the Republican sheriff John DeLacy to execute the laws. As Jeffries put it:

For the last two or three years we have had a judiciary which has failed to inspire respect in the community, and has failed to enforce its decrees. We have had a sheriff who has failed to execute writs placed in his hands; in fact, we have been compelled to fall back upon natural law for protection, and the colored people in that country argued about it in this way: They say that these white people whom we have been supporting have failed to give us protection. For instance, a very little while ago a colored man was killed by a drunken white man on the borders of the town. No arrests were made at the time or since. Now we told these people that we would give them as good government, and that they should have full protection; that heretofore we have had no part or parcel in the administration of justice; that the men whom they had placed in power had failed to administer the law, but if they placed in our hands the offices of the parish we would give them protection, and see that they were secure in their rights, and that they would have such security as would protect them.³³

By November 1874, militant whites had demonstrated that they held de facto political control along the Red River Valley by driving off Republican officials and preventing those who remained in office from carrying out their duties. Conservatives, for instance, continuously drew attention to the unpopularity of Republican sheriff DeLacy, because he failed to effectively apprehend offenders. Republicans insisted that he dared not for fear of reprisals by a white community that already detested him for marrying a black woman. Such distinctions, however, would have mattered little to some of the blacks by 1874, who simply saw that Republicans lacked the wherewithal to make good on their election promises. Blacks similarly may have resented the poll tax, regardless of the fact that its imposition was likely a political ploy by the independent tax collector, Michael Legras, and his Democratic deputy, John M. Barret, to discredit the Republican regime.³⁴ By election time, moreover, whites had

³² Ibid., 53, 88, 93, 98, 99, 102, 104, 135-136. See also: AC, 74-05-02, 74-05-09; Jerry Purvis Sanson, "White Man's Failure: The Rapides Parish 1874 Election," *Louisiana History* 31, no. 1 (1990): 41-42.

³³ Ibid., 49.

³⁴ Ibid., 53; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 518; AC, 74-07-04, 74-12-23; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 101, part 2, 93, 104.

taken control of most of the parish offices, demonstrating the powerlessness of Republicans in the face of persistent white opposition.

With whites in effective political control of the parish, and the Republican Party both powerless and divided, a significant number of black voters may have decided to stay at home on election day or to vote the Democratic ticket. Even if they did not anticipate immediate dismissal or violent reprisal for voting the Republican ticket, they may have calculated that supporting the conservatives who held political control regardless offered greater benefits than supporting a Republican Party that lacked the resources to implement the greater racial equality it advocated. No doubt, Republican ineffectiveness was itself largely the result of persistent, and often violent, white resistance that had decapitated and driven off the party's most competent leadership and undermined its ability to effectively govern by refusing to recognize its courts, obey its officials, or pay its taxes. Nevertheless, on election day itself, whites could credibly claim that blacks had voluntarily voted for their candidates. Indeed, Lieutenant E. A. Belger, in command of troops in Rapides, reported a fair and quiet elections, either unaware of or uninterested in the atmosphere of violence and intimidation that had characterized the preceding months.³⁵

Joe Gray Taylor has correctly concluded that "there is no way [...] to determine who won the election of 1874 in Louisiana." Although scholars of Louisiana Reconstruction agree that significant numbers of blacks voted the conservative ticket or stayed away from the polls, the role that intimidation played remains impossible to determine.³⁶ In the absence of independent black testimony the above conclusions regarding black voting and its motivations must remain tentative. In any case, conservative whites, who had claimed that Republican officials had held office as usurpers ever since the 1872 elections, had no intention of simply acquiescing in the Returning Board results that denied them not only a majority in the state legislature but also prevented them from legally reclaiming political control of the parishes along the Red River. They vociferously attacked the Returning Board, employing the kind of incendiary rhetoric that they had tempered prior to the election.

The *Times* set the tone with an editorial published in mid-November insisting that "the Returning Board cannot change the count of a single precinct, without perpetrating fraud and

³⁵ 'November 4, 1874, Alexandria, Belger to AAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Canby, letters sent 1873-1877, vol. 2. Ted Tunnell has made a similar argument in relation to black voting patterns two years later: Ted Tunnell, "The Negro, the Republican Party, and the Election of 1876 in Louisiana," *Louisiana History* 7, no. 2 (1966): 106.

³⁶ Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 302-303; Dawson, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*, 189; Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields*, 166.

violating the constitution and the most sacred rights of the people." Leonard warned that "unless they return the elections as they were returned at the polls, they and those they seek to 'count in,' will pay the forfeit with their lives." The White Leaguers who had fought at Liberty Place would take care of the Board members in New Orleans, and in the individual parishes "the people should use hemp or fall on the defeated candidates counted in." For the candidates along the Red River, the threats were personal:

If Geo. L. Smith is counted in over W. M. Levy, or if Twitchell is counted in over Elam, let Smith and Twitchell be killed; if Johnson and Tyler, in DeSoto, are counted in over Scales and Schuler [...] or if Keeting, Levissee and Johnson in Caddo are counted in over Vaughan, Horan and Land, then let Johnson, Tyler, Keeting, Levissee and Johnson be killed.³⁷

Wilbur F. Blackman, from Alexandria, expressed similar sentiments in a personal letter. "We are in a hell of a fix," he wrote, "and I see no way of righting matters but by taking the bull by the horns and killing off all the rascals that intrude into office." He saw no alternative to "anarchy for two years, no courts, no law, and dam it, - but little money - or I would leave the country."³⁸

Conservative papers throughout the region echoed such sentiments, albeit in less explicit terms. Biossat's *Democrat* labeled the Returning Board "a gross cheat and fraud" on which "Republicanism, again defeated in Louisiana as in 1872" depended for its victory. The Republican candidates in the parish themselves admitted defeat, the paper claimed, and "if any one of them shall change his mind and try his hand on our people, his punishment will come so swift and sure that a lightning flash won't be a circumstance to it." The *Vindicator* argued that the Returning Board's actions legitimized the White League's resistance to the Kellogg government after the fact. The editor expressed conservative whites' determination "from this hour to *never pay to that government one dollar of Taxes*, and we will resist its officers *to the death who attempt to enforce it*." The *Caucasian*, meanwhile, drummed up L. J. Kennedy, a black commissioner of elections, to write an open letter asserting that large numbers of blacks voted the Democratic ticket voluntarily, and calling on the blacks of Rapides to "meet in a mass meeting, and denounce publicly the fraud of the Returning Board

³⁷ ST, 74-11-15.

³⁸ 'December 26, 1874, Alexandria, Blackman to Dear Judge,' Anderson McNutt Estate Papers, Mss. 4187, LLMVC.

and let the whole world know that the colored race in this parish, are not responsible for its wrongs.”³⁹

Such vicious editorials, as well as personal observation, led Colonel Henry A. Morrow to conclude that

local disturbances of a very serious character may take place in the event of the returning-board [...] ruling the votes of parishes for mere technical reasons. Already all influential and respectable citizens concur fully and entirely in the view that violence to any extent will be justifiable, and should be resorted to secure to the people a change of local administrators to which they claim they are entitled, as the result of the late election.⁴⁰

Merrill concurred, warning superiors that such a “determination appears well settled and so generally expressed and approved by a large majority of whites that I doubt not it is more than idle threat.” In Caddo, he predicted, most local officials elected on the Republican ticket, except maybe the parish judge, a “man of courage and coolness,” would refuse to take up their office out of fear of retribution, while those Republicans who left for New Orleans to take their seats in the legislature would be murdered if they returned.⁴¹

As it turned out, the conflict over the results of the 1874 elections came to a head in New Orleans, before local conflicts in northwestern Louisiana could escalate to the point of violence. When the new legislature met in early January, both Conservatives and Republicans claimed a majority that would entitle them to control of the House of Representatives. The initial strong response by federal authorities in support of the Republican regime soon backfired, precipitating the de facto withdrawal of federal interference from state affairs, a full two years before President Hayes formally ended the military presence in Louisiana.

