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# An Impossible Direction: Newspapers, Race, and Politics in Reconstruction New Orleans

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AN IMPOSSIBLE DIRECTION:  
NEWSPAPERS, RACE, AND POLITICS IN RECONSTRUCTION NEW ORLEANS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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in

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by  
Nicholas Chrastil  
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I would like to thank my mom, who suggested that I research Reconstruction in the first place, and also proofread every section of my paper. I would also like to thank my committee for their helpful insights, suggestions, and guidance along the way.

These are no times of ordinary politics. These are formative hours: the national purpose and thought grows and ripens in thirty days as much as ordinary years bring it forward.

**Wendell Phillips, 1866**

We were moving slowly in an absolutely impossible direction.  
**W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880***

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the racial ideologies of four newspapers in New Orleans at the beginning and end of Radical Reconstruction: the *Daily Picayune*, the *New Orleans Republican*, the *New Orleans Tribune*, and the *Weekly Louisianian*. It explores how each paper understood the issues of racial equality, integration, suffrage, and black humanity; it examines the specific language and rhetoric each paper used to advocate for their positions; and it asks how those positions changed from the beginning to the end of Reconstruction. The study finds that the two white-owned papers, the *Picayune* and the *Republican*, while political opponents, both viewed racial equality as primarily a political consideration that could be either advocated for or cautioned against depending on circumstance. On the other hand, the black-owned papers, the *Tribune* and the *Louisianian*, understood race as the essential issue of Reconstruction and equality for the black population as a moral imperative tied closely to fundamental American values. This contrast in rhetoric illustrates a critical divide between the black and white elements of the Republican party in Louisiana during the era, and helps explain the ultimate failure of Reconstruction's efforts to bring racial equality to the state.

## Chapter One: Introduction

“It is clear from the time of Washington and Jefferson down to the Civil War,” argued W.E.B DuBois in his history of Reconstruction, “when the nation was asked if it was possible for free Negroes to become American citizens in the full sense of the word, it answered by a stern and determined ‘No!’” (1935, 132). Before the Civil War, even those who opposed slavery had trouble conceiving of the full integration of slaves into society once it ended. Abraham Lincoln was a proponent of colonizing blacks in other parts of the world rather than attempting to sort out the implications of their freedom if they were to remain in America. “What next?” he asked during his campaign in 1860. “Free them and make them politically and socially our equals? My own feeling will not admit of this, and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of whites will not” (DuBois 1935, 146).

But the events of the war, particularly emancipation and the participation of black soldiers in the Union Army, made political equality for former slaves a real possibility. “At last the same necessity which insisted first upon emancipation and then upon the arming of the slaves, insists with the same unanswerable force upon the admission to complete Equality before the law,” argued Charles Sumner, “so that there shall be no ban of color in the court-room or in the ballot-box, and government shall be fixed on its only rightful foundation—the consent of the governed” (1876, 129). By 1864, Lincoln was suggesting at least partial suffrage in Louisiana for the black soldiers who had fought with the Union. Indeed, the integration of black people into American democracy became a central issue for the nation, and forced it to grapple with the underlying problem of slavery since the founding. “The true significance of slavery in the United States to the

whole social development of America lay in the ultimate relation of slaves to democracy,” argued DuBois.

What were to be the limits of democratic control in the United States? If all labor, black as well as white, became free— were given schools and the right to vote— what control could or should be set to the power and action of these laborers? Was the rule of the mass of Americans to be unlimited, and the right to rule extended to all men regardless of race and color, or if not, what power of dictatorship and control; and how much would property and privilege be protected? This was the great and primary question which was in the minds of the men who wrote the Constitution of the United States and continued in the minds of thinkers down through the slavery controversy. It still remains with the world as the problem of democracy expands and touches all races and nations. (1935,13)

The war did not bring everyone to such magnanimous conclusions toward the freed slaves as it did Sumner. In the South, many had dark and dramatic visions of what emancipation might mean for the freed slaves and for society as a whole. The possibilities for black people, they thought, were limited to their extinction or reversion into a system more or less indistinguishable from slavery. To the extent they believed that black people possessed the capability to become effective citizens, “this would in itself be the worst conceivable thing on earth; worse than shiftless, unprofitable labor; worse than ignorance, worse than crime. It would lead inevitably to a mulatto South and the eventual ruin of all civilization” (DuBois 1935, 130).

Even for those who advocated for black suffrage and equal rights, what drove their advocacy were often political and economic calculations rather than moral imperatives or a commitment to the principles of democracy. Northern business leaders and Republicans who did not necessarily believe in the principles of racial equality needed Black suffrage in the South in order to prevent a full scale revitalization of the Confederate state governments that had seceded just years before. C. Vann Woodward calls this “the incubus with which the Negro was burdened before he was ever awakened

into political life”:

The operative and effective motives of his political genesis were extraneous to his own interests and calculated to serve other ends. If there ever came a time when those ends—party advantage and sectional business interests—were better served in some other way, even in a way destructive to the basic political rights of the race, then the political prospects of the Negro would darken. (1957, 235)

Even the black elite who had been free before the war petitioned for their own suffrage before deciding it would be in their interest to work on behalf of the freed slaves as well (Tunnell 1984, 78).

These competing and occasionally contradictory aspirations for the integration of black people into society help explain the political developments of Reconstruction and the ultimate demise of Republican governance in the South. One way those aspirations were articulated to the public was through local newspapers. This thesis looks at the coverage of four newspapers in New Orleans near the beginning and end of Radical Reconstruction. It focuses on each paper’s views on race, what language and rhetoric was used to articulate those views, and how those views changed from the start to the end of Reconstruction. New Orleans, home to the first black-owned daily, provides a unique setting to understand how papers with differing racial and political ideologies engaged with the extraordinary circumstances of the period.

### **Louisiana’s Reconstruction**

New Orleans fell to the Union army in 1862, ushering in an era of Reconstruction that at times grew “more tangled than the region’s labyrinth of swamps and bayous” (Tunnell 1864, 2). Louisiana, in particular New Orleans, was an outlier in terms of its racial and social composition before the war. There were nearly 19,000 free blacks in

Louisiana in 1860, owning fifteen million dollars worth of property, which included slaves. In addition, they had a record of military service. In 1815, a free black militia fought in the Battle of New Orleans under Andrew Jackson. Before that, in 1811, they had volunteered to help put down a violent slave rebellion. (Tunnell 1864, 67-68). This position of the black elite in Louisiana created a unique political environment at the beginning of Reconstruction. The *New Orleans Tribune* described the situation in 1864:

Louisiana is in a very peculiar situation. Here, the colored population has a twofold origin. There is an old population, with a history and mementos of their own, warmed by patriotism and partaking of the feelings and education of the white. The only social condition known to these men is that of freedom. . . . There is, on the other hand, a population of freedmen, but recently liberated from the shackles of bondage. All is to be done yet for them. (December 27, 1864)

The presence of the already free black population forced the state to deal with the question of black suffrage during the wartime Reconstruction policies under Lincoln, and perhaps even forced it upon the nation. In 1863, the free blacks of Louisiana petitioned wartime Governor George F. Shepley to be allowed to register to vote. They were denied. In 1864 they established the Louisiana National Equal Rights League and formed the *New Orleans Tribune*, and two representatives of the free black community met with President Lincoln in Washington to attempt to persuade him to endorse black suffrage (Tunnell 1984, 77-78, Foner 2014, 49). Lincoln, after the meeting, in a private letter to then Governor Michael Hahn, lightly encouraged the idea of allowing black delegates at the upcoming constitutional convention: “I barely suggest for your consideration, whether some of the colored people not be let in—as for instance, the very intelligent, and especially those who have fought gallantly in our ranks. . . . But this is only a suggestion, not to the public but to you alone” (qtd. in Foner 2014, 49). The early pressure for even limited black suffrage during wartime Reconstruction in Louisiana was

important in opening up the possibility for the nation as a whole. “If this experiment in Reconstruction had been attempted anywhere but in Louisiana, it is possible that the whole question of Negro suffrage would not have been raised then, or perhaps for many years after,” argued Dubois (1935, 153).

But it would have to wait. The constitutional convention of 1864, consisting of white Unionists, produced a constitution that abolished slavery but went no further in granting political rights to the black population (Taylor 1974, 50-52). Even among Unionists, black political equality was strongly opposed by more conservative factions. Historian Ted Tunnell cites fear as the primary difference between the outlook of Radical Unionists to that of the conservatives: “Underlying the hatred and recalcitrance of conservatives and reactionaries was fear, fear of race war, of Negro equality, of this bogey or that; fear, above all, that amalgamation would subvert their sense of themselves as Christian men, living in a civilized culture.” For Radicals, however, the fear was absent. This was not necessarily due to a belief in the viability of a post-racial society. For some it had more to do with their total confidence in white supremacy. Alfred C. Hill, who served as an aide to General Nathaniel P. Banks and was considered a Radical, claimed he did not fear racial equality “because I believe that the white race is the dominant race in this country, and always will be” (Tunnell 1984, 63).

In 1867, however, following a resurgence of reactionary policies and former rebels being given political positions under President Johnson’s Reconstruction plan, there was an attempt to convene another statewide constitutional convention in New Orleans. The convention would have enfranchised blacks and stripped the vote from former Confederates. However, a group of armed whites (aided by the local police force)

responded by massacring blacks and convention delegates (Tunnell 1984, 105-106). The event had national impact. The extent of the targeted violence undermined Johnson's conservative plan that had allowed many rebels to return to power in Louisiana. Among a host of other factors, it provided the foundation for a push in the United States Congress for Radical Reconstruction in the South, which eventually led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, the 14th Amendment, and the Reconstruction Act. The impeachment of Johnson, his narrow escape from being removed from office, and the election of Ulysses S. Grant in 1868 followed soon after. The rights—whether civil, political, or social-- of the four million slaves freed during abolition were being vigorously debated and rapidly defined on a national stage (Foner 2014, 263-280).

In accordance with the Reconstruction Act, in order for Southern states to be readmitted, they were required to convene a constitutional convention that would guarantee black suffrage and ratify the Fourteenth Amendment. The delegates of these conventions were elected by loyal Unionist whites and blacks, with voter registration and elections overseen by the military commander assigned to the specific district. In Louisiana, it produced a diverse crowd, unlike any other governing body in the state before it:

The members were an extraordinary group: blacks and whites; ex-slaves and ex-slave owners (of both colors); Northerners and Southerners; Protestants and Catholics; elder statesmen and young men barely old enough to vote; famous men and obscure men, some from the Confederate South's only metropolis and others from its most isolated rural areas; men of wealth and men who never before or ever again after would earn as much as the state paid them for attending the convention. By occupation they were clerks, shop owners, grocers, planters, farmers, lawyers, judges, journalists, doctors, politicians, tradesmen, and jack-of-all-trades. Yet, for all their diversity, they shared common bonds: loyalty to the Union, membership in the Radical Republican party, and a similar view of recent history. (Tunnell 1984, 113)

The majority of delegates at the convention were black, and the resulting constitution not only enfranchised blacks, it contained the first Bill of Rights for Louisiana, guaranteed “public rights” in addition to civil and political, and even mandated that at least one public school be built in each parish in Louisiana. Segregation in public schools was to be prohibited (Tunnell 1984, 111-135).

This thesis begins its investigation following the convention, with the presidential election that took place in November of 1868. In the preceding months, beginning with the gubernatorial election in April, Louisiana saw itself submerged in a steady campaign of political violence. Secret paramilitary societies began to meet in order to organize against the policies of Radical Reconstruction and using intimidation tactics to drive Republicans from the polls. In 1868 alone, the terrorist organizations killed 784 people and wounded 450 more, primarily black Republicans (Dauphine 1989, 176).

