

Uncivil War: Five New Orleans Street Battles and the Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction

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Review

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Hogue, James K. *Uncivil War: Five New Orleans Street Battles and the Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction*. Louisiana State University Press, \$45.00 hardcover ISBN 9780807131474

The Fight over Reconstruction in New Orleans

James K. Hogue adds an important new perspective to the much-studied topic of Reconstruction in Louisiana by considering the state's politics through the lens of military history. Taking as his departure point the relative absence of scholarship on Reconstruction as a military phenomenon, Hogue recasts the era as a continuation of the Civil War in an irregular, intermittent, and sometimes clandestine struggle (10).

This struggle pitted the Republican Party's coalition of African Americans, white northern newcomers, and southern Unionists against Louisiana's white ex-Confederates, who organized behind the Democratic Party. Republicans wanted to create a racially egalitarian, free labor society whereas Democrats wanted to preserve as much as they could of the antebellum racial hierarchy. While this characterization of Reconstruction as a failed revolution resonates with most scholarship written after the demise of the Dunning school's tragic era account, Hogue breaks new ground in showing how military processes contributed to the downfall of the Republicans and their plan for a new social order.

Hogue organizes his argument around five New Orleans street battles that occurred between 1865 and 1877. The incidents marked stages in the evolution of counterrevolutionary tactics. In an assault that killed at least 38 Republican convention delegates on July 30, 1866, anti-Republican whites, many of them Confederate veterans, enacted the most visible manifestation of a much broader pattern of vigilante violence across racial lines (51). Hogue fits the 1866 street battle into a larger pattern of racial moments of truth that originated in slavery and gained intensity after 1863, when African-American Union military service

gave former slaves a fair fight with their white foes. The northern reaction to the 1866 violence helped Republicans obtain the necessary Congressional majorities to pursue revolutionary change in the South. In Louisiana, General Phillip Sheridan and Republican Governor Henry Clay Warmoth pursued radical policies with the aid of a superior military organization capable of overawing Ku Klux Klan vigilantes.

Counterrevolution entered its second phase in 1873 when white supremacist Democrats abandoned ad hoc vigilantism in favor of better organized paramilitary attacks on Republican power. William Pitt Kellogg, the Republican claimant in that year's disputed gubernatorial election, used the bi-racial Louisiana State Militia, headed by former Confederate General James Longstreet, to fend off an armed attack by followers of his Democratic challenger. Although victorious in the state capital, Republicans had been weakened by vacillating federal support, factional infighting, and their inability to make the Louisiana State Militia effective outside New Orleans. In open alliance with Democratic candidates, white supremacist paramilitaries exploited this vulnerability by driving Republicans out of rural parish governments. The Colfax Massacre in Grant Parish, Reconstruction's deadliest battle, epitomized this new combination of racialized politics and paramilitary violence.

Hogue's analysis of the Crescent City White League, a component of Democrats' loosely organized paramilitary force, shows that its largest group of volunteers had earlier belonged to the Confederacy's Washington Artillery, an elite unit formed by New Orleans merchants and lawyers. The paramilitaries reflected the larger dynamics of the state Democratic Party, in which planters, professionals, and ex-Confederate officers led the mass of the state's white men against any expansion of African-American political and social power.

In 1877 Democratic paramilitaries entered the final phase of counter-revolution, a successful *coup d'etat* that toppled Republican government in Louisiana and, as part of the settlement in the contested presidential election of 1876, ended Reconstruction once and for all. Hogue interprets the street battle of January 9 as an example of the modern *coup* in which small forces take political power through attacks on key government facilities, such as the legislative halls, courthouses, newspaper offices, and armories.

The book concludes by exploring Reconstruction's implications for the U.S. military and state-run National Guards. Hogue argues that southern opposition to

federal intervention combined with career soldiers' reluctance to re-engage civilian politics to restrict the size of the U.S. army and increase the power of state-run National Guards.

Hogue's argument is persuasive, based on impressive research, and full of suggestive arguments about racial conflict and the place of Louisiana Reconstruction in the broader pattern of nineteenth century political and military history. If there is a flaw in Hogue's research model it lies in explaining what social and ideological factors helped each side maintain cohesiveness over the twelve-year span of Reconstruction. Hogue attributes the zeal of White Leaguers to unrepentant white supremacist and Confederate sympathies. Republican motives, especially those of Republican leaders like Kellogg and his predecessors Henry Clay Warmoth and P.B.S. Pinchback, are harder to identify. While Hogue eschews the Dunning school's blanket condemnations of Republicans, he does see spoils as a primary influence. In contrast, Ted Tunnell's recent biography of carpetbagger Marshall Twitchell, whose family was murdered by White Leaguers not far from Grant Parish, describes at least one northern-born Republican officeholder who risked a great deal for comparatively little personal gain. Similarly, Rebecca Scott's comparative history of Louisiana and Cuba brings out the complex play of forces that permitted or prevented military and political mobilization by former slaves. Having a safe space to organize politically and the economic resources to act free of employer coercion greatly aided the foes of Reconstruction while the same factors circumscribed the ability of black Louisianans, the largest constituency of radical reconstruction, from achieving the same level of military readiness.

Although these perspectives might deepen the reach of Hogue's insights into Louisiana politics, these same books could be faulted for their inattention to the military perspective on state politics that Hogue provides. Not only is *Uncivil War* a valuable addition to the study of Reconstruction, but it also enhances historians' understanding of the coercive side of American politics and offers a timely case study of past efforts at peacekeeping during an irregular civil war.

Frank Towers is an associate professor of history at the University of Calgary. He is the author of The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War (2004).