The Banditti Backlash

The four parishes along the Red River that the Returning Board threw out entirely (Bienville, DeSoto, Grant, and Winn) complicated Louisiana politics immensely when the new state legislature met for the first time on January 4, 1875. As no legal results existed for these parishes, five seats in the house for representatives remained unoccupied. It fell to the other

³⁹ LD, 74-11-25, 74-12-02, 74-12-16; NV, 74-12-26; AC 75-01-02.

⁴⁰ ‘December 11, 1874, Shreveport, Morrow to AAG,’ CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 101, part 2, 78.

⁴¹ ‘December 30, 1874, Shreveport, Merrill to AG,’ enclosed in ‘January 6, 1875, New Orleans, Sheridan to Belknap,’ NARA, RG 94, M666, file 1874-3579, reel 173, frame 110.

members to determine the outcome of these elections, which would determine the chamber's majority. Conservatives quickly seized control of the chaotic proceedings, claiming to elect Louis Wiltz as speaker, despite procedural objections. Wiltz then seated the conservative candidates present from the disputed districts, as well as conservative representatives from Caddo and Rapides, which seats the Returning Board had declared for the Republicans. A number of Republican representatives then walked out in an attempt to prevent a quorum, but conservatives nevertheless proceed to organize the House under their own leadership.

Federal troops, under the command of Colonel P. Régis de Trobriand, initially assisted Wiltz and his Conservative allies by clearing the corridors of the state building of a crowd that protested against the irregular proceedings. Soon, however, Kellogg requested Trobriand to clear the legislature of members not officially approved by the Returning Board. Trobriand, aware of the gravity of this request, insisted on receiving written orders from his superior before acting. He subsequently removed eight representatives, three from Caddo, three from Rapides and one each from Grant and Winn. All but one insisted that an armed soldier escort him out and entered a lengthy verbal protest before retiring.⁴²

The following day, Trobriand's superior, General Phillip H. Sheridan, whom Grant had sent to Louisiana in response to reports of unrest, backed up the colonel's firm actions with even stronger words. He telegraphed Secretary of War William W. Belknap that he could preserve the peace with the military forces available, requesting that "Congress [...] declare the White League and other similar organizations banditti." This would allow the military authorities to arrest and prosecute the leadership of these organizations under martial law, and, as a result, Sheridan predicted, "the terrorism now existing in Louisiana, Mississippi and Arkansas could be entirely removed."⁴³

Later that week, Sheridan sent a more extensive report in defense of such a policy. He claimed that in the course of Reconstruction, in Louisiana alone, whites had murdered or severely assaulted nearly 3500, mostly black, victims, half of them in the explosion of

⁴² Taylor records Trobriand as removing the five members seated from disputed districts. Both Trobriand's report and a newspaper report in the *Alexandria Caucasian*, however, refer to eight Representatives being removed, with the latter source recording their names and the parishes they represented. Apparently the Conservatives had not only seated the members present from DeSoto, Grant, Bienville, and Winn, but also the Conservative members they claimed had been elected in Caddo and Rapides. Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 305; 'January 6, 1875, New Orleans, Trobriand to AAG, Official Report of the Events of January 5, 1875, in New Orleans,' in Marie Caroline Post, *The Life and Mémoires of Comte Régis de Trobriand, Major General in the Army of the United States, By his Daughter* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1910), 445-452, 450-451; AC, 75-01-09.

⁴³ 'January 5, 1875, New Orleans, Sheridan to Belknap' and 'January 5, 1875, New Orleans, Sheridan to Belknap,' Sheridan Papers, reel 6, frames 418 and 419.

violence leading up to the November 1868 election. Political motives lay at the root of over 1200 of these attacks, and in the vast majority of cases the civil authorities had been unable or willing to take action. As a result

in but a few of the country parishes can it truly be said that the law is properly enforced and in some of the parishes, the judges have not been able to hold court for the past two years. Human life in this state is held so cheaply that when men are killed on account of political opinions the murderers are regarded rather as heroes than as criminals.

The bad government that conservatives complained of, Sheridan continued,

is the result of the armed organizations which have now crystallized into what is called the White League. Instead of bad government developing them, they have by their terrorism prevented to a considerable extent the collection of taxes, the holding of courts, [and] the punishment of criminals.⁴⁴

Republicans from the South applauded Sheridan's firm actions and firmer words. "How entirely ridiculous are the howls and indignation of Rebs and Democrats over being called a name," John Hammond, a Southerner living in Chicago, wrote the general.

You call one name against their mountain of slang and Billingsgate. Why, General, cannot the Northern public comprehend that when Rebels and Democrats speak of the people of the South and their rights, they mean the Rebel people? [...] Anyone who imagines that Kuklux, carpetbag denunciations and murders of negroes and white Republicans, and white league are more individual and local outbreaks, is not alive to the situation. On the contrary, there is a well-defined plan and powerful combination to put the government in the hands of the late rebels.⁴⁵

In a thorough analysis of the national debate sparked by Sheridan's banditti telegram, Carole T. Emberton argues that the general was a "deft verbal swordsman," who consciously used such terms to "strip[...] the White League of their moral authority" and "place[...] their campaign outside the boundaries of legitimate protest." By labelling the white terrorists, not Republican officeholders, as the true criminals in Louisiana, Sheridan hoped the national state would bring its full force to bear in suppressing them. "A stronger backbone is what Sheridan

⁴⁴ 'January 10, 1875, New Orleans, Sheridan to Belknap,' NARA, RG 94, M666, file 1874-3579, reel 173, frame 384.

⁴⁵ 'January 7, 1875, Chicago, Hammond to Sheridan,' John H. Hammond Letter, Mss. 2232, LLMVC.

offered his party," as Republicans from President Grant on down sought to "reconcile the use of physical force with the process of democratization."⁴⁶

Grant and Belknap initially supported Sheridan, informing the Senate on January 13 that

if error has been committed by the Army in these matters, it has always been on the side of the preservation of good order, the maintenance of law, and the protection of life. Their bearing reflects credit upon the soldiers, and if wrong has resulted, the blame is with the turbulent element surrounding them.

Sheridan, meanwhile, backed up his claims of political terror a few months later with an extensive "list of persons killed and wounded in the State of Louisiana since the close of the late war from causes arising out of the political condition of affairs in that State." Soon, however, "Grant found himself in an untenable situation as the negative reaction exploded."⁴⁷

In the end, Sheridan's insistence on a "vigorous counterinsurgency strategy" found support neither among leading Republican policymakers, nor among the military establishment. After engineering the removal of General Emory, whom he considered unreliable in his support of Reconstruction and the Louisiana Republicans, Sheridan had General Christopher Columbus Augur appointed in his stead. As it turned out, however, Augur belonged to "a growing number of senior officers who no longer supported the bygone Radical views on Reconstruction that had once dominated the thinking of the commanders of the five Military Districts." Sheridan's forceful actions not only isolated him from the mainstream current of thinking among the national political and military leadership, but also shocked Northern public opinion, undermining electoral support even for a more modest military role in the former Confederacy. In the aftermath of Trobriand's intervention, US District Attorney James R. Beckwith predicted that any federal support for Kellogg's state government would inevitably "result in unpleasant complications and must become the stock and trade of liars and slanderers working for political and party purposes."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Emberton, "Politics of Protection," 256, 269–270, 275, 276, and chap. 5.

⁴⁷ CSS, 43-2, Sen. Ex. 13, 8. For Sheridan's report in support of his claims of white violence see: 'July 22, 1875, Chicago, Sheridan to Forsyth,' in CSS, 44-2, HOR. Ex. 30, 456. The accompanying list of political outrages is reprinted in *Ibid.*, 458-541. On Grant's tepid support for Sheridan in the face of hostile public opinion, see: Emberton, "Politics of Protections," 278-282.

⁴⁸ Hogue, *Uncivil War*, 158; Dawson, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*, 213–215, 216–218; 'January 9, 1875, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,' DOJ, reel 2, frame 412.