The following years of attempted Reconstruction saw the Republican Party, led primarily by Northern politicians known as “carpetbaggers,” faced with a crisis of legitimacy, crippling party infighting, and political violence. On one hand, the Governor, Henry Clay Warmoth, pursued a strategy of reconciliation with former rebels, hoping to win white voters. He extended patronage to white conservatives by appointing them to state and local offices, as well as the bench. Despite being from Illinois, he played up his Southern roots, and repealed the disenfranchisement clause of the Radical constitution that prevented some Rebels from voting. In addition, he refused to implement many of the civil rights provisions from the constitution— vetoing legislation that would enforce the prevention of discrimination in public spaces, and refusing to desegregate rural schools or the Louisiana State Seminary. Warmoth’s appeals to the white vote, however,

drew antagonism from the more Radical portion of his own party, particularly the black members (Tunnell 1984, 151-172).

Warmoth also attempted to maintain power through more forceful methods. To wrestle control in the heavily Democratic countryside, Republicans created new parishes and appointed their own officials to head them. They used a similar tactic in New Orleans, which allowed the Governor to appoint city officials and maintain Republican control of the city between 1870 and 1872 for the only time during Reconstruction. In addition, they implemented a Returning Board that was responsible for counting the votes and was able to discard the vote tallies from precincts where violence or intimidation had occurred. These tactics, however, created problems for the Republicans as well by undermining the very legitimacy of the democracy they were hoping to instill: “To protect themselves from those who would destroy them with violence, they constructed a police and election apparatus the internal logic of which subverted the democratic government as surely as the tactics of their opponents” (Tunnell 1984, 160).

The contradictions of these political strategies led to the tumultuous election of 1872, in which the Republican Party abandoned Warmoth and ran William P. Kellogg against a Fusionist party made up of Democrats and the Warmoth Republicans. The Returning Board split into two, and both parties claimed victory (Taylor 1974, 227-242). President Grant had to step in to declare Kellogg the Governor. By that time, however, Kellogg “would rule the corpse of a Republican Louisiana” (Tunnell 1984, 172). The increased perception of illegitimacy after the election, alongside the economic depression that swept the nation, led to the rise of the White League and a wave of violence in Louisiana that overthrew the Republican governments in several rural parishes. In 1874,

the Colfax massacre left over 100 black Republicans dead (Tunnell 1984, 189). The same year, the White League attempted to take control of the legislature by force, necessitating an intervention by federal troops (Taylor 1974, 293). Nationally, following the Panic of 1873 and the subsequent economic depression, the electorate in the North took a sharp turn away from the Republican Party. In the 1874 national Congressional elections, Republicans lost the large majority in the House that they had enjoyed since the beginning of the war. Finally, in 1877, an agreement in the United States Congress over the disputed presidential election of 1876 secured Rutherford B. Hayes the presidency, dictated the removal of federal troops from the South, and ended Reconstruction (Foner 2014, 523; Morris Jr, 2003).

### **The Southern Press During Reconstruction**

This thesis looks at three ideological categories of newspapers during Reconstruction: a white-owned Democratic paper, and both a black- and a white-owned Republican paper. The *New Orleans Picayune* is the Democratic paper and the *New Orleans Republican* is the white-owned Republican paper. Because there was no single black-owned newspaper that spanned the entirety of Reconstruction, this thesis looks at two: the *New Orleans Tribune* which was first published in 1864 and ran until 1868, and the *Weekly Louisianian*, which was founded in 1870 and ran until 1882. The *Daily Picayune* is a product of the antebellum Southern press, while the *New Orleans Republican*, the *Tribune*, and the *Louisianian* each were founded following the Unionist takeover of New Orleans.

During the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Southern press tended to be an ideologically cohesive force in terms of race, and strongly resistant to dissenting voices. The ideology, in its most simple terms, was white supremacy. While the shades of this thinking varied to a degree, between a paternalistic attitude insisting black people should occupy the lower rungs of society, to a flat out desire for extermination, or later a pseudo-scientific notion of racial order called *Volksgeist*—none seriously threatened the race-based economic and social structures of the South (Cummings 2003, 79-86). During Reconstruction, this force of opinion devoted itself to maintaining the antebellum racial order and vehemently opposing any attempt at Radical reform. “Perhaps in no other time in American history has any significant part of the press so blindly devoted itself to a political campaign for so lengthy a period,” argues Carl R. Osthaus in *Partisans of the Southern Press* (1994, 124). Osthaus takes the career of John Forsyth of the *Mobile Daily Register* as a representation of how Southern editors behaved during Reconstruction. In the *Register*, Republicans received a torrent of insults and were portrayed as tyrannical leaders, actively exacerbating the crisis of legitimacy that many Republican governments were facing. On the question of race, Forsyth treated blacks with contempt. He denounced their participation in politics and entrance into the public school system, gave sensationalized accounts of black violence, and stirred up white fear of a race war. While other editors may have varied in their styles and tactics, Osthaus argues, the views expressed by Forsyth were shared by Democratic editors across the South (1994, 118-148).

Richard H. Abbott’s *For Free Press and Equal Rights* (2004) provides the most comprehensive overview of the Republican press during Reconstruction, both in terms of

organization and ideology. As a new institution in the South, he describes the distinct challenge that the Republican papers faced:

The South's Republican editors had to balance two sometimes conflicting concerns that reflected the dilemma facing their party in the ex-Confederate States. On the one hand, they wanted to establish their party and its press as legitimate institutions entitled to share in their section's political life. At the same time, these editors hoped to build a viable political constituency among voters, both black and white. Since the bulk of Republican support came from freedmen's votes, Republican editors' efforts to rally black support made it exceedingly challenging to achieve legitimacy in the eyes of whites. (95)

Abbott describes an effort of editors to create a counter-part, both ideologically and stylistically, to the dominant Democratic press. Republican papers were aggressive advocates of free speech, "adopted a calm and objective editorial tone," and made efforts to modernize what they saw as the backwards thinking South. In addition, they advocated for equal political and civil rights for freed slaves. On this point, however, editors had to make efforts to do so in a way that did not completely alienate the white voters that they were hoping to attract. They were primarily aimed towards a white readership, and rarely challenged the assumption of inherent white supremacy. Instead, they attempted to assuage white fears of a race war, the indolence of free black laborers, and the threat of Republican governments to confiscate land, integrate schools, and disenfranchise white voters (Abbott 2004, 95-115).

The Republican papers faced significant challenges beyond negotiating their ideological position. With many Conservative businessmen refusing to buy advertising or provide patronage, they found it difficult to maintain the financial backing necessary for survival. One solution the party turned to was funding the press through the state treasury. In Louisiana, this meant \$1.5 million of state funds going to public printing in the first three years of Republican rule. This patronage could only go so far, however.

Republican papers rarely had the funds to subscribe to AP services, which left them at a significant disadvantage to Democratic papers that could provide more extensive coverage. In addition, news that was sent North was regularly altered and censored by conservative telegraph operators, or written by AP correspondents in the South who were Democrats themselves. This allowed for only a single, distorted picture of what was happening in the South to reach Northern readers and lawmakers, and “affected not only the credibility but the stability of Southern governments” (Summers 1994, 220-223).

During the Civil War and Reconstruction, 115 black newspapers were founded in the United States. While most had a relatively short life span, lasting only around eight years, at least nine survived to the turn of the century (Simmons 1995, 15). There were five black papers in Louisiana during Reconstruction, but the *Tribune* and the *Louisianian* were the only papers that lasted more than a few years. Before the war there had been just 25 black papers in the United States in total (Hutton 1995, 6). The Southern black papers struggled after the war with many of the same issues as the Republican press at large, but they also emerged from a distinct tradition. With the founding of the first black paper, the *Freedom's Journal* in 1827, the primary goal of the black press was to establish a legitimate voice for the free black population that had been fundamentally ignored and degraded by the white press, and provide an alternative vision of black humanity (Simmons 1995, 10). In addition, many of these editors advocated for the abolition of slavery and the extension of democratic rights to free blacks. As Frankie Hutton suggests, a driving ideological force in the development of the black press were the ideals of the American Revolution. That democratic idealism, she argues, continued to shape the black press after the Civil War and throughout Reconstruction (1995, 7-9).

The evidence gathered from both of the black papers examined in this study support her contention.

“The conviction of nineteenth-century newspaper editors that they substantially influenced public opinion proves difficult to evaluate,” Abbott concedes (2004, 1). However, because the South lacked the host of opportunities for acquiring information that the North provided (magazines, publishing houses, libraries and public schools), newspapers played an oversized role in educating the masses. In a time as contentious as Reconstruction, with so much on the line for so many, that role was likely inflated again.

### ***The New Orleans Daily Picayune***

The *New Orleans Picayune* debuted in late January 1837. Its founders and original editors, Francis Asbury Lumsden of North Carolina and George Wilkins Kendall of Vermont, consciously modeled the paper after the penny presses of the Northeast—something that had yet to be done in the South. Initially light-hearted and aiming to entertain, the *Picayune* evolved into an “establishment press,” with an interest in influencing public affairs. Before the election of Lincoln, it was Unionist and attempted to resist the calls of Radicals from both the North and the South. Lincoln’s election, however, “forced it into a pragmatic acceptance of secession.” By 1860, with a circulation of 12,600, it had become the largest paper in the South. (Osthaus 1994, 47-68).

Despite two brief shutdowns during the Union occupation, after the war the *Picayune* emerged in “a stronger position than that of any other New Orleans newspaper” (Copeland 1947, 109). It was still, however, considerably shrunk. According to a Geo P.

Rowell and Co's 1869 American Newspaper Directory for advertisers, the circulation was somewhere between five and ten thousand.

Edited by Alva Morris Holbrook, with a brief disruption in 1872, the paper focused primarily on economic and agricultural concerns—though by no means ignored politics. While Holbrook determined the overall direction of the paper, the “brilliant commentaries on the political situation” of the early Reconstruction years came from Connecticut-born Samuel F. Wilson. Other influential editors included Joseph A. Quintero and Marion A. Baker. With Holbrook's death in 1876, his wife took over as publisher, and led the paper during the election of 1876 (Copeland 1947, 110-114). Throughout Reconstruction, the *Picayune* maintained a relatively sober tone compared to other Southern publications. “The *Picayune*,” argued Osthaus, “though a critic of Radical Rule and social change in the postwar South, avoided the bitter-end resistance so destructive of effective journalism, and thus became the only antebellum, English-language paper in New Orleans to survive the war and Reconstruction.” Merging with the *Times-Democrat* in 1914 and forming the *Times-Picayune*, it continues as one of the dominant New Orleans newspapers (Osthaus 1994, 68).

### ***The New Orleans Republican***

The *New Orleans Republican* was founded in March of 1867 and declared itself in its prospectus “devoted to the Political, Commercial, and Industrial interests of Louisiana; in furtherance of which it will support the Republican Party, and the policy of Reconstruction adopted by Congress.” General Benjamin Butler and Nathaniel Banks,

who were commanding the federal troops in New Orleans at the time, signed a letter vouching for the loyalty of the papers proprietors, S.L. Brown & Company.

The paper soon came under the editorship of Michael Hahn, who had served as a military Governor in Louisiana between 1864 and 1865 and was both a member of the school board and the state legislature throughout Reconstruction (Reeves 1962, 71). With the election of Henry Clay Warmoth in 1868, the *Republican* picked up the official printing contract that had been lost by the *Tribune*. This was perhaps unsurprising, as Warmoth himself owned a considerable stake in the paper, and through the contract the paper “grew fat on state printing” (Taylor 1974, 157, 199).