Conservative immediately grasped the significance of the moment. The *Democrat* cynically applauded Sheridan's and Trobriand's actions, predicting that

the audacious and utterly illegal conduct of Sheridan will do for stricken Louisiana what nothing else could do so effectually. It will compel the American people to make our case their own. From one end of this country to the other a spirit will be aroused [...] that will bring military despotism to its senses. [...] The trooper of the Shenandoah will prove to be the executioner of his master.⁴⁹

Such optimism proved justified. Over the next two years, the federal government increasingly refrained from interfering in civil affairs, protecting Republican officials, or enforcing racial equality in Louisiana, beyond ensuring that Kellogg maintained nominal control of the state government in New Orleans. The army, the Department of Justice and congressional investigators all retained a presence in Louisiana, but their passivity stands in marked contrast to the relatively vigorous enforcement policies pursued by Merrill, Sheridan, Packard, Beckwith, and other federal officials in the months leading up to and the weeks following the 1874 elections.

In fact, many local military commanders had begun to retreat from enforcement even earlier, reflecting the army's changing priorities as Radical Republicanism faded from political prominence in the mid-1870s. Major E. A. Belger, and Captain S. D. Parker, commanding in Rapides and Caddo respectively, personified these changes. Both men proudly disavowed any inference that their men had interfered in the 1874 elections or otherwise influence the political situation. Parker assured his superiors that his troops had merely been near the polls and not "at them," which "could not be constructed by unprejudiced persons as a partisan measure in any sense whatever." Belger sent small detachments to a number of election precincts, but in the absence of open violence during the elections they returned "without any trouble." Belger, who prided himself on being ignorant of politics, assured his superiors that "the people in this section of country are peaceable and law abiding. I have heard no complaint of breaches of the law or of crimes having been committed and gone unpunished." Conservatives gratefully quoted Belger's reports during the

⁴⁹ LD, 75-01-13.

subsequent congressional investigation to bolster their argument that the elections had been fair and peaceful.⁵⁰

Such a passive attitude towards Reconstruction soon spread throughout the military leadership. The military records clearly illustrate the reduced priority given to enforcing Reconstruction in the aftermath of the 1874 election. Although a substantial amount of military correspondence has been preserved for the years 1875 and 1876, both from departmental headquarters in New Orleans and from various posts and detachments along the Red River, none of these concern military involvement in civil affairs, the enforcement of Reconstruction, or the protection of Republicans and freedpeople from violence and intimidation. Both a volume of letters sent and one of telegrams received at the departmental headquarters during 1875 and 1876 - including correspondence with posts at Shreveport, Colfax, Natchitoches, and Alexandria - relate exclusively to routine matters of finance, military discipline, troop movement, and supplies. The same applies to collections of letters sent from posts at Shreveport, Alexandria, and Natchitoches between the spring of 1875 and the elections in November 1876.⁵¹

When Lieutenant, and at that point acting, Governor C. C. Antoine asked for federal troops to act as a *posse comitatus* in response to a violent outburst in West Feliciana parish in the spring of 1876, Augur bluntly denied his request. He reminded Antoine "of the limitation of the right of US Troops to interfere in the internal affairs of a state." Only a formal appeal through the president, as mandated by the constitution would allow the military to interfere, no matter "how desirable or useful [such interference] might be."⁵² Troops briefly left their camps in November 1876 to keep the peace during the presidential elections, but their order explicitly prohibited them from "offensively or unduly meddling with local or political affairs." Except under exceptional circumstances, troops were to remain in barracks on election day. Local commanders generally sent down reports of peace and quiet throughout the region, which subsequently served to legitimize conservatives' claims that they no longer

⁵⁰ 'November 4, 1874, Alexandria, Belger to AAG,' and 'November 30, 1874, Alexandria, Belger to AAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Canby, letters sent 1873-1877, vol. 2; 'January 21, 1875, Shreveport, Parker to AAAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Shreveport, letters sent 1874-1876, vol. 2; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 101, part 2, 41, 103.

⁵¹ NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1965, vol. 42, passim; NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1962, vol. 115DSL, passim; NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Natchitoches, letters sent 1875-1876, vols. 1 and 2, passim; NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Shreveport, letters sent 1874-1876, vols. 1 and 2, passim; NARA, RG 393, part 5, Post Canby, letters sent 1873-1877, vols. 2 and 3, passim.

⁵² 'May 16, 1875, New Orleans, Augur to Antoine,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1962, vol. 115DSL.

needed to engage in violence and intimidation in order to win elections, in much the same way that Belger's reports had done in 1874.⁵³

Within days of that final election of the Reconstruction era, the departmental command in New Orleans ordered most of the military forces in northwestern Louisiana to break up their posts and return to the city, leaving just a token force of a single company at Pineville.⁵⁴ By December, the military commander in Monroe, just east of the Red River Valley, where troops also remained, warned that

the 'moral influence' resulting from the presence of the United States troops, of which so much has been said and written, if it ever existed, is being rapidly dissipated, and [...] these men, feeling assured through agencies of partisan newspapers, of being sustained by a large proportion of the political party, north and south, with which they affiliate, will only be restrained from execution of their unlawful designs by actual and sufficient physical force.⁵⁵

In early March, outgoing President Grant's private secretary informed Packard, the Republican claimant to the Louisiana governorship, that the military would no longer "support the maintenance of state government in Louisiana." Two months later, on May 14, 1877, the last troops, including those at Pineville, received orders to "break up your post and proceed with all public stores and property to Jackson barracks."⁵⁶ Although the conservative press trumpeted this final and official removal of troops from Louisiana as a major victory, conservative whites had, in reality, experienced little hindrance from the military presence for two years previous. The *Democrat* acknowledged as much when it sent the last company off with an editorial expressing "the common and outspoken sentiment of our community, when we assert, that take the command, from its highest officer down to the lowest private, they have all the time here behaved like true soldiers, and that we all regret, on a personal grounds,

⁵³ 'September 22, 1876, New Orleans, AAG to post commanders, Circular 10' and 'November 1, 1876, AAG to post commanders, circular 18,' NARA, RG 94, M666, file 1876-4788, reel 298; 'November 7, 1876, Shreveport, Clapp to AG,' 'November 7, 1876, Coushatta, Hannay to AAG,' 'November 7, 1876, Natchitoches, Hobart to AG,' 'November 7, 1876, Alexandria, Chipman to AG,' and 'November 8, 1876, Colfax, Belger to AAG,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1970, vol. 154DSL.

⁵⁴ 'November 9, 1876, New Orleans, Augur to Clapp,' 'November 10, 1876, New Orleans, Augur to Clapp,' 'November 11, 1876, New Orleans, AAG to commanding officer Natchitoches,' and 'November 13, 1876, New Orleans, AAG to commanding officer Pineville,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1965, vol. 142.

⁵⁵ 'December 15, 1876, Monroe, Hale to AAG,' NARA, RG 94, M666, file 1876-4788, reel 299.

⁵⁶ 'March 6, 1877, Washington, DC, Sniffen to Packard,' NARA, RG 94, M666, file 1876-4788, reel 300; 'May 14, 1877, New Orleans, AAG to Commander Post Pineville,' NARA, RG 393, part 1, entry 1965, vol. 142.

their leaving here.” The editor singled out Belger, and his successor Penrose, for especial praise, styling them “gentlemen of the old army *regime*.”⁵⁷

The army was not the only federal institution to tread water during the final years of Reconstruction. In June of 1874, following an earlier mistrial, United States District Attorney Beckwith had succeeded in winning a hard-fought conviction of Bill Cruickshank, James Hadnot, and Bill Irving for their involvement in the massacre of dozens of blacks at the Colfax courthouse more than a year earlier. During the preliminary hearings, Supreme Court Justice Bradley, while ‘riding circuit,’ had taken the bench alongside local federal judge William B. Woods and shown himself amenable to the defense’s constitutional objections in the case. These objections centered on the contention that the court had no jurisdiction under the Enforcement Acts, because the indictment did not explicitly specify race as a motivation for the alleged crimes. Following the convictions, Bradley returned to New Orleans and promptly allowed the defense’s motion for arrest of judgment on these grounds. Woods dissented, making an appeal to the full bench of the Supreme Court all but inevitable. In the meantime, the judge had no choice but to release the convicted men, who returned to northwestern Louisiana as heroes.⁵⁸

On March 27, 1876, the Supreme Court issued a ruling upholding Bradley’s earlier decision. That same day, the court also declared Sections 3 and 4 of the Enforcement Act unconstitutional in its decision of *United States v. Reese*, a voting rights case originating in Kentucky. Although the Department of Justice would continue to pursue cases in support of black voting rights following these judicial defeats, the Supreme Court’s action in these cases significantly undermined the judicial enforcement of Reconstruction in the crucial years between 1874 and 1876, at the same time that the army quietly began beating a retreat in the South, and public support for Reconstruction evaporated in the North.⁵⁹

Well before the court’s final decision in the Cruickshank case, moreover, Bradley’s decision to grant the arrest of judgment had paralyzed the efforts by Beckwith and US

⁵⁷ LD, 77-04-24, 77-05-23; ST, 77-04-25.

⁵⁸ Lane, *Day Freedom Died*, chap. 9; Goldman, *Reconstruction and Black Suffrage*, chap. 3; LD, 74-07-01.

⁵⁹ Goldman, *A Free Ballot and a Fair Count*, chap. 7. The Supreme Court’s decision built on jurisprudence established in another landmark Civil Rights case that had emerged in Louisiana. In these so-called *Slaughterhouse* cases, the Supreme Court had already vastly limited the scope of protection offered by the Fourteenth Amendment by restricting its ‘due process’ and ‘equal protection’ clauses to rights conveyed by national, rather than state citizenship: Goldman, *Reconstruction and Black Suffrage*, 101, 103; Labbé and Lurie, *Slaughterhouse Cases*; Ross, “Justice Miller’s Reconstruction.” On the role of the Supreme Court in dismantling Reconstruction’s civil rights agenda in general see: Donna A. Barnes and Catherine Connolly, “Repression, the Judicial System, and Political Opportunities for Civil Rights Advocacy during Reconstruction,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1999): 327–45.

Marshall Packard to pursue any further prosecution of those suspected of violating the Enforcement Acts. Conservatives, on the other hand, welcomed the judgment from a federal judiciary, which, until then, they had experienced mostly as an “engine of oppression of every man who refuses to bend the knee to the Radical Baal.” In August, Governor Kellogg warned President Grant that Bradley’s decision, in combination with the president’s refusal to support Republicans in neighboring Arkansas and Texas, would lead to an increase in political violence, beyond the state authorities’ ability to suppress. Beckwith, meanwhile, complained that Bradley’s action had “placed US officers in a most unpleasant situation from the vagueness of the opinion as published. Inferences against the jurisdiction of the federal courts and the power of the federal government of the broadest character are drawn by those who engage in or countenance violence.” The White League, Beckwith believed, “sprang into life or received their only vitality from the action of Justice Bradley.” The entire organization “would never have existed but for his action and the immunity supposed to be found in his opinion of the law in that case.”⁶⁰

In response, Beckwith urgently appealed to the attorney general in Washington to pursue an early trial in the Cruickshank case, as further prosecutions under the Enforcement Act would be useless until the matter was settled. “I am very much embarrassed by Justice Bradley’s action,” Beckwith complained. He feared that jurors would use it as an excuse to acquit those suspected of political violence, especially when they “apprehend personal danger or inconvenience in event of a guilty verdict.” This was no abstract conjecture. On the same day he made his request, Beckwith reported on his investigation of the Coushatta massacre, of which “the details are more horrible and inhuman than the newspaper accounts.” Prosecutions, however, would be unless and until the Supreme Court reversed Bradley’s ruling, which

combined with the terrorism resulting from repeated acts of barbarity perpetrated for purposes of intimidation, will render it impossible to get a jury of sufficient courage in this district to punish even the Coushatta outrage. Jurors will seize upon the slightest pretext or excuse for avoiding responsibility. Any trial under current conditions will be but an expensive mockery. In the case Grant or Coushatta murderers are arrested,

⁶⁰ BB, 74-07-11; ST, 74-07-18; LD, 74-07-15; ‘August 19, 1874, New Orleans, Kellogg to Grant,’ ‘October 5, 1874, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,’ ‘October 7, 1874, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,’ and ‘October 27, 1874, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,’ DOJ, reel 2, frames 95, 186, 194, 256.

they should not be put on trial until after the supreme court decision, even if this means admitting them to bail.⁶¹

In February 1875, ten men indicted in connection with the Colfax case petitioned Attorney General Williams in Washington to instruct Beckwith to enter a plea of *nolle prosequi*. They claimed to “have been maliciously and illegally endangered in their rights of liberty and pursuits of usual avocations” by the indictments and warrants against them. They enclosed dozens of pages of affidavits to prove they had been nowhere near Colfax on Easter Sunday. They also challenged the jurisdiction of the federal court in New Orleans, which “subjects them to very great expense, deprives them of consulting counsel,” and infringes on “their right to trial in a local court, situated at a reasonable distance from the place where the crimes were allegedly committed.”⁶² These men couched their petition in general legal arguments and made no reference recent judicial and political events. The petition’s timing nevertheless suggests that their actions were influenced by Bradley’s decision and the political fallout from the Trobriand and banditti imbroglio. Why else would they have waited a year-and-a-half before making their complaint, if not for the political winds to change in their favor?

Judicial enforcement of Reconstruction was further complicated when US District Judge Edward H. Durrell resigned in December of 1874. A year later, no replacement had yet been appointed, prompting Beckwith to complain that a “large amount of important business [remains] unattended, some of which US is interested party in.”⁶³ Clearly, the enforcement of Reconstruction was no longer a priority of the Republican administration in Washington, and most of Beckwith’s correspondence for the years 1875 and 1876 refers to various civil cases with only sporadic mention of either criminal proceedings or related political matters, most importantly a suit brought by conservatives against Sheridan, Trobriand and Emory. While Louisiana would see significant judicial action based on the Enforcement Acts in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Bradley’s intervention effectively nullified the only such convictions obtained in the state during Reconstruction and prevented the prosecution of any more such cases in the crucial years between 1874 and 1876.

⁶¹ ‘October 17, 1874, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,’ and ‘October 27, 1874, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,’ DOJ, reel 2, frames 222, 256.

⁶² ‘n.d., n.p., Strong et al. to Department of Justice,’ enclosed in ‘February 5, 1875, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,’ DOJ, reel 2, frame 439.

⁶³ ‘December 1, 1874, New Orleans, Durrell to AG,’ ‘February 22, 1875, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,’ ‘December 27, 1875, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,’ and ‘January 24, 1876, New Orleans, Beckwith to AG,’ DOJ, reel 2, frames 362, 509, 729, 763.

Like the executive and judicial branches, Congress also withdrew much of its support for Reconstruction in the years following the 1874 election. In part, this was the inevitable result of Republicans' massive losses in these election, which gave control of the House to the Democrats for the first time since the Civil War and reduced the Republican majority in the Senate from 35 to 19 seats. Regardless of their numerical decimation, however, the actions of Republican congressmen who visited Louisiana as members of congressional investigations during this period clearly indicate that their highest priority was not the protection of their fellow party-members and the black electorate in the South.