The *Republican* printed a four- or eight-page paper six days a week for 10 years. According to the Geo P. Rowell and Co’s 1875 directory, it had a daily circulation of around 1,800. After the election of 1876, however, it briefly downgraded to a weekly, and then a semi-weekly. On November 10, 1878 it printed its last issue.

### ***The New Orleans Tribune***

The *New Orleans Tribune* was born when Dr. Louis Charles Roudanez purchased the printing equipment from the defunct *L’Union* two days after its closure in the summer of 1864 (Melancon 2011, 36). *L’Union*, a French-language paper founded five days after the emancipation proclamation by an all black group of shareholders, had been the first general circulation black paper in the South. It published bi-weekly and subsequently tri-weekly (Simmons 1995, 14; Melancon 2011, 35). Roudanez himself had been a founder of *L’Union*. He was a free black, born in Louisiana and educated in Paris. Paul Trévigne, the editor of *L’Union*, was also a free black, born and raised in New Orleans. He joined

Roudanez at the *Tribune* as its original editor, and together they published the first issue on July 21, 1864 (Connor 2001, 163). By 1865, it claimed a circulation of 3,000 papers daily, and in 1866 boasted (dubiously, perhaps, given the reported circulation of the *Picayune*) of having a larger circulation than any other paper in New Orleans (Melancon 2011, 52).

*L'Union* had been a caste journal, focusing on the aristocratic free black population with little concern for the freedmen. But the *Tribune* made it a point to appeal across class divides by printing in both French and English, and advocating the common interests of black people in Louisiana. An important part of their effort was Jean-Charles Houzeau, a white, Belgian-born abolitionist, who became the editor of the *Tribune* in the months after it was founded, while Trévigne remained on as an associate editor. Houzeau, by placing an emphasis on the English portion of the paper and by covering political events, broadened the *Tribune's* commitment to racial equality. He also made the *Tribune* a formidable political entity by sending copies of it to Northern papers, as well as every Congressman, who were then able to use his editorials to supplement their own rhetoric on the South. The paper obtained a printing contract from the Louisiana Republican Party, and in April of 1867, the *Tribune* was classified as the "Official Organ of the United States Government" (Melancon 2011, 58; Connor 2001, 163-165).

The rest of the staff was an "extraordinary group of black, brown, and white workers" (Rankin 1984, 29). But none had the dedication of Houzeau, who by 1866 had written 1,500 articles for the paper. After the Constitutional Convention, however, Houzeau left the paper after splitting with Roudanez over the best strategy to pursue regarding the candidacy of Henry Clay Warmoth, who they both opposed for governor.

Roudanez wanted to nominate another ticket, while Houzeau thought that such an approach may hand victory to the Democrats. Feeling he had lost a degree of editorial confidence, Houzeau resigned his editorship and moved to Jamaica, and eventually back to Belgium (Connor 2001, 179). With Warmoth's victory, both Congress and the Republican Party dropped their contracts with the *Tribune*. After a seven month printing hiatus, and a brief attempt to revive itself as a weekly, the *Tribune* printed its final issue in 1870 (Melancon 2001, 61).

### **The *Weekly Louisianian***

The *Weekly Louisianian* published its first issue on December 18, 1870, and began publication as a semi-weekly. The main proprietor was P.B.S. Pinchback, a free black man who had come to New Orleans in 1862 from Mississippi where he had been working as a river-boat captain. He served briefly in the Union Army, was a delegate in the 1868 Constitutional Convention, then a State Senator, and became the first black Governor of a U.S. state in 1872, when he served to replace Henry Warmoth, who was suspended pending the trial of his impeachment (Taylor 1974, 221-249). William G. Brown served as the *Louisianian's* first editor until 1872 when he took over as Louisiana's superintendent of education. He was succeeded by Henry A. Corbin, who edited the paper through the election 1876 (Chronicling America 2017).

The paper continued in the tradition of *L'Union* and the *Tribune* in advocating for equal rights for blacks, and claimed that "not a single line published was written by a white" (Abbott 2004, 151). But it also covered a wide-range of topics, including national and international news, and by 1872 had a network of correspondents throughout the state

and country (Breux 2006, 75). While the exact circulation numbers are not readily available, its listing in an advertiser's newspaper directory throughout the 70's suggests it was never greater than 5,000. The *Louisianian* also made an effort to attract a white audience more so than other black papers in Louisiana, initially touting its Republican credentials over its identity as a black paper. Its masthead read: "Republican at all times and under all circumstances" (Breux 2006, 70). This allegiance to the party above race, however, would eventually become strained--- as evidenced by the coverage examined in this study.

## **Methods**

While a number of studies provide a sense of the racial ideology and rhetoric of the press during Reconstruction, this thesis hopes to delve deeper. A comparative study of three papers operating in the same city will not only reveal their racial outlooks, but explore how they evolved in relation to the development of Reconstruction and adjusted to political circumstances.

This thesis will examine the coverage of each paper during two periods: one near the start of Radical Reconstruction, and one at the end. For the two white-owned papers, the *Picayune* and the *Republican*, it looks at the coverage the month surrounding the presidential elections of 1868 and 1876— two weeks before and two weeks after. The black-owned papers are more limited in their availability. I look at the closest available issues of the *New Orleans Tribune* before and after the election of 1868, which consisted of 18 issues from April of that year and 12 issues from December. Because there are only two issues of the *Weekly Louisianian* available during 1876, I looked at all available issues between the end of 1875 and the end of 1877— 13 issues in total.

Each paper will be analyzed with certain questions in mind. Most importantly, how is the fate of black people in the United States described or imagined? Are race relations described primarily in political, moral, or practical terms? Does each paper advocate for equal rights, and if so does that position stem from a professed belief in racial equality or from political necessity? Is the fate of black people a central element in the coverage, or only mentioned peripherally? How are black people described, particularly in their roles as citizens and lawmakers? And finally, how did these views evolve throughout Reconstruction?

## Chapter Two: 1868

So it is in the political life of a State. Today the future brightens with hope, and promises of peace and prosperity. Tomorrow portends disaster, and the bad passions of bad men threaten bloodshed and disorder. (*New Orleans Republican*, October 20, 1868)

### **The *Daily Picayune* and the *New Orleans Republican***

As the election of 1868 approached, a tremendous amount of violence plagued New Orleans. “By day and night white mobs roamed the city and its suburbs” writes Ted Tunnell, “robbing, beating, and killing Negroes; breaking up Republican clubs and processions; and ambushing and so intimidating the police that patrolmen feared to leave their station houses” (1984, 154). In the two weeks before the election and those immediately following, both the *Daily Picayune* and the *New Orleans Republican* were compelled to report on the violence and advocate an appropriate response to it, but had to do so with a certain degree of dexterity. For the *Picayune*, the election of a Democratic president, and thus ending Radical Reconstruction before it could get off the ground, was an enticing prospect, and one that looked increasingly viable as elections in the North showed Democrats increasing in power. But as a means of securing electoral victory, the violence against blacks and Republicans was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, keeping Republicans from the polls through intimidation was likely the only way the Democrats would be able to carry the state for Horatio Seymour, the Democratic presidential nominee who was running against the Republican, Ulysses S. Grant. Just months before they had lost the battle over the ratification of the state constitution and control of the state legislature. On the other hand, the violence threatened to undermine the legitimacy of a Democratic victory. The *Republican* faced a more practical concern: should they encourage Republicans, many of them newly enfranchised freedmen who had

yet to participate in a national election, to go out and vote when it could mean risking their lives?

The *Picayune's* reporting of the violence reflects and highlights its positions regarding race, politics, and democracy at the time: the fundamental denial of black political agency and humanity; the inherent deviousness of the carpetbaggers; the inevitability of constant white violence in response to black suffrage; and the impossibility of a functioning multi-racial democracy or integrated society.

The *Picayune's* degradation of blacks was twofold. First, it dubiously attributed to them excessive and unprovoked violence. Second, it maintained that blacks were being unwittingly pressed to commit that violence by self-serving carpetbaggers, thus denying even their independence. The *Picayune* ran daily stories leading up to the election portraying the black population as violent, threatening, and hateful. This narrative, however, was sometimes difficult to square with the actual results of the violence. Georges Clemenceau, who covered Reconstruction in America for a French newspaper, wrote: "In all events of the kind, the remarkable feature is that according to the telegraphic reports, there is always a band of heavily armed negroes attacking a handful [*sic*] of harmless whites. Then when it comes to counting the dead, a few negroes are always down, but of white men, not a trace" (qtd. in Taylor 1974, 168, Foner 2014). This was perhaps most clearly demonstrated in a single headline from the *Picayune* on October 25:

A RIOT ON CANAL STREET  
Six Negroes Killed.  
Two Wounded Mortally.  
Terrible Excitement.  
Negroes are Again the Aggressors.

The insistence on blacks as the source of violence also allowed the *Picayune* to avoid an uncomfortable truth about their own relationship to political violence, which was that in addition to needing it as an electoral tool, the logic of their political position depended on it. They discouraged the violence of Democrats in the abstract, suggesting in one editorial that the wrongs inflicted upon them by the North could “be properly and efficiently remedied only by and through peaceful means” (October 22). But when it came to actual acts of violence committed against black people, the *Picayune* portrayed them as warranted. After a fire in Gretna, the *Picayune* reported: “For while the fire was at its height, several negroes were observed stealing and carrying away goods and any portable articles they could lay their hands on. This, of course, provoked the citizens and in the melee which immediately followed three of the negroes were killed” (October 24). Not only were acts of individual violence justified circumstantially, violence in general was considered unavoidable in the face of Republican rule. “It is our duty to counsel peace and forbearance,” printed the *Picayune* on October 30, “but it is equally our duty to say that Radical legislation as now going on is inimical to peace and order and the prosperity of the State.”

The *New Orleans Republican* made an effort to counter the *Picayune*’s narrative of black agitation by reporting on the murder of black citizens by Democrats and explicitly disputing the accounts of Democratic papers. The *Republican*’s headline regarding the same incident on Canal Street that the *Picayune* had suggested was due to black aggression inverts that premise:

Another Street Conflict.  
ASSASSINATION OF COLORED MEN.  
Great Excitement Saturday Night.  
SEVEN COLORED PERSONS KILLED  
Two White Men Killed.

“That it was an unprovoked assault is certain,” wrote the *Republican*, “the Democratic journals to the contrary notwithstanding” (October 26). In their articles and editorials they placed the blame on Democrats for the constant violence, condemned them for refusing to hire freedmen who voted on the radical ticket, and accused them of stealing and destroying registration papers. In addition, they praised the black population for their patience and peacefulness. In one article, responding to Democratic resolutions that pledged to “protect every man, white or black, in his right to vote,” the *Republican* responded: “Let this question be asked: From whom, from whose violence do they propose to protect the colored voter? Out of their own mouths they are convicted” (November 3). By the time the election came to pass, the violence had gotten so severe that the *Republican* declared that it would be impossible to have a fair vote:

We are certain that if every possible effort should be made it would be an impossibility to poll half of the real Republican vote in the State. If the effort should be made with the firmness and determination many polling places would simply become scenes of massacre. With these convictions we have this advice to offer Republicans throughout the state. Wherever you can vote without reasonable apprehension of being subjected to personal violence, do so....if you cannot, remain at home. (October 30)

After the vote, which resulted in a Democratic victory in Louisiana, the *Republican* declared the election a “farce” (November 11).