The first indication of this shift came with the sub-committee of George F. Hoar's Select Committee on the Condition of the South, which the lame duck Republican majority sent to New Orleans in December of 1874 to investigate the recent elections there. Although the sub-committee numbered two Republicans, Charles Foster and William Walter Phelps, and just one Democrat, Clarkson N. Potter, they unanimously reported that "no general intimidation of republican voters was established." They argued that

frequent arrests by the United States marshals for intimidation or threats of non-employment, and the apprehension that was felt that the returning-board would count out their men if excuse for such a course were offered, all combined [...] to put the conservatives on their good behavior, and the result was that *in November, 1874, the people of the State of Louisiana did fairly have a free, peaceable, and full reregistration and election in which a clear conservative majority was elected to the lower house of the legislature, of which majority the conservatives were deprived by the unjust, illegal, and arbitrary action of the Returning Board.*⁶⁴

The methods employed by the investigators to reach these conclusions were dubious at best. Regarding northwestern Louisiana they took testimony only on the relatively peaceful parish of Rapides, collecting no evidence from the much more violent parishes farther north. The Republican House leadership subsequently sent the entire select-committee to New Orleans, in hope of its reaching a more politically favorable conclusion before Democrats took over control of the House. Such hopes, however, proved ill founded. The committee's second Democratic member, Samuel S. Marshall, joined the three members of the sub-committee in a majority report that once again denied any widespread violence or intimidation of colored voters and declared the 1874 elections to have been free and fair, thus confirming

⁶⁴ CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 101, 5, 8, 12 [my emphasis].

the narrative presented by Louisiana's conservative whites who claimed to have one the election fair and square.⁶⁵

Chairman Hoar, along with fellow Republicans William A. Wheeler and William P. Frye disagreed, but their minority report did not endorse the state Republicans nearly as ringingly as the majority report did the Democrats. They acknowledged the deleterious effect of the widespread use of violence and intimidation - both in the immediate run-up to the election but also in earlier years - on blacks' ability to safely vote as they pleased. As a result, they concluded that "the election of 1874 was neither full, free, nor fair [...] and that many more voters than were needed to give the republican party a complete victory were prevented from voting at all or coerced into voting the white man's ticket." What the minority report gave to Louisiana Republicans with one hand, however, it immediately retracted with the other. The report went on to conclude that the Returning Board had gravely overstepped its legal authority in effectively nullifying the election results and handing the legislature to Republicans and, en passant, declared the order by Judge Durrell that had placed Kellogg in the governor's mansion in 1873 to have been illegal.⁶⁶

The Republican minority report, in essence, declared the political situation in Louisiana to be an insoluble mess. It admitted that

it is not strange that the Republicans of Louisiana should delude themselves by any plausible views of laws which will enable them to occupy the places which they believe the will of a majority of the legal voters of the State, if free from violence and intimidation, would award to them. It is not strange that the democrats of Louisiana should believe the whole State government a usurpation, should give it no credit for its best acts, should seek to embarrass, and thwart and resist it to the extent of their power, and should be unwilling to wait for the slow but sure operation of lawful remedies to cure whatever evil really belongs to it.⁶⁷

Such a Solomon's judgment, however judicious, hardly helped the beleaguered state Republican Party. With a majority that included two Republicans giving unequivocal support to the Democrats and a minority essentially declaring both sides in the wrong, Kellogg had little choice but to accept the political adjustment brokered by Wheeler on the basis of these reports. The deal allowed him to stay on as governor for the remainder of his term, but

⁶⁵ CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 1-4.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 5-25, especially 14, 19 [quote], 21, 22, 25.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 25.

Republicans lost control of the state legislature and - although this was not part of the formal agreement - of much of the local government in the outlying parishes

Wheeler and the other committee members almost certainly understood that this agreement could never be more than a way-stop on the way to complete Democratic control of the state. Many conservative whites, indeed, felt that their position was so strong that they need not accept the compromise at all, and might take control of the state government immediately. Thomas C. Manning, a prominent local Democrat from Alexandria, wrote to ex-governor Moore that "the feeling [in New Orleans] against the surrender, miscalled 'compromise', [...] is very general and pervades all classes." He nevertheless counseled Moore to keep his spirits up, as "our ultimate release is now sure, though we shall have to endure our present misery until the new Congress meets."⁶⁸ While the adjustment may indeed have been a success for the Republican Party at the national level, as James T. Otten has argued, it also clearly signaled that the same national party was willing to sacrifice Reconstruction in Louisiana on behalf of its greater interests.⁶⁹

The next major congressional investigation in Louisiana took place in the summer of 1876. Its primary object concerned the management of the New Orleans Custom House, an important source of federal patronage for the state Republicans, and particularly the collector of the port and the President's brother-in-law James A. Casey. In what was clearly a politically motivated inquiry, the Democratic majority, including Louisiana representative and committee chairman Randall L. Gibson, found evidence of "irregularities and frauds" as well as "an effort on the part of James F. Casey [...] to obstruct the investigation," while the Republican minority insisted that "the collector of customs had uniformly managed the business of his department with promptness and courtesy, with fidelity to the Government, and sure regard to the convenience of the public."⁷⁰

Of greater interest to us is the result of an inquiry by two of the committee members, Democrat John L. Vance and Republican William Woodburn, into the mysterious shooting in Coushatta of local Republican leader Marshall Harvey Twitchell. Despite the murder of most of his relatives and fellow white Republicans, Twitchell had continued to pursue his political career, both as a state senator and locally as a member of the police jury, the school board, and as United States commissioner. Late in April 1876, Twitchell returned to Red River

⁶⁸ 'February 16, 1875, Alexandria, Manning to Moore,' Moore Papers, bound transcript, vol. 6

⁶⁹ James T. Otten, "The Wheeler Adjustment in Louisiana: National Republicans Begin to Reappraise Their Reconstruction Policy," *Louisiana History* 13, no. 4 (1972): 366-367.

⁷⁰ CSS, 44-1, HOR. Rep. 816, i, xvii

Parish, after a prolonged absence, to attend to his business and political interests there. Early in the morning of May 2, Twitchell, with his brother-in-law and fellow police juror David King, boarded a skiff to cross the river and attend a police jury meeting, despite black ferryman Dennis Dam's warning of danger. When they were halfway across, a mysterious stranger, disguised with a fake beard and green eyed goggles, opened fire on the boat from the opposite bank. Although Twitchell was his primary target, the assassin hit all three men in the boat, killing King, wounding the ferryman in the hand, and striking Twitchell in his left thigh and, after he jumped ship, in both arms as he tried to hold on to the skiff. Miraculously, Twitchell survived, although both arms had to be amputated.⁷¹

When the news of the shooting reached Washington, the House authorized the select committee already in New Orleans to investigate the affair. Vance and Woodburn left for Coushatta and on June 7 and 8 spent two days questioning witnesses there. Numerous black and white Republican witnesses testified that the attempted assassination of Twitchell was politically motivated. These included Twitchell himself, former Union army general W. R. Mudgett, Clerk of Court Z. T. Wester, black minister Benjamin Perrow, and black carpenter and Republican activist Andrew Bosley. Conservative whites, on the other hand, told a different story, blaming the shooting on personal enmity with members of his own party, including former sheriff John T. Yates.⁷²

Even the testimony from these conservative witnesses, however, implicitly supported the allegations of a politically motivated assassination attempt, as they nearly all admitted that an extreme prejudice existed in the white community against Twitchell. They took care, however, to erect an artificial distinction between Twitchell's partisan affiliation and his supposed mismanagement of parish affairs, blaming his unpopularity exclusively, in E. W. Rawle's words, on "the monstrosities of his administration," rather than "his political opinions." White League leader B. W. Marston admitted that "our people rejoiced at it as much as they would at the hanging or killing of any tyrant in the world," and labeled Twitchell "as much a usurper as Mr. Kellogg." But with the same breath Marston denied that the murder "had any political significance."⁷³

⁷¹ For a more detailed account of the events, see: Tunnell, *Edge of the Sword*, chap. 13.. A summary of events by the sub-committee can be found at CSS, 44-1, HOR. Rep. 816, vii. For Twitchell's own account of the events see: *Ibid.*, 649-651.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 648-649, 656, 658, 673, 676-677, 701, 709, 712, 719.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 659, 680-681.

Such partisan, contradictory, and often ambiguous testimony need hardly surprise us. More significant is the fact is that the two Representatives unanimously endorsed the conservatives' reading of events. Nevada Republican Woodburn concluded that the "testimony of all disinterested witnesses [...] in regard to the conduct of parochial affairs was to the effect that they had been loosely and extravagantly managed," even though many Republican witnesses testified to the contrary, an investigation by a local tax-payers association found no irregularities in the parish's finances, and an indictment against Twitchell for fraud would have been quashed, according to his Democratic co-defendant Jules Lisso, if Twitchell had been present at the session of the district court.⁷⁴ Woodburn similarly concurred in the conclusion that "the shooting of King and Twitchell was not caused by reason of their political opinions, and that the affair 'was not of a political character.'" The greatest suspicion rested on his personal enemies within the Republican Party, although the evidence was not of a character to create a reasonable ground of suspicion against any particular person.⁷⁵

The only dissenting voice on the full select committee belonged to Chester B. Darrall, a Northern-born Republican and Union veteran who represented Louisiana's third congressional district. Although he had not gone to Coushatta to hear testimony, he submitted a dissenting report based on the testimony collected to show that "the murder of David King and attempted murder of Senator Twitchell was of a political character and for political reasons; and [...] that it is very unsafe for a member of the republican party to actively advocate his principles in that part of the State." He insisted not on "any further legislation, but, first, a more prompt and rigorous enforcement of the laws and punishment of those violating them by the local and state authorities, aided, if need be, by the power of the General Government." The third Republican member of the select committee, Michigan representative Omar D. Conger, did not join in Darrall's dissent.⁷⁶ The report thus strikingly illustrates the changed political realities in Washington: southern Republicans desperately needed federal enforcement to withstand the onslaught of the White League and similar organizations, but with Democrats' political fortunes ascendant and the nation caught in a severe economic crisis, Northern and Western Republicans considered their Southern brethren as expendable..

⁷⁴ Ibid., viii, 673, 720, 722.

⁷⁵ Ibid., ix.

⁷⁶ Ibid., xi, xvi.

The Final Push

In the wake of the 1874 election and the Wheeler compromise, what Republican organization and government that remained along the Red River rapidly disintegrated. The means and the pace with which whites reclaimed power varied from parish to parish and those places where Republican held on to power the longest experienced the most violent transition to de facto Democratic rule between 1874 and 1876. At the same time, the transition to conservative rule was not always seamless. Even as Reconstruction collapsed throughout the region and the state, nominally Republican officials at times briefly reclaimed power at the local level. The formal party affiliation of these officials, however, made little practical difference to the freedpeople, who saw the protection and of their political and civil rights continually erode during these years.⁷⁷

In Rapides and Caddo, the conservative candidates elected in 1874, according to the original returns, had taken possession of the parochial and municipal offices by March 1875. Although Kellogg sent up commissions for the officials certified by the Returning Board, these men never attempted to carry out their duties. Following the compromise of 1877, the parish saw a brief return to nominal Republican rule. The original results, which gave a statewide majority to Nicholls for governor, returned Republican majorities in Rapides and a number of other parishes along the Red River. In its campaign to reclaim control of the state, the *New Orleans Democrat*, the official journal of the Nicholls government, accepted these parochial results.⁷⁸

While their local defeat undoubtedly disappointed the Democrats in Rapides, their party's statewide victory offered ample compensation. The officers elected, moreover, proved more than acceptable to the white population. George Kelso and John DeLacy, the most despised Republican leaders of the parish, had run for state senator and representative; conservatives were glad to see them leave for New Orleans, where they joined a legislature in which their party was now a minority. The local officials were cut from a different cloth. The sheriff, H. M. Robinson, and parish judge, John Clements were both former Democrats - Robinson had even run on the anti-Fusionist, or straight-out Democratic, ticket of Robert P. Hunter in 1872 - whom whites might resent for their political opportunism, but whose racial

⁷⁷ Little to information on local government in DeSoto, Winn and Bienville parishes is known to the author, but as Republican organization there had always been the weakest of the parishes along the Red River and we may assume that Democratic control persisted there as it had for most, if not all, of Reconstruction.

⁷⁸ LD, 75-01-06, 75-03-03, 75-03-10, 75-03-17, 76-11-15; ST, 74-11-05; 'Caddo Police Jury Minute [May 8, 1875]' WPA PJ Minutes, reel 63; SPCC, Book D: November 16, 1874, November 19, 1874.

views conformed to the dominant norms. The clerk of court, James Ransdell, had held the office since the summer of 1875 on an appointment by Kellogg. Conservatives considered him a "capable and worthy young Creole of the Parish." Ransdell had announced himself as an independent candidate, although he subsequently appeared on the Republican ticket.⁷⁹

While nominal Republican rule did not necessarily imply an active pursuit of the racial equality envisioned by Reconstruction architects, neither did Democratic control imply its complete dismantling prior to 1876. In DeSoto, where both the parish and the judicial district it belonged to had reverted to conservative control by 1875, blacks continued to serve on grand and petty juries, albeit in much smaller numbers than they had when Levissee was judge. In the fall term of 1876 and the spring term of 1877 black participation suddenly increased, in an effort by white conservatives to demonstrate their bona fides to federal election officials. Once the troops had been permanently removed, however, conservative judge David Pierson established a 'jury commission' consisting of five white residents of the parish. Although the precise responsibilities of this commission remain unclear, its results are indisputable. At the next term of court in October, not a single black man sat on the grand jury for the first time in six years, while of four petty juries empanelled that term, two included a single black member and the other two were entirely white. Black participation in the DeSoto district court - and presumably in other parishes throughout the state - had effectively ended.⁸⁰

Rapides was not the only parish on the Red River that saw a return to - or in the case of Bossier a continuation of - nominal Republican rule following the 1876 election. Caddo and Bossier saw a similar development. In Bossier, as in Rapides, the officials elected on the Republican ticket did not represent the hated Radical wing of the party. The two most prominent candidates were the incumbent sheriff, J. B. O'Neal, and parish judge, B. F. Fort, who had joined the Democratic district attorney in a petition to Kellogg in 1875, denying reports of large scale violence against blacks in the parish and disavowing the need for assistance from state or federal troops to restore order. By the summer of 1877, moreover, Governor Nicholls's regime had undermined Republican control of the police juries in these parishes. In April, the legislature passed a law allowing the Governor to appoint up to five new police jurors in any country parish he saw fit. Such appointments assured that conservatives in Caddo, Rapides, and Bossier regained control over the police jury and thus

⁷⁹ LD, 72-10-16, 74-12-23, 75-08-18, 76-09-13, 77-02-07, 77-05-30; Jerry Purvis Sanson, "Rapides Parish, Louisiana, during the End of Reconstruction," *Louisiana History* 27, no. 2 (1986): 178-180.

⁸⁰ 'DeSoto Minutes,' 203; de Vries, "Between Equal Justice and Racial Terror."

over parish taxes and, importantly, the organization of the elections in 1878. In combination with renewed violence against blacks, who now had no possibility of redress, this measure ensured that all three parishes reverted to Democratic control following these elections.⁸¹

Matters did not resolve themselves as easily in Natchitoches, where conservatives had claimed the narrowest of victories after the 1874 election. For the office of parish judge, in fact, they claimed that the Democratic candidate C. F. Dranguet, had beaten J. Ernest Breda by just a single vote and for most other offices the conservative majority was 40 or 50 votes at most out of about 3000 cast. The Republican candidates were close political allies to the Republican officials whom the White League had forced out of the parish the previous summer, and conservatives proved hell-bent on preventing them from regaining control of the parish. They felt, if anything, an even greater hatred against E. L. Pierson, who had been a prominent Democratic politico, but defected to the Republicans on July 4, 1874, who promptly nominated him for the state legislature. Following the election, an attempt was made to assassinate him, and a few weeks later he fled Natchitoches along with Breda, arriving in New Orleans as "the heroes of north western Louisiana and our daring trip [...] the comment and theme of conversation for several days after our arrival among the leading men of our party."⁸²

Though their fellow Republicans may have received them as heroes, and despite Breda's confidence that before long "Grant's order to the troops to recognize, assist and protect the officers holding Kellogg commissions and none other, will be in full force and operation," Conservatives continued to hold de facto power in Natchitoches so long as the Republican leadership remained in New Orleans. Around the time Pierson and Breda arrived in New Orleans, the police jurors elected on the conservative ticket met to organize themselves under the leadership of William Payne and elected a parish treasurer, constable and clerk. The parish still lacked a tax collector, parish and district judge, and clerk of court, but the *Vindicator* insisted that

⁸¹ 'July 26, 1875, Bellevue, parish officers to Kellogg,' Kellogg Papers, folder 5.34b; 'Act 57,' *Acts Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana at the Extra Session of the Fifth Legislature, Begun and Held in the City of New Orleans, March 2, 1877* (New Orleans: State Printer, 1877); Gilles Vandal, "Albert H. Leonard's Road from the White League to the Republican Party," *Louisiana History* 36, no. 1 (1995): fn. 79; Gilles Vandal, "The Policy of Violence in Caddo Parish, 1865-1884," *Louisiana History* 32, no. 2 (1991): 179; LD, 77-06-13, 78-11-13.