While the *Picayune* could not deny the reality of a diminished black turnout to the polls, it took as the cause a conspiratorial effort by the Republicans to encourage blacks not to vote in order to make it *appear* as though there had been intimidation. This was

part of a larger campaign against the white element of the Republican Party. The *Picayune* reserved its most adamant antagonism for carpetbaggers, who they contended manipulated blacks and encouraged violence in order to secure their own power. By painting the white Republican leadership in such a way, they also attempted to portray Democrats as the *true* friend of the black population and the freedmen. In an article surrounding a violent incident in Brasher City, the paper blames “the hungry adventurers who have flocked hither—to implant feelings of hatred in the hearts of the negro race, in order they might thereby incite and perpetuate a strife which they alone benefitted” (October 21). Reporting another incident, in which a black man was shot after supposedly “endeavoring to fire a musket at a white man engaged in a difficulty with a negro on the corner of the street,” the *Picayune* displayed a hint of sympathy for the eventual victim: “Ill advised and mistaken, he was but the instrument in the hands of those who should have known better. The real offenders escaped; the negro—the dupe—was alone the sufferer. It is the old story; the instrument has been punished, and the really guilty party is unmolested” (October 30). Depicting the carpetbaggers as strictly opportunists with no serious moral fortitude was an essential strategy of the *Picayune*. In one article they suggest that “there is not a shade of difference in the motives of the slaveholder and those of the carpet-bagger; only that the carpet-bagger puts on the air of a sleek humanitarian... If the negro knew the true history of his race, he would think the slave-holder altogether more reputable than the carpet-bagger” (October 28). Any attempts by white Republicans to advance political or social equality for the black population were never characterized as such—they were considered acts of aggression against Southern whites.

In addition, the *Picayune* also suggested that the carpetbaggers fundamentally did not understand the freedmen. They wrote of Republican assumptions:

It was supposed that the freedmen were an intellectual, intelligent class of men, who, when power was conferred upon them, would know how to wield it for their own supremacy: but it was discovered that their intellection, their self-reliance, their intelligence are a mere rope of sand, in which no confidence can be placed. . . . It is now conceded on all sides that no political timber can be made out of the negro. He is found in the rough and must remain in the rough. He may be as black as mahogany, but he is utterly condemned for cabinet furniture. Horace makes an idol of Priapus to say, "I was a rude, misshapen log until the carpenter hewed and fashioned me into a god." The Radicals tried the same experiment on the African, but without success; they found him a log, and must leave him a log. (October 25)

With their reckless attempts at black equality, the Radicals upset what the *Picayune* portrayed as a relatively harmonious relationship between the races. After an incident in which two black prisoners in a Gretna jail were lynched by a mob of angry whites, the *Picayune* placed the blame squarely on Radicals for "the disruption of all the life long relations of the whites with the blacks" (October 25). In another article they suggest that after emancipation whites "imputed no fault to the negro, and conceding his freedom as unalterable, felt no resentment towards him, nor disposition to regain authority" (October 25).

The *Picayune*'s relative tolerance towards blacks compared to carpetbaggers and their professed understanding of them provided a position from which they could appeal to the black vote. It was the Southern Democrats, who had lived close to black people their whole lives, who truly understood the way to structure a mutually beneficial relationship between the two races. The *Picayune* contended that, in fact, the interests of the Democratic Party and the black population of Louisiana were one in the same.

"Among us the mutual interests were strong, the sympathies only slightly disturbed, and the knowledge of each other perfect," wrote the *Picayune* on October 25. The "mutual

interests” they described, however, would not be realized through concessions to equality from the Democratic Party, nor the curtailment of violence. Rather, it depended on an awakening by the blacks in the state that the only way to find peace would be through the renunciation of their political rights. In a letter printed on October 21, supposedly written by freedmen, the *Picayune* claimed to have received just that renunciation:

We, the undersigned, feeling convinced from the late events that have transpired in the parish, that the policy of the Radical party will give us not peace, but will lead only to riots and disorder, do hereby withdraw from said party and renounce all affiliation with it. Knowing, moreover, that from our limited knowledge of politics, we are unable to act wisely in using the elective franchise, we do therefore withdraw there from entirely and renounce all right to register or vote, and agree to have nothing whatever to do with any party, or to meddle with politics in any ways.

The *Picayune* took this letter as vindication of their claims: that Radical policies were the cause of violence, blacks were ignorant, and the carpetbaggers self-serving. The article follows with a few other examples throughout the state of blacks renouncing the vote, and then goes on to say: “The light of truth has at length struck the eyes of many among them. They begin to see that scalawags and carpet baggers are not their real friends, and that their only objects have been to make use of the colored people as tools for their own personal benefits and advancement” (October 21).

Of course, there was an irony in the *Picayune*’s sudden praise for black reasoning and recognition of truth when they renounced their own political rights, while the primary argument against granting them political rights in the first place was their inability to reason and their susceptibility to manipulation. But this sort of contradiction was a standard element in the *Picayune*’s rhetoric on black political rights. On the one hand they denounced the violence they saw being committed by their own party, but they also depended on that very violence and chaos to demonstrate the inevitable results of

equality. They described blacks as uneducated and ignorant, but refused to acknowledge their own historical insistence that that be the case. Finally, they described blacks as lacking any agency in terms of their political decisions or acts of violence, and used those descriptions to deny black citizenship. Yet, simultaneously, they refused to take responsibility for the violence of their own party or acknowledge it as strategic intimidation. Rather, they described it as an unalterable condition of racial equality. In doing so they called in to question their own agency or ability to control their violent impulses. This self-fulfilling logic was a continuation of a perspective held by much of the South immediately following emancipation. In 1866, a man in Mississippi wrote a letter to Charles Sumner claiming that “the object of the Southerners appears to be to make good their often repeated assertions, to the effect that Negroes would die if they were freed. To make it so, they seem determined to goad them to desperation, in order to have an excuse to turn upon and annihilate them” (DuBois 1935, 148).

While the *Republican* made an effort to counter the most egregious of Democratic claims about black people, they stopped short of a full-throated endorsement of black equality or aligning the struggle of the Republican Party with the struggle of the freedmen. Indeed, they seemed disinclined to approach race as a political issue at all. In a November 10<sup>th</sup> editorial they wrote:

The fight of the Republicans has never been for the negro; it has been for freedom—freedom of man, and of man’s right to write, to speak, and to live undisturbed in the existence of such right anywhere in this broad land of ours. When colored men plant themselves on the issue of “race” and band clannishly to give their race as such a superiority in power and direction of the State Government, they will find the white element of the Republican party actively antagonistic to them.

The *Republican* did not view the Republican Party in Louisiana as being driven by the

interests of its racial majority, nor did it view itself as a voice speaking for or to that majority. That voice came from the *New Orleans Tribune*.

### **The *New Orleans Tribune***

While there are no available issues of the *New Orleans Tribune* immediately surrounding the presidential election of 1868, issues from April, the month in which the state voted on the new state constitution, and from December of that year, provide a relatively clear picture of the paper's position on racial politics and its relationship to both the *Republican* and the *Picayune*. The *New Orleans Tribune* saw the contradictions in the Democratic arguments and made it their primary duty to point them out. As such, many of their editorials in 1868 were structured as critiques of articles in other newspapers and journals in the city. In an editorial leading up to the vote on the Constitution of 1868, the *Tribune* addressed the Democratic journals of the city, which were attempting to turn the black vote against it. Their appeals, argued the *Tribune*, were based solely on arousing fear and the threat of violence. "But is it not a strange spectacle," asked the *Tribune*, "an intelligent people, professing to be high-minded, generous and Christian, far in advance of their Northern neighbors, uniting through their press in one universal threat of their displeasure against a portion of their fellow-citizens, for no other conceivable crime than striving in a peaceful and lawful way to make sure of their freedom?" (April 22). In an April 14 editorial the *Tribune* took on a criticism made by a Democratic newspaper that most of the blacks who would be voting on the state constitution were illiterate. "Very likely, but who is to blame?" asked the *Tribune*. "Had

the old Constitution granted them the same educational advantages which the new does, they might be able to “read, write, and spell.”

In their own political appeals the *Tribune* stressed a consistency based on the principles of liberty, equality, and democracy. Editorials theorized about their true meanings. On April 17, in an editorial “Liberty for all or Liberty for None,” the *Tribune* argued that slavery in the South had “corrupted the sentiment of liberty” and made it a privilege rather than a right. As such, Liberty existed as something that could be handed out, and more importantly, revoked. This, argued the *Tribune*, should be alarming for citizens of all races: “Will, then, the common people, (we speak irrespective of color) hold their liberty secure? Let them regard liberty as a Right, common to mankind. Let them not withhold from any of their fellow men what they demand for themselves.” In another, “True Liberty and It’s Counterfeit,” the *Tribune* goes on to distinguish between liberty and toleration. “Toleration is in fact only one phase of tyranny; tyranny in smiles, but tyranny still. For he who can permit may refuse. Toleration implies the right to withhold tomorrow what is granted to-day... This surely is not liberty” (April 23). The *Tribune* contested that their claim to political and civil rights was in fact a *preservation* of fundamental American values, as opposed to simply a radical overthrow of racial hierarchy.

As a way of emphasizing their consistency, the *Tribune* regularly reminded their readers that they had opposed disenfranchisement of former Confederates at the state convention. “It was our wish that all the people should have an equal share in legislation and government,” they wrote on April 23. “We were willing to forget the bad fact of rebellion, in our desire for conciliation and peace. A risk, we know, would be thereby

incurred, but we were ready to take our chance with the rest, even though, in that case, the numerical advantage would have been against us.” These reminders not only proved the fortitude of their principles, but also were used combat the notion being put forward by Democratic papers that the Radicals were conspiring to secure black supremacy. “But you cannot endure black supremacy,” wrote the *Tribune*, “Well, we do not care to be supreme. . . . All we want is our rights.” They go on to reassure the Democrats that if they were to encourage immigration “from whatever quarter,” they would soon regain their political advantage. At the same time, the *Tribune* understood that the potential result of the franchise for former Confederates was having their own franchise revoked. “We advocate a rule that works both ways,” they wrote. “It would be absurd in us to untie the hands of those who might at once proceed to tie up ours, without our having a chance to resist” (December 29).

The *Tribune* was also willing to use Democratic narrative of race relations and depictions of blacks as uncivilized and ignorant to point out the glaring contradiction in their professed paternalism and Christian generosity towards the former slaves and the reality of their actions towards them:

We used to hear it said that slavery was a missionary institution for the civilizing and Christianizing of the black race. Does it not seem strange that the agents working for that institution should now, in their new relation to the “heathen” among them, spend their breath in abuse and ridicule of those people? One would almost suppose that these “missionaries,” in imparting civilization and Christianity to others, had left none for themselves. (April 26)

While these arguments appear tongue-in-cheek, they provided another opportunity for the *Tribune* to make their case for equality without entirely destabilizing the racial hierarchy, and also appealing to the ego of the Southern whites who regarded their race as superior. “We should call it honorable,” wrote the *Tribune*, “for a powerful, intelligent and

Christian people to hold out the hand of welcome to a weaker, less educated race, and to encourage their every endeavor at self improvement” (April 26). And like the *Picayune*, the *Tribune* also appealed to the historical relationship between races. In one editorial they suggested that the experience of having lived with white people for so long would give freedmen in America a certain level of political aptitude that the slaves in Haiti did not possess following the Haitian revolution: “It should be remembered that in our country the colored people have been living for two centuries among a “superior” race,” wrote the *Tribune*, “distinguished for intelligence, enterprise, a practical familiarity with the principles of law, a remarkable aptitude for government, and a high-toned Christian sentiment...With all the compulsory ignorance of multitudes of American blacks, the influence of their white brethren ought to tell upon their character” (April 24).