⁸² NV, 74-09-26, 74-11-07; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 134; 'November 25, 1874, New Orleans, Breda to Dear Wife,' J. P. Breda Family Papers, Mss. 953, 966, 1021, LLMVC [Hereinafter: Breda Papers], folder 2.12.

anarchy is much more preferable, if this be it, to such Republican form of government as is 'guaranteed' us by Grant's army and navy, or rather the army and navy paid for with our money and run by Grant for his own amusement. After six months trial of this 'anarchy,' [since the bulldozing of Republicans in July] we have concluded that we will continue it indefinitely.

While the officials certified by the Returning Board remained in New Orleans, the conservative police jury continued to operate, and the Democrats organized informal 'committees of public safety' and 'courts of arbitration' to enforce order and resolve civil disputes. Following the Wheeler compromise, conservatives reluctantly acquiesced in a number of Republican appointments for the parish, although they repeatedly urged Kellogg to choose officials whom, although nominally Republican, the white community considered acceptable.⁸³

The appointment of such a compromise candidate resolved the ongoing dispute over the 17th Judicial district. Kellogg appointed the Liberal Republican candidate of 1872, C. C. Chaplin, even though he had not even been a candidate in 1874. Conservatives would have preferred their own candidate, William H Jack, but they realized that the latter was "classed by some of our 'step-ins' as violent in politics to which class the Governor assisted by the 'moderates' will give no preferment." They instead accepted Chaplin as "a gentleman in every way qualified and acceptable to our people," especially as M. J. Cunningham, the Democratic candidate in 1874 for district attorney, received his commission from Kellogg at the same time. As a result, court resumed throughout the district over the summer and fall of 1875, following an interruption of over a year.⁸⁴

Conservatives in Natchitoches proved less pliant when Kellogg attempted to replace the Payne police jury, which had been effectively acting for almost half a year, by a Republican body under the despised Republican Joseph Ezernack. Editorials in the *Vindicator* had repeatedly reminded its readers that any Republican officials served, in effect, at the sufferance to the white community, and that if they overstepped their bounds they would suffer the same fate as the Republican officials run out in the summer of 1874. The editors now warned that "when it is attempted to foist upon us an ignorant Police Jury [...] it bears upon its face the intention to plunder, and we intend to *prevent evils this time, not to cure*

⁸³ 'November 27, 1874, New Orleans, Breda to Dear Wife,' Breda Papers, folder 2.12; NV, 74-11-21, 75-01-02, 75-01-09, 75-01-23, 75-03-20, 75-04-17.

⁸⁴ NV, 75-05-01, 75-07-03; 'DeSoto Minutes,' 132; 44-2, CSS, 44-2, HOR. Misc. 34, part 3, 122, 194.

them [as] we did before.” If Kellogg persisted, “Natchitoches will do as she did in 1874, take care of her own interests, and protect her own people at whatever cost.” Wanting to avoid the embarrassment of having Republican officials again chased out of the parish, Kellogg backed down. Rather than try and enforce the commissions he had issued, Kellogg had the Republican police jurors attempt to claim their offices through the courts. The delay that such a course implied, in the *Vindicator*’s view, “sets at rest the question of the *de facto* legality of the People’s Police Jury.”⁸⁵ Conservatives thus retained effective control of the parish. Having run the most prominent Republican leaders out of town in 1874, and with the state authorities unable and the federal authorities increasingly unwilling to enforce Republican rule, conservatives could pick and choose which Republican appointees they tolerated, without having to resort to outright violence.

Even so, a Republican organization remained active in Natchitoches during the 1876 campaign. J. Ernest Breda was now the undisputed head of the party in the parish and ran himself for district judge. Soon after the election he, along with Rford Blunt and Henry Myers, went to New Orleans, again leaving control of the parish in the hands of the conservatives. In their absence, “the ‘Bulldozers’ alias Texans, took possession of Natchitoches [...] and committed all kinds of excesses.” A. P. Breda wrote his brother that these men rode into town on November 28, causing “much excitement on the streets by cussing the ‘d--d Radicals,’ shooting, etc.” The next day they “raised perfect hell in the streets, whipping one negro and telling him ‘you d--d son of a B--- go home or I will kill you,’ shooting their guns all along Front Street, finally coming to wait upon Phillip [Breda] and myself.” The Breda brothers managed to defuse the confrontation, although the men claimed they had been paid three hundred dollars to kill the Bredas. The town was crowded with armed Democrats, who “openly declare on the streets that no Republican shall take his office if elected, that they are determined this time to kill the last one of them.”⁸⁶

As late as February, Breda held out hope that Packard would be recognized as governor, but when the final compromise handed Louisiana to the Democrats, the Republican organization in Natchitoches quickly collapsed. By the 1878 elections, an anonymous black correspondent warned Breda that “Mr. Bright Eyed Democrat buys a great deal of [the black] votes. Buys some votes for a peck or bushel of meal, some for an old coat. Buys some for

⁸⁵ NV, 75-01-23, 75-05-08, 75-05-22.

⁸⁶ ‘Minute Book of the Republican Central Club, 12th Ward, Natchitoches, 1876,’ Breda Papers, vol. 15; ‘November 21, 1876, Natchitoches, Tunnard to JEB,’ ‘November 29, 1876, Natchitoches, Harris to dear brother Ernest,’ and ‘December 1, 1876, Natchitoches, Tunnard to Breda,’ Breda Papers, folder 2.13a

want of homes. Tells them, if you don't vote for us leave our plantation." Nor did white conservatives lightly forgive those who had attempted to cross the racial barrier and enforce blacks' political and civil rights. In September 1878, in order to ensure a complete victory at the next election, Democrats chased the most prominent Republicans, white and black, out of the parish. Eventually, conservatives allowed the Republicans to return to the parish, but in January 1879, nearly five years after whites had reclaimed *de facto* control of the parish, the bitterness still ran too deep for that. J. Emile Breda, Ernest and Philippe's youngest brother, wrote to them in New Orleans that if either they or "Blunt, Lewis, Raby, Barron, or any others who testified against them ever return to Natchitoches," they would "killed on sight."⁸⁷

In Red River and Grant, Republicans initially held on to local power following the rise of the White League and the 1874 election. In Red River it took the near fatal assault on Twitchell to break the Republican hold on the parish, which reverted to Democratic control following the 1876 election.⁸⁸ In Grant, meanwhile, Democrats gradually undermined a local Republican Party already suffering from internal divisions. A high-profile court case against William B. Phillips, one of the most prominent white Republican leaders of the parish, created frictions within the Republican Party that led to the murder of the Republican tax collector by the Republican sheriff. In the ensuing confusion and disorder, Democrats succeeded in reclaiming control of the parish government.

Divisions among the Republicans emerged when Phillips and William Ward came up to Colfax during the 1874 election campaign. Both men had run for office in the parish, even though they lived mostly in New Orleans. The following week, simmering tensions within the Republican ranks boiled over. Ward got into a firefight with a Captain Moss, a Republican from St. Landry who had come to the parish with Ward and Phillips as a school teacher. That same night, a number of blacks set fire to the house of the local tax collector G. H. Radetzki, with whom Ward had had an altercation a few days earlier. The next month, Phillips, who had returned to New Orleans, was arrested there on the charge of being an accessory before the fact in the murder of Needham Walters in Grant. Walters had accused Phillips of having had him arrested some time before for the sole purpose of extorting him. Phillips allegedly arranged for his release in return for the payment of \$300.00. Fearing that Waters would

⁸⁷ Adam Fairclough, "Alfred Raford Blunt and the Reconstruction Struggle in Natchitoches, 1866-1879," *Louisiana History* 51, no. 3 (2010): 284-305; 'February 9, 1877, New Orleans, Levi to Breda,' Breda Papers, folder 2.13b; 'August 1878, Natchitoches, colored man to Breda,' 'January 21, 1879, Breda to Breda,' Breda Papers folder 2.14.

⁸⁸ Tunnell, *Edge of the Sword*, chap. 14.

expose him, Phillips arranged for his murder and the body was found a few days later floating in the river. Common wisdom in Grant Parish, at least among the whites, held that Phillips was not only an accessory, but that he and Ward were “guilty not alone of the murder of *Needham Walters* and the burning of the Tax Collectors, G. H. Radetzki’s house, but [were] in truth the instigators and incendiaries that from the beginning have caused so much bloodshed and slaughter in this parish.”⁸⁹

In June, Phillips was brought from New Orleans to Colfax as a prisoner, initially on the sole charge of illegal voting based on his being a resident of New Orleans. Within a fortnight, however, the grand jury of the district court in Colfax – according to the *Democrat* “the best,” presumably meaning the whitest, “since the creation of the parish” – indicted Phillips and deputy sheriff and coroner Alfred Shelby for the murder of Needham Walters. The Democratic district attorney, E. G. Hunter, requested a continuance to prepare the case and asked that Phillips and Shelby be remanded to jail. Republican judge John Osborne granted the continuance, but left it to Sheriff John B. McCoy’s discretion whether to lock the men up. McCoy, an ally of Phillips, saw no need to put Phillips and Shelby in jail, even after Hunter had pressured Osborne into ordering him to do so. Expecting little help from Osborne, Hunter began proceedings against McCoy for refusing to execute a warrant issued by the parish court. In early July, Parish Judge F. J. Stokes suspended McCoy and appointed J. W. Callam in his stead, who then selected as his deputy Christopher C. Nash, Delos White’s murderer, whose claims as sheriff had prompted the standoff that resulted in the massacre at the Colfax courthouse just two years earlier. These new officers immediately began hunting Phillips and Shelby, who had fled as soon as it became clear that they risked going to jail.⁹⁰

Radetzki, although a Republican and a Kellogg appointee, was not part of Phillips’s clique. He had, in fact, been instrumental in bringing Phillips up to Colfax to face trial and, it was rumored, had had a hand in getting McCoy suspended. In response, an enraged McCoy shot Radetzki dead in cold blood a few days later on the streets of Colfax. He was promptly arrested by newly-minted deputy sheriff Nash. The symbolism was not lost on local conservatives, who gloated that “our day is coming at last, and all alike, white and black, must participate in the coming blessing.” At its September session, the district court in Grant Parish released McCoy on a \$5000 bond. After conservatives regained control of the state he was

⁸⁹ NV, 74-11-14, 75-01-02; LD, 74-11-18, 74-12-09; AC 75-01-02; CSS, 43-2, HOR. Rep. 261, 518-519.

⁹⁰ LD, 75-06-09, 75-06-23, 75-06-30, LD, 75-07-07; NV, 75-07-17. This is the same Shelby who had replaced Delos W. White as sheriff and had played a part in the burning of Phillips and White’s house in 1871.

convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in the state penitentiary. Phillips and Shelby, meanwhile, fled to New Orleans, where the Louisiana Supreme Court granted Phillips' petition to have his case removed to the district court in Pointe Coupee Parish. Phillips had argued that he was so disliked in Grant Parish that he could secure neither legal representation nor an impartial jury there.⁹¹

With the Republican leadership either in jail or on the run, Republicanism in Grant Parish quickly collapsed. Ward, Eli Flowers, and Phillips, who had formed the Radical backbone of the party and struggled to keep the parish Republican not only gave up on these efforts, but also defected to the opposite side, actively campaigning for the Democrats in the 1876 election campaign. As a result, Grant parish, carved out to be a Republican stronghold and a bastion of Reconstruction, elected a Democratic parish government and state legislator that year, formally 'redeeming' itself even before many of its larger neighbors.⁹²

Conclusion

Between 1873 and 1879, conservative whites honed a combination of legal and extra-legal strategies to reclaim political power throughout Louisiana. In most of the Red River region, they had seized effective, if not always nominal, control by early 1875 through a combination of economic blackmail, targeted violence, and verbal intimidation. This strategy succeeded in simultaneously undermining local Republican organizations, mobilizing white support, limiting black voting, and, crucially, ensuring a modicum of support, or at least benign neglect, among Northerners. Republicans' response to the banditti controversy clearly illustrates that enforcing Reconstruction no longer ranked high among their priorities. After Democrats swept the 1874 midterm elections, the national party set out to salvage its electoral viability, albeit at the expense of its still nascent Southern wing.

The rise of the White League, the federal retreat from federal enforcement, and the subsequent collapse of local Republicanism, entailed more than the transfer of political power from one party or clique to another. For the hundreds of thousands of blacks living in the state, as well as the far smaller number of loyal white Republicans, these developments impacted not only their political, social, and economic position and opportunities, but threatened their

⁹¹ 'July 20, 1875, Colfax, Register to Kellogg,' Kellogg Papers, folder 5.32; LD, 75-07-21, 75-09-08, 77-05-23; 'State of Louisiana ex rel. William B. Phillips vs. John Osborn, Judge of the Ninth Judicial District Court,' Louisiana Supreme Court, Docket 5898, November 1875:

<http://libweb.uno.edu/jspui/handle/123456789/21544>.

⁹² LD, 76-10-11, 77-12-05.

physical security. As Merrill reported, following the elections of 1874, "the usual worrying and harassing of the negroes goes on with little intermission." With the murderous violence that characterized the first postwar years in decline, "such acts are now confined to plundering them with or without some show of legal form and driving them from their homes to seek places to live elsewhere." The political instability, moreover, threatened to greatly aggravate the condition of things which is already serious enough,"⁹³

In February 1875, in the wake of the banditti controversy, a committee of former Union soldiers and sailors addressed a petition to President Grant, praising Sheridan's forceful action and apprising him of their increasingly precarious position in the state. "There is no safety in the state," they complained,

for Republicans or ex-soldiers and sailors of the Union. Even god's sanctuary has not been spared, for they have sent their missiles into the churches, while the worshipers were in the midst of divine service. Nor have the schools escaped, for bands of White Leaguers paraded the streets of New Orleans from school to school and drove from them children of African descent, who in some instances, it is but true to state, were their own half-sisters.⁹⁴

In northern Louisiana, blacks, and the very few white Republicans who remained there, faced even greater dangers. In the spring of 1875, hundreds of colored citizens from Caddo and surrounding parishes petitioned President Grant, informing him of the physical and economic persecution faced by those who had voted the Republican ticket in November: "These white people, who once held us slaves, they have taken all of our last year's crop away from us, and have taken a part of our bed clothing, and have taken our old mules and horses and taken even our furniture for voting a Republican ticket."⁹⁵ The president and his party, however, turned a deaf ear to such entreaties, leaving blacks' civil, economic, and political rights utterly dependent on their hostile white neighbors. It would be many generations, before the nation once again attempted, with more success, to make good on the promises of Reconstruction.

⁹³ 'December 30, 1874, Shreveport, Merrill to AG,' enclosed in 'January 6, 1875, New Orleans, Sheridan to Belknap,' NARA, RG 94, M666, file 1874-3579, reel 173, frame 110.

⁹⁴ 'February 17, 1875, New Orleans, Borgui to Grant,' DOJ reel 2, frame 523.

⁹⁵ 'May 1, 1875, n.p., Bull to Grant,' DOJ, reel 2, frame 597.