Ultimately, the *Tribune* was firm in its belief in the political agency and integrity of black people, and their ultimate steadfastness on the issue of their own equality. In a last ditch appeal to compel black voters to vote against the new constitution, a number of Democratic candidates for the state legislature held a barbecue and encouraged planters to place “their horses and wagons at the disposition of ‘their negroes’ to enable them to attend” (April 10). The *Tribune* was supportive of the opportunity for black people to “hear all sides,” but was not concerned that the flattery would persuade any of the attendees to vote against their own interests:

They will eat and make merry; but whether any number of them can be induced by these gastronomic appeals to vote against the “Black Crook” Constitution, we have serious doubts. The savory argument will be hugely appropriated and appreciated, and fully assimilated, but whether the assimilation will be sufficiently Democratic, is another question. (April 10)

Similarly, around Christmas, the Democratic paper *The Planter's Banner* ran an article suggesting that “the negroes have now dropped politics” and the planters, in turn, should “give them a big dinner, and the materials for a general frolic.” *The Tribune*, however, was having none of the suggestion: “We trust that none of our people will suffer themselves to be duped by ‘big dinners and a general frolic,’ to abandon politics. Our liberties are in our own hands, and must not be thrown away for ‘fiddles and bows’” (December 29).

## **Conclusion**

“Equality,” wrote the *Picayune*, “is a fine thing in fancy, but there is no such thing as equality in nature, no such thing in this world, and there will be none in the world to come” (October 28). Reading the *Daily Picayune* and the *New Orleans Tribune* in 1868, one finds what appear to be fully formed and totally irreconcilable views on racial equality, universal suffrage, and integration. To the *Picayune*, any attempt by the Radical Republicans to secure or exercise the rights of citizenship for the black population was seen as an act of intentional antagonism towards them. While they would not encourage it, the violence that occurred as a response to that antagonism was regarded as unavoidable by the *Picayune*. Understood in the context of their political position, it was necessary.

Those rights of citizenship for blacks, along with basic security, were the only things that mattered to the *Tribune*. And while they made the struggle of freedmen their unapologetic focus, they based their demands on a set of principles that were necessarily unattached to race. The ultimate logic of those principles demanded not just equal rights,

but eventual integration. Praising integrated Northern universities, the *Tribune* wrote that they “are not the result of fanaticism nor an exceptional fact, but perfectly in a line with the liberal spirit of the age, as they are with the fundamental principles of justice and equity, and the genius of our Republican Government” (December 18). Despite the threat faced by the black population of Louisiana and the atrocities committed against them, the *Tribune* did not view their demands as self-defeating. They saw them as the natural culmination of their history since emancipation.

“To describe the significance of freedom to four million black slaves of the South is to test severely our historical imagination,” wrote Leon Litwack (1979, xii). Perhaps it is an equally severe test of our imagination to describe the ideological chasm that split Louisiana (along with the rest of the South) at the outset of Radical Reconstruction. It is hard to imagine a more divided and uncertain politics in a democracy. Yet, on each side there were gestures made to the opposition in a distant hope that they could be persuaded. It is worth noting what exactly each side was asking of the other. The *Picayune*, in its attempts, was asking the freedmen to forgo all claims to political involvement, and in effect, renounce their own humanity. Conversely, the *Tribune* seemed to be pleading with the white people of Louisiana to, in fact, live up to their professed ideals, to demonstrate their superiority and generosity, and most essentially, to become more humane.

It is more difficult to find in the *Republican* a similarly cohesive position on racial equality, or what they believed the future for black Louisianans should look like. They were willing to defend the character of black people, and bring attention to the violence being committed against them. But they stopped well short of extolling the virtues of racial equality or integration. This hesitation did not go unnoticed by the black

population. In a single biting observation, the *Tribune* noted: “The New Orleans Republican of Tuesday evening, contains a long article on public education, in which it takes good care to say nothing about mixed schools” (December 10). Tunnell suggests that being considered at the forefront of a mostly black movement caused the white leadership in the Republican Party significant discomfort. “A harsh verdict can scarcely be avoided,” he wrote. “Reconstruction failed on the lower Mississippi mainly because Louisiana whites believed more devoutly in white supremacy than the Radicals believed in the rights of man” (1984, 217) The 1868 *New Orleans Republican* provides significant evidence to support that verdict.

## Chapter Three: 1876

In the drawn out centennial election contest between Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel Tilden, one thing the nation succeeded in was narrowly avoiding a descent into complete violence and chaos. “Indeed,” writes Roy Morris Jr., “one ill-chosen word from Tilden might well have ignited another Civil War, this time between rival political parties rather than geographical regions” (2003, 3). Instead, Morris suggests, the back-room dealing that eventually decided the election simultaneously disenfranchised over 4 million Democratic voters, abandoned the nation’s guarantee to protect Southern blacks (leading to nearly a century of segregation and terror under Jim Crow) and undermined the credibility of the entire political and electoral system for years to come (2003, 4).

In all this, Louisiana played an essential role. Along with South Carolina and Florida, the Returning Board in Louisiana invalidated enough Democratic votes due to reported intimidation to swing the state for Hayes. Whether or not there was actually enough intimidation to make the Returning Board’s action legitimate is still a point of historical contention. Morris finds the proposition dubious (2003, 182). Joe Taylor, however, throws his lot in with early 20<sup>th</sup> century historian and Conservative sympathizer Ella Lonn, who wrote that “in such a maze of assertions and denials, bribery and counter-bribery, and false testimony contradicted and retracted, the truth is well-nigh hopelessly buried” (Lonn 1918, 452; Taylor 1984, 492). In any case, the final results of the compromise of 1877 put Hayes in the oval office, Democrat Francis T. Nicholls in Louisiana’s Governors office, and saw the removal of federal troops from New Orleans on the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their arrival in 1862. The attempt at Southern Reconstruction came to an end.

In their own ways, each of the New Orleans newspapers considered here anticipated some aspect of the electoral result and its meaning. The *Picayune* both saw the potential for a victory by appealing to the black vote, and also feared the possibility of electoral victory being taken from them by the Returning Board. The *Republican* made ominous predictions regarding the future of the South under Democratic rule and the curtailment of rights for African-Americans that would eventually come to prove frighteningly accurate. And the *Louisianian*, for its part, seemed to sense that no matter the result of the election, the Republican Party and the nation as a whole seemed to be quickly losing interest in its recent commitment to racial equality.

### ***The Daily Picayune and the New Orleans Republican***

In the weeks surrounding the election of 1876, the *New Orleans Republican* and the *Daily Picayune*, as they had done in 1868, traded accusations of fraud, intimidation, and deceit. The *Republican* referred to any intimidation of Republican voters as “bulldozing.” The *Picayune*, in turn, warned that Republicans in certain parishes would use overblown accusations of intimidation to throw out legitimate votes. They called it “Ku-Kluxing” the vote. A Republican effort to root out fraudulent voter registration in New Orleans purged nearly ten thousand false names from the voter rolls. The *Picayune* dubbed this effort the “Sewing Machine Trick” (Republicans had sent out sewing machine advertisements to verify addresses), and portrayed it as an attempt to suppress *legitimate* voting. Each side appeared convinced that the only way the other could win was through intimidation and fraud. On November 1, the *Republican* printed an accusation that the Democratic ballot was being printed in a way that would not allow

voters to write in the candidate they preferred. “This is a manifestation of the doubts entertained by the Democratic managers of the people they claim as followers,” wrote the *Republican*. “It is a deliberate attempt to prevent them from exercising their honest judgment and freedom of opinion, and in this respect is an insult to their manly independence.” On November 5<sup>th</sup>, two days before the election, the *Picayune* suggested there was an attempt to undermine voting in conservative parishes, alleging that “some of the registration office records have been spirited away, and in other instances the supervisors have failed to designate polling places.” The extent and persistence of such accusations reflected each side’s anxieties about the stakes of the election, and their distrust of one another. The distinct ways that each paper portrayed those stakes reveals how they understood the position of blacks in relation to their party and to Louisiana as a whole.

“It is universally conceded,” wrote the *Picayune* the day before the election, “that the Presidential election to be held tomorrow involves more important interests than has any other in the history of this country” (November 6). It spared no exuberance in describing what they believed would be the outcome of a Democratic victory. On October 28<sup>th</sup> they wrote:

We believe that on the night of November 7, next, an electric storm of good news will sweep hither announcing the triumph of constitutional principles, and the rebuke, the discomfiture, the final defeat of aggressive Radicalism, of pseudo-philanthropy, of centralism, of nepotism and carpet-baggers all over the length and breadth of the land.

The overthrow of what they saw as an illegitimate Radical government was one facet of the *Picayune*’s vision. Another was a holistic improvement in the state’s economic

position. “In Louisiana, particularly, the triumph of Conservatism is necessary to revive the prosperity of the people,” the *Picayune* wrote on November 4<sup>th</sup>:

The election of Gen. Nicholls would restore confidence and enterprise to every department of business. Capital, which has been frightened away by misgovernment and political spoliation, would flow back into our city, to be distributed in developing the industries of the people and the resources of the state. Immigration, which has shunned our shores during the reign of corruption, would soon populate the fertile lands of the interior. The State credit would be restored and the value of her securities advanced, for capital, both at home and abroad, will accept Gen. Nicholl’s election as a guarantee of an honest and capable and tranquil administration.

The promise of prosperity was not relegated to the *Picayune*’s white readers. They pointed to Democratic administrations in other states that had supposedly increased the wealth of the black population as well. On November 1<sup>st</sup> they wrote:

The Republican party claims to have done a great deal for the negroes; but the statistics show that they have grown weary in the good work, and that the Democrats have come to their relief. For instance, the average wages of a farm laborer in Georgia are \$12 per month; just across the river in South Carolina only \$8. At the close of the Bullock administration the Georgia blacks owned altogether \$600,000; four years of Democratic rule have increased their wealth to \$6,000,000.

Economic appeals were part of a larger attempt by the *Picayune* and the Democratic Party to win over black voters. In 1876, for the first time, the national Democratic platform committed to upholding the law as dictated by the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments. The actual sincerity of the parties commitment to the black population, however, was strongly challenged by the *Republican*—and to some degree tempered by the *Picayune*’s own shifty rhetoric on equality and race relations.

“The seventh of November is charged with the grave portent to the American people in the second century of their national life,” wrote the *Republican* on October 26. “If the North should fail to arouse the momentousness of the issue, its direst threatenings

must befall.” The *Republican*, like the *Picayune*, focused on the potential consequences of a Democratic victory and viewed it with no less seriousness. But where the *Picayune* was jubilant, the *Republican* was foreboding, and where the *Picayune* pointed to a prosperous future under a Democratic regime, the *Republican* warned of the return to the solid Democratic South that existed before the war, and everything that implied:

Let the North fully understand that if in this centennial year, force and fraud are permitted to achieve a solid Democratic South, that victory will be a permanency; that the ante-bellum sectional lines are thereby at once re-established; that the gage is thrown for a renewal of the bloody strife of last decade, whatever be the immediate issue which the politicians invent. (October 26)

Memories of the horrors of the war and the conditions of the antebellum South, along with the threat of another Civil War, provided the thrust of the *Republicans* appeal to voters before the election. In one editorial they mocked Samuel Tilden for avoiding the subject of Democratic Party’s past: ““Let us look at the bright Democratic present,” says Samuel, ‘and the dazzling future. Let us forget the unhappy past, and look at something cheerful, look at me on my way to the White House’” (October 27). These appeals often drifted into what the *Picayune* and the Democrats pejoratively called “waving the bloody shirt”-- emotional reminders of the losses suffered during the war:

We are willing to forget the Democratic past, and to forget Tilden, but there are glories won by Republicans in the war for the Union, there are acts of sacrifice and heroism, there are men like the martyr Lincoln, like Sumner, Seward and Stanton, there are dead soldiers left on strange fields, there are the grateful tears of a people released from bonds, and there are thousands of noble men, acts, words and deeds of the glorious past we can not and would not forget; not for our own sake, not to oblige Tilden. (October 27)

This rhetoric seemed specifically focused on guilt-tripping any Northern Democrats who likely would have had allegiances to the Union during the war, and to spur federal intervention to ensure a fair election.

But perhaps the fundamental warning the *Republican* issued during the weeks surrounding the election was with regard to the likely fate of the black population in a Democratic South. To varying degrees, the *Republican* suggested that should Democrats gain control of the South, along with the presidency, they would “subjugate the colored race to something approximating slavery” (November 4). Or, at the least, they would use their power to effectively disenfranchise blacks. In one editorial, entitled “The War Over Again,” the *Republican* paints a distressingly accurate picture of the Jim Crow South that would become the reality in the decades to follow. Of course, it was not the election result that they feared that led to it. The passage is worth quoting at length for both its prescience and irony. Referring to the black population in the case of a Democratic victory, the *Republican* wrote:

They will be the prisoners of the war....They may be subjected to a copy of the law of Texas or of Georgia, or to the social despotism of Mississippi or Alabama. Within their fatal inclosure they may groan in political bondage, but with the exclusive right of the State to administer its own laws over its own citizens— with a President who will not intervene to protect a citizen of the United States, unless called upon to do so by the authorities of the State within which the citizen resides, there will be practically no protection. If the Democratic party shall conquer in this war they will carry the colored voters into a captivity from which their can be neither ransom nor escape. Let them come up to what may be their last free ballot, as men who have before them the alternative of political freedom or political death. (November 7)

This ultimate accuracy of this prediction would slowly unfold, beginning with the compromise of 1877 and continuing as Jim Crow policies formalized.

After Election Day, as the results were being reviewed and party officials from the North travelled to Louisiana, the *Republican* doubled down on their accusations of intimidation and fraud. They also suggested what the consequences of effective disenfranchisement could be for blacks, and for the South as a whole. One possibility was

the voluntary renunciation of their franchise, which would have depleted the representation of the South in the U.S. legislature. However, the *Republican* deemed this unlikely. What it felt was more probable was the mass migration of Southern blacks to other parts of the world. “It is extremely probable that contiguous territory can be found,” they wrote on November 15<sup>th</sup>, “in which the negro shall be rated at his full value not only in the industrial sense, but as a political integer.” Mexico, Central American, and the Caribbean Islands were all offered as potential destinations for black Southerners. This suggestion was not just innocent speculation, but also a warning to Southern planters of the detrimental effects it would have on the economy and political representation of the South:

With our own sugar fields deserted and those of San Domingo peopled by the magnificent body of laborers to whom Louisiana owes nearly every dollar of wealth she has, the question of a tariff on our sugar would become too insignificant to merit the indignation of the most orthodox Northern Democrat. At the same time the industrial arm of the South thus paralyzed, the scepter of political power would be changed into a buffoon’s stick, the North and the world would lose all interest in the shiftless unthrifty people who remained, and the great question which has kept a whole continent in hot water for three-quarters of a century would become asphyxiated by the loss at one and the same time of the backbone of contention and the chief prop of productive power. (November 15)

For the *Republican*, the potential for mass migration existed as one of the only recourses for blacks in the case of a Democratic South expressed.

The *Picayune* pushed back against the idea that a Democratic victory would mean the subjugation of black Louisianans. Much of the rhetoric surrounding the politics of race was the same as during the election of 1868, and based on an attempt to draw the black vote away from the Republican Party. While perhaps less vigorously, they revived their accusations that manipulative carpetbaggers did not deserve the loyalty of the black population and continued their attempts to undermine the moral superiority of the North

by providing their version of the ideological history of abolitionism: “After 1808, the New England people found it more profitable to hire white servants than to keep slaves,” wrote the *Picayune* on October 29, “and mistaking the promptings of self-interest for that of high moral duty, they sought to justify themselves by bitterly attacking the South and loudly applauding their own conduct.” In accordance with the Democratic Party’s platform that endorsed protecting the new constitutional rights of freedmen, the *Picayune* also seemed to become somewhat more liberal in its rhetoric. While the paper still featured some portrayals of black criminality, they were not nearly as central to its coverage as they had been in 1868. Inevitable racial violence was no longer a preferred rallying cry against the radical agenda, nor were explicit depictions of blacks as unfit for political participation. Rather than publishing letters from blacks renouncing their own political rights as they had done in ‘68, they instead published letters from blacks declaring their support for the Democrats. In this way the *Picayune* expanded its efforts to appeal to the black population. A letter published in the *Picayune* on October 29<sup>th</sup> went as far as to say that “no thinking man in the South would, if it were in his power, deprive the negro of a single right.”

The paper’s strong appeals were not without their caveats. That same letter went on to argue that while there should be black suffrage, because blacks pay taxes, “no sane man, unless a knave, can advocate social equality; it is unnatural, and does not exist among any people, civilized or barbarian. . . . The perversion of this word equality has been made the pivot on which the Radicals have sought to turn many a political outrage” (October 29). A speech by Col. W.D. Burton published in the *Picayune* strongly countered the accusation that a Democratic victory would mean a return to slavery for

black Louisianans. His reasoning, however, did not suggest any principled Democratic stance against the possibility, only that the Party's commitment to upholding the constitution would make it logistically unfeasible. Addressing the black members of the audience, Burton assured them that returning them to slavery would be "utterly impossible, without a change in the constitution, and no change of this sort could take place without submitting it to a vote of the people, and you would have as much right to vote on this question as anybody else, and I know you would not vote yourselves back into slavery" (October 29). In an editorial, entitled "Law-Making" (November 1), the *Picayune* warned of the difference between "genuine law and an arbitrary enactment; the one being a necessity arising out of the very nature of things, the other often the result of whim, prejudice or interested motive." The editorial *did not* mention race, but blamed the spirit of legislating beyond customs as the cause of the Civil War: "It was this spirit of innovation which brought on the war and reduced the country to that unhappy condition from which nothing can now relieve it but a general Conservative victory throughout the country." Finally, in at least one instance, the prospect of black extinction in the United States was given voice in the *Picayune* in 1876. "I am sorry to say that the condition of the negroes seems to me to be relatively less favorable than that of the whites," wrote a correspondent in a special dispatch from Paris, "and that the more I study the results of the abolition of slavery the more inclined I am to share the opinion of the people here, namely that the abolition of slavery will end in the early or late but inevitable exhaustion of the negro race in the United States" (October 29).

The *Republican* did its best to expose the shift in the Democrat's racial platform as empty rhetoric and doublespeak, and they found a target in Samuel Tilden specifically.

“Having cut loose from the almost chronic position of opposition to the fourteenth amendment,” they wrote in one editorial, “which has been the backbone of every Democratic platform speech or essay since the war, Tilden trips lightly and gaily along in defense of his newly found political creed” (October 26). But Tilden’s words, they argued, had different meanings for his Northern and Southern audiences. Of his claim that no rebel debt would be paid—for loss or damage of property, including slaves—the *Republican* wrote:

No man knows better than Tilden the difference that exists between the North and South in defining the words “rebel” and “disloyal.” When he tells the New Yorkers that the rebel debt must not be paid he winks at Ben Hill and Hamburg Butler knowingly, as if to say: “Hush! you know I hold that the Confederates were not rebels. Therefore I don’t mean you, but these New Yorkers will think I do, which will help our reform movement. (October 26)

The *Republican* also pointed to another instance in which there were discrepancies between the rhetoric and intentions of Southern Democrats and the understanding of Northern Democrats. In the United States Congress a Northern Democrat, Scott Lord, introduced a resolution that would punish anyone involved in attempts at voter intimidation or suppression. Lord, wrote the *Republican*,

had listened to Southern orators during the session, and heard time and again that the solid South was full of peace and fairness; that there was no disposition to bulldoze, intimidate or deprive any man of his rights at the polls. Mr. Lord, as a Democratic statesman, took the orators at their word, and conceived the idea of patting the sentiments expressed into a resolution. He believed the resolution would silence Republicans, while, if Southern Democrats were honest, it could not hurt the Democratic cause. (November 2)

The result, however, was that nearly all the Southern Democratic congressman abstained from voting on the resolution. “The idea of punishing a man with death, imprisonment, or even fine, for committing election frauds or intimidating a nigger, was too much for Southern chivalry,” declared the *Republican*.

Attempting to discern the *Republican's* own vision for the black population of the South outside of their warnings against Democratic rule, however, is a more difficult task. As the *Picayune* criticized, the *Republican* understood the blacks in Louisiana as a constituency whose vote they had already earned via emancipation and Radical legislation. Rather than offering them a program for improvement, they cautioned them to vote responsibly:

Let every man of the colored race remember that he and his race are still on trial before the world, and cast his vote as if in the actual presence of the whole country, North and South, well-wishers and ill-wishers; as if though thousands of Union soldiers who perished on the battle fields of the war in the cause of freedom were surrounding the ballot box; as if the piercing gaze of Sumner and the mild glance of the martyred Lincoln were anxiously looking down upon the important act. (November 5)

In a number of instances the *Republican* seemed to equate black “qualification” for citizenship with their allegiance to the Republican Party and their willingness to withstand the threats and appeals from Democrats. This is perhaps most apparent in a praise-filled editorial after the election, tellingly entitled “Our Colored Voters”:

The colored people of this state have just given us an example of fortitude and fidelity which is worthy of all emulation and praise. They have stood firmly by their principles and their leaders; they have been faithful to their pledges and true to each other. Threats have been employed in vain; murder, whipping, intimidation have proved ineffectual to turn them from a settled purpose to vote the Republican ticket. . . . Both sexes of the colored race have fully established their claim to the franchise and vindicated the wisdom of those who fought to give them human rights. (November 10)

The implication in the editorial is the black “claim to franchise” was somehow inextricable from their “purpose to vote for the Republican ticket.” And in fact, for Republicans, starting with emancipation, a means of securing their own power was perhaps the fundamental way in which they understood the freedmen. “We are depending now upon the negro vote precisely as we depended in the war upon the negro soldier,”

wrote the *Republican* as the election results were being disputed. “There appears now something prophetic in the words of Abraham Lincoln: ‘The time may come when the colored freedman by his ballot shall restore the jewel of liberty to the diadem of the republic.’ One would think that the sainted martyr prophesied this day and this hour. Let us hope for the best” (November 15). Unfortunately for the Republicans, that *assumption* of allegiance frustrated many blacks in Louisiana and in many cases caused them to question the Republican Party’s commitment to them, and theirs to the party.

### ***The Weekly Louisianian***

By the fall of 1875, in the only black-owned paper in Louisiana, weariness with the Republican Party and with being regarded simply as a means to secure political power, was easily detectable. “The campaign of 1876 is approaching,” a letter from R.L. Desdunder began. “May I say that it is the only time, when the colored element is considered of any consequence, and seems to call for any regard from the greedy expectants for official stations?” The letter goes on to grapple with an allegiance to the principles of the Republican party, “the civil and political equality of all men,” while also confronting a desperate reality that Republicans in power had done little to relieve: “Since reconstruction, colored men in certain states have passed from one vicissitude to another of unmitigated anguish and cruel suffering, aggravated by party injustice and treachery. Such a life is not endurable, and must come to an end.” Desdunder, however, concluded that the blacks in Louisiana could “dam the floods of corruption and faithlessness” within the Republican party: “We do not propose to establish a color line party, because such a thing is impracticable and in direct opposition to the noble

principles of our design ....We need not desert our party to choose honest and fearless men; such men can be found, and will, I trust, offer themselves at the proper time” (October 30, 1875).

Others were skeptical even of the Republican Party’s principles. Another letter in the *Louisianian* began: “In a former communication I asserted that the Republican party does not sympathize with the negro—does not actually believe in his essential manhood and as a consequence his dual claim to all the rights of citizenship as accorded to the whites.” Nor were these failings, according to the letter, in any way deviating from the historical attitudes of the Republican Party and its relationship to Southern blacks. While the *Republican* cast their Party’s historic reliance on blacks to maintain power as a mutually beneficial relationship, the *Louisianian* represented it as something closer to exploitation:

This want of sympathy while it did not prevent the party from using the negro as a means first to crush the rebellion and then prematurely to rehabilitate the collapsed framework of government in the seceded States, permits the former rebels in regaining their own fortified citizenship clearly to disregard and trample under foot that of the negro whose services in time of the nations peril entitles him to the fullest protection now that the danger is seemingly passed. The party is satisfied to have restored throughout the South the form of Republican government while the substance is entirely wanting. (December 25, 1875)

These opposing historical narratives, along with the contention that substantively the Republican Party was doing little to improve the lives of black people, drove a significant wedge between the two.

In response to this disillusionment with the Republicans, the *Louisianian* urgently called for the development of *independent* political agency and capital, and unity within the black population. Again, these calls expressed varying ideas regarding the extent to which this meant spurning the party establishment, or working within it. In another letter,

Desdunder, without specifically calling for allegiance to the Republican Party, suggested that unity was a necessity primarily as a buffer against the greater threat of Democrats: “Never before in the history of our race was unity more imperatively required than now when the party of reaction is so bent upon our utter annihilation. In organization now means protection against the terrible crash of the future” (December 4, 1875). But all calls were not so conciliatory. In an editorial anticipating the Colored National Convention in Nashville, the *Louisianian* questioned in no uncertain terms the Republican government’s commitment to protecting blacks in the South: “If it needs be that we shall drag our mangled and mutilated forms from those fields of desolation, of human butchery and bloody carnage to say to the American Government: ‘This is the protection you have given us!’ let us do it” (December 25, 1875). And others were even more explicit about the need to cast off white patronage to secure self determination. One editorial made similarly bleak, Jim Crow-like, predictions that the *Republican* had made regarding the possibility of a Democratic victory. This editorial, however, warned against *any* system of white political determination over blacks:

The time has come even sooner than I anticipated when the Negro vote must be recognized and respected, not only as a “force” but as a determining balance of power in American politics. In order to make this power effective, however, the whole system of white political overseership of the Negro must be overthrown. The Negro must now stand for himself and vindicate himself. No one can stand for him and vindicate him in the crisis. If he is not man enough to seize the present opportunity and utilize it, he will sink naturally into a position of permanent subordination to the white race. He will in such case become the serf substratum in one social formation of a purely white mans government. (January 22, 1876)

For the *Louisianian*, the goal of unity was not simply protecting the rights already guaranteed them by the constitutional amendments, but to further improve the lives of blacks. These specific suggestions went beyond anything in either the *Picayune* or the

*Republican*, focusing on issues like integration, economic independence, and educational opportunities. And with regard to these issues as well, the sense was that, more than ever, black people needed to fend for themselves. One editorial, “Combine,” focused on unifying the race in order to find capital so that they could secure landed homes. “The need of this policy of combination,” they wrote, “is rendered imperative from the fact that we are as a race being left more and more to our own resources.” A letter to the editor on the same day called for a boycott of institutions that discriminated against blacks:

I now ask that the Mignonette and other literary, social, and benevolent clubs and societies among the colored people of New Orleans, notable, should lead off in the matter of resolving that none of their members shall further aid in the erection of barriers to enjoyment of civil rights by all classes of citizens alike, in the matter of the service of their money for public amusement by contributing one dime to theaters, or other places where the Yankee proprietors and managers, whether of the North or South, would impose hateful class distinctions.

Suggesting actual attempts to secure economic stability and social equality went far beyond anything called for by the *Republican*, and set the *Louisianan* apart as a significantly more progressive paper in terms of race.

These themes—uncertainty with the Republican Party, a desire for unity, and visions for substantive change— which appeared in the *Louisianian* prior to the Hayes’ inauguration and his decision to withdraw federal troops from the South gained in strength after the election. The confirmation of Republican indifference to their struggle was simultaneously a confirmation of the necessity of their own self-reliance and political independence. “Betrayed by our government we helped to put in power,” wrote the *Louisianian* in October, 1877, eight months after Hayes’ inauguration, “by its withdrawal of that protection, which we had a right to expect....we must awake to a full realization of our situation and remember that resting upon our own resources and dependent upon our

own endeavors we are in the future, to be precisely what we make ourselves.” This sentiment was reiterated time and again in the *Louisianian* after the election. The disdain for the Republican leadership in the South in the *Louisianian* even, on occasion, resembled the rhetoric in the Democratic press that besmirched the carpetbaggers eight years earlier. “The war brought large numbers of needy adventurers into our midst, the reconstruction acts threw us, an inexperienced element, in the political arena” they wrote. “The wily rascals who managed to come among us, soon discovered our helplessness, and with devilish ingenuity managed to ingratiate themselves into our favor and secure the leadership our necessities demanded” (November 17, 1877).

Despite the stark political circumstances faced by the black population, the *Louisianian*'s calls for self-determination were coupled with visions of progress. They strongly rebuked a suggestion by another newspaper that integrated schools would never be implemented in practice, despite being legally mandated, pointing to Northern states in which schools were integrated over similar objections. “In view of these incontrovertible facts and the extraordinary changes that have taken place in the status of the colored race in the last decade,” wrote the *Louisianian*, “we confidently look forward to the accomplishment of like results in Louisiana” (October 6, 1877). They called for training more black female teachers and refused the notion of black colonization in Liberia or elsewhere. In response to a quote by Wade Hampton, the Democratic Governor of South Carolina, that he would like “the colored people to become land-owners, for then they will become conservative,” the *Louisianian* responded: “Yes, break up all the large estates, sell them land on long time and easy terms, build school houses at every crossroads, and they will surely become *conservators*” (November 17, 1877). In some

cases it was suggested that in fact the black population was better off without protection from the Republicans and the federal government. “Our emancipation from control of the men who have been our advisors and who have used us mainly to their own advantage is already demonstrating our capacity and resources, and show forces in us not to be despised” (November 17, 1877).

The *Louisianian* itself was seen as a demonstration of the “capacity and resources” of the black population. As one letter on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1877, advocated making the paper a national publication, noting the “capacity, persistence, pluck and devotion to principle of the editor”:

With such a journal circulated throughout the country, keeping abreast of the times on all public questions, independent in sentiment, impartial and fearless in criticism, impersonal in character and true to the sentiment of equal rights in its broadest sense we have the means at hand to bring order out of chaos, and reduce the demoralized and despondent condition of our people to do a better and more hopeful state.

This view of the paper as a pillar of black unity, endurance, and progress, is an accurate reflection of the values that the paper stressed in its content. But, as with the relative political power experienced by African-American’s at the time, there was an expiration date. The newspaper continued its weekly publication until five years later when it folded, in 1882.

## **Conclusion**

Cutting through the accusations of fraud and intimidation, the fear-mongering, and the characterizations of their opposing side’s intentions, one finds in the *New Orleans Republican* and *The Daily Picayune* relatively similar professed beliefs regarding the social position of black people the state of Louisiana in 1876. With the shift in

Democratic Party platform to include support for the constitutional amendments, both papers were ostensibly on the same page in terms of defending political and civil equality for black people. The *Picayune* was more explicit than the *Republican* in expressing what it felt the limits of that equality should be, and was not shy about its belief in white supremacy. But the *Republican* did not have a progressive vision of its own in terms of race, and having been in power for eight years, it was difficult for the paper to make a case for the Republican Party as an agent of even general improvements in the areas of government and economy. On the other hand, even as it explicitly advocated against social or economic equality, the *Picayune* was able to at least position the Democrats as a change from the status quo, and employ a “rising tides lift all boats” appeal to black voters.

For the *Louisianian*, neither of these visions was particularly enticing. Like the *New Orleans Tribune* before, it advocated positions that were based on the notion of black elevation and equality and the need for protection from the significant number of groups and individuals that wished to do them harm. More so than in the *Tribune*, however, these positions were coupled with a sense of political abandonment by the Republican Party and a desire to develop their own political power and independence. It appears as if the *Louisianian* could sense the inevitability of Radical Reconstruction’s collapse, and understood that any meaningful gains would not come with the support of the Republican Party or the federal government. This made it all the more important that a formidable coalition with a political vision for black people be developed independently.

Both the immediate aftermath of the election, and the decades to follow, would unveil both the *Republican* and the *Picayune*'s professed positions on race to be essentially political veils for their party's true priorities. The compromise of 1877 and the abandonment of Southern blacks by the federal government revealed how limited the Republican Party's commitment to racial equality actually was, and the weariness they developed attempting to secure it. The Democrats, after gaining control of the South, eventually used their power to go back on their commitments to upholding the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments, and to disenfranchise and subjugate the blacks in Louisiana in varying degrees for nearly a century. As for the *Louisianian*, their foreboding sense of abandonment was justified. Also justified was the notion that only a unified and forceful movement of and for black people would be the means to secure the more dignified, secure, and prosperous future that they envisioned for the freedmen. Unfortunately it would only be after enduring decades of segregation, political and economic subjugation, and violence that such a movement would come to pass.

## Chapter Four: Conclusion

On April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1877, four days after the removal of from the state, the *Republican* reflected on what Reconstruction had meant for Louisiana. Their assessment was notably hopeful:

Great changes have come over our State, not the least of which is that manifested in the political sentiments of our people, or rather the more noisy and self-asserting portion of our white citizens. The blacks then were not people, they were chattels....Now those chattels are citizens coveted for their votes by their former masters. Those masters who then despised, as only the haughty can despise, the word "Republican," are now, in everything but name, Republicans of the first water, recognizing the negro as an integral part of the body politic, entitled to any office he may be fit for, and— wonder of wonders—willing that negro children should receive the same educational advantages as white ones. Verily, the world does go on, and carries even Southern Democrats along with it.

Despite their warnings of Democratic racial intolerance and hostility during the 1876 campaign, the *Republican* had come to understand that by that time there was no real substantive difference between the Democratic position on race and their own. They point to the softening of Southern Democrats towards the idea of black suffrage and equality as the reason. But looking at how the *Picayune* and the *Republican* shifted or failed to shift their racial positions, and how they discussed matters of equality, suggests a deeper similarity in how they understood race more generally. For both of those papers racial equality was primarily a political consideration that could be either celebrated or cautioned against depending on circumstance, and was not tied to fundamental American values or deep moral imperatives. For the black papers, however, despite a shift in their rhetorical focus between 1868 and 1876, their advocacy for racial equality was *always* tied to a sense of American idealism and moral necessity.

Of the papers examined here, the *Daily Picayune* changed its rhetoric most significantly regarding race between the 1868 and 1876 elections. In 1868, any

suggestion of political equality among the races was seen as an act of aggression against whites, blacks were portrayed as violent and ignorant, and carpetbaggers as unprincipled opportunists. Race, and the looming threat of black supremacy, was an essential element in its coverage. While there were attempts to reach out to black voters, they primarily consisted of trying to convince them that the restriction of their own political and civil rights would be to their benefit. That benefit, however, was not an improvement their political, social, or economic position-- rather it was degree of safety, gained through appeasement of the more extreme elements of the Democratic Party that would do them physical harm. Perhaps most significantly, in its 1868 coverage, the *Picayune* promised that the result of Radical Reconstruction would be prolonged and inevitable violence.

There were elements of the *Picayune*'s coverage in 1876 that remained the same as in 1868. It retained a belief in white supremacy, and regarded the relationship between former slaves and slave owners as generally harmonious. But by 1876, the *Picayune*'s coverage was significantly less inclined to use the threat of racial equality, or black supremacy, as a means of appealing to white voters than it was in 1868. It ceased the daily reports of violence in which blacks were inevitably portrayed as the aggressors. There was a suggestion that blacks would share in the economic prosperity that would come with a Democratic administration, and that they would be allowed to maintain their political and civil rights under the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments.

What caused the change in the *Picayune*'s rhetoric surrounding race? First, it was clearly aware of the possibility of the election being taken from the Democrats by the Republican Returning Board, and thus was careful not to print anything that could be

taken as encouraging intimidation or violence. In conservative campaigns throughout Louisiana, writes Joe Taylor, “White League racism was, at least publicly, forgotten” (1974, 486). Instead there was an overtly conciliatory approach extended towards black voters. They were invited to be speakers for the Democratic cause, and the number of blacks at their rallies was touted as evidence of their bi-racial appeal (Taylor 1974, 486). This Democratic Party strategy of simultaneously making an appeal to the black vote, while also attempting to conceal the intimidation and coercion that was taking place, was evident in the *Picayune*’s coverage.

There is also the possibility, however, that the *Picayune* had genuinely moderated its views on race, which were never as vitriolic as some of their Southern counterparts (Osthaus 1994, 68). The shift in Democratic Party platform on the constitutional amendments may have been a way to win over Northerners and Southern blacks, but it certainly did not indicate any serious shift away from white supremacy. In fact, the ascendancy of the Democratic Party in the South did not guarantee the eventual capitulation to the extreme racism of Jim Crow. In *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, C. Vann Woodward identifies three racial philosophies “that rejected the doctrines of extreme racism” after the end of Reconstruction: liberal, radical, and conservative (2002, 45). The “liberal philosophy” maintained the demands for equality that Radical Reconstruction had attempted, and was rejected outright. The “radical philosophy” was manifested in the Populist Party, but racial fracturing and political failure led to its demise near the end of the century and to the institutional segregation of Jim Crow. The “conservative philosophy,” however, positioned itself between the extreme racists who sought an “aggressive war” on the black population and the supposed self-serving

carpetbaggers who displayed not just poor judgment but also a “baseness of motivation.” “The conservatives reminded the Negro that he had something to lose as well as something to gain,” wrote Woodward, “and that his Northern champions’ exclusive pre-occupation with gains for the Negro had evoked the danger of losing all he had gained so far. The conservative’s primary purpose was to conserve” (2002, 48).

The conservative approach to race provides a relatively accurate description of what the *Picayune* put forth in both 1868 and 1876, and within this framework their shift on race was not so much a change in philosophy as product of circumstance. In 1868, when the notions of black political participation and equal rights was still viewed as revolutionary and the ratification of the new state constitution had not yet been finalized, the *Picayune* could not accept them. The relative safety that would result from an overthrow of Radical policies was their consolation offer. After eight years of both the normalization of that violence as well as of black political activity, however, the instinct changed. The conservative position now allowed the violence to go on without comment, but also promised not to drastically curtail the rights of blacks that had already been guaranteed by the constitution, despite having considered these freedoms a travesty eight years earlier. The change fell well short of any sort of endorsement of black equality. But rather than prescribing to the dogmatism of what Woodward termed the “extreme racists,” the *Picayune* expressed an evolving version of what they must have considered a more pragmatic vision of white supremacy.

The *Picayune*’s evolution contrasts sharply with the *Republican*’s remarkably similar racial rhetoric in both 1868 and 1876. During each election, the *Republican* made an effort to position itself as the political alternative to both the ante-bellum social order

of the South and the continued racial violence that plagued Louisiana throughout Reconstruction. But in neither election did that position ever grow into a vigorous call for the uplift of freedmen or greater equality for the black population beyond the guarantees of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments. Instead, it settled into a pattern of self-satisfied paternalism, focused on reminding its readers of the horrors of the war and the virtue and past accomplishments of the Republican Party.

What the essential convergence of the *Republican* and *Picayune*'s proclaimed stances on racial issues in 1876 likely suggests is that their opposition to one another, even in 1868, ultimately had little to do with differing convictions on race, but rather a distinction in their fears and desire for power. Outweighing their commitment to racial equality was the *Republican*'s fear that former Confederates, who they considered traitors to the nation, would return to power. And rather than opposing the extension of political or civil rights to blacks as some sort of moral transgression, the *Picayune* feared that the even more Radical elements of the Republican Party would make an actual effort to disrupt the social and economic control of the planter elite in Louisiana through redistribution of land and other more vigorous attempts at black uplift.

The *New Orleans Tribune* and the *Weekly Louisianian*, despite being two distinct institutions, presented views on race at the beginning and end of Reconstruction that demonstrated continuity in their focus on improving the conditions for black people in Louisiana. However, the methods used by each paper and the issues they stressed highlighted the changing attitude of the black population towards the Republican Party. In 1868, the rhetoric of the *Tribune* was primarily concerned with securing black political and civil rights, and stressing the ability and agency of the black population to handle

those rights, and planting those appeals in the larger context of American and democratic ideals. They were not particularly preoccupied with independent political power or scorning the Republican Party. It is important to note, however, that despite it not being central to their coverage, in 1868 the *Tribune* did defect from the Republican Party's nomination of Henry Clay Warmoth for Governor. Roudanez, the paper's owner, "simply refused to support the election of a carpetbagger," and positioned himself as the leader of the "pure Radicals" (Melancon 2003, 61).

It is telling that the main proprietor of the *Louisianian*, P.B.S. Pinchback, did *not* defect from the Republican ticket in 1868 (Taylor 1984, 157). But despite his previous allegiance, by 1876 the contents of the *Louisianian* had become outspokenly skeptical of the Republican Party's commitment to the cause of black people—a significant indictment of the conduct and rhetoric of the white Republican leadership during their time in power. This skepticism translated into a call for unity among Louisiana blacks and a desire for a more significant amount of political power either within or distinct from the Republican Party. Those positions were advocated by the *Louisianian* more forcefully than they had been by the *Tribune*, and were particularly notable coming from a paper that had, at its inception, wholeheartedly identified itself with the Republican Party. But expressing the need for independence was by no means a foreign concept to the black population, as Roudanez and the *Tribune* had demonstrated eight years earlier.

The contentions made by each paper in this study about the meaning of emancipation, the role of blacks in Southern society, the moral and political calculus of

themselves and their opponents, and the ultimate reasons for the failure of Republican government in the South were not settled by the withdrawal of federal troops in 1877. Of course, the issue of race in American society has never ceased to be central to political discourse, popular culture, or academic scholarship. But by briefly looking at the historiography of Reconstruction, it is evident how the more specific claims and perspectives of these papers have reverberated in our various understandings of the era.

The Dunning School, a group of early 20<sup>th</sup> century historians studying at Columbia University under professors William A. Dunning and John A. Burgess, put forward the first dominant narrative of Reconstruction. “In this view,” summarizes Eric Foner, “vindictive Radical Republicans fastened black supremacy upon the defeated South, unleashing an orgy of corruption presided over by unscrupulous carpetbaggers, traitorous scalawags, and ignorant freedmen. Eventually, the white community of the South overthrew this misgovernment and restored Home Rule (a euphemism for white supremacy)” (1986, 82). A number of scholars have noted the ways in which the Dunning School’s interpretation of Reconstruction was essentially the version of the period presented by Southern propagandists, and the one accepted by the regional white population (Smith and Lowery 2013, 7). But even the specific language used to discredit the mission of Reconstruction at the time was utilized by subsequent historians, so even now it is impossible to extinguish their influence. Ted Tunnell demonstrates how Southern editors in particular intentionally invented the term “carpetbagger” during the state conventions of 1867 in order to discredit whole host of Northern players in the South and to agitate the Southern sense of persecution from outside forces. In the *Picayune*, that term and its surrounding implications were a mainstay of its coverage

of both the 1868 and 1876 elections and was essential in its attempts to undermine the moral high ground of the Northern attempts at racial equality—the “ideological raison d’être of Radical Reconstruction” (Tunnell 2006, 821). But “carpetbagger” and its symbolic weight integrated itself into the Dunning narrative of Reconstruction and beyond. Bernard Weisberger notes the absurdity of the fact that in school textbooks pejoratives such as “‘carpetbagger’ or ‘scalawag’ are sometimes used as if they were genuine proper nouns and not cartoonists’ labels.” He goes on: “It is true that they are now so familiar as perhaps not to need quotation marks, and yet by the same token we should expect to find Jacobin, Doughface, and Gold Bug in current and unqualified usage to describe certain groups in our history” (Weisberger 1959, 435). And indeed, historians writing over a hundred years later and with dramatically different perspectives find themselves nonetheless subservient to the terms of conversation first put forth by the *Picayune* and other Southern papers. Regarding his use of “carpetbagger” and “scalawag,” Eric Foner writes that the terms “have become so unavoidable a part of the lexicon of Reconstruction that I have continued to employ without intending to accept their pejorative implications” (Foner 2014, 295).

The *Picayune* also, in its pivot away from the overt rhetoric of racial prejudice between 1868 and 1876, anticipated the attempts of the Dunning School to frame the opposition to Radical Reconstruction in more palatable terms. This is not to say that the *Picayune* in 1876 nor the historians of the Dunning School denied the claim of white racial superiority, but rather positioned that claim and the assumed inferiority of black people as incidental to their desire for better government overall, as opposed to the primary purpose. “White historians,” wrote Weisberger in 1959, “have shied away from

grasping the nettle of the race conflict, mainly because of the difficulty of recognizing their own emotional involvement with the problem” (436). This difficulty led historians to ignore evidence that would suggest a more visceral initial reaction of the South to integrated politics. “A glance at source materials of the sixties,” Weisberger suggested, “shows that many so-called conservatives opposed the Radical program for the South not because they were devoted to states' rights, or agrarianism, or the Constitution, or the Democratic Party alone, but plainly and simply because they thought it was sinful to give so-called Africans the right to share in governments framed by a clearly superior Anglo-Saxon race” (1959, 437). This comes to light almost immediately when looking at issues of the *Picayune* in 1868, but it is a fact that both the *Picayune* and the Dunning School in their own ways attempted to dampen.

W.E.B. DuBois, widely credited with issuing the first sweeping critique of the Dunning narrative, laid out in the very first page of *Black Reconstruction* the fundamental difference in his approach from previous historians: “I am going to tell this story as though Negroes were ordinary human beings,” wrote DuBois, “realizing that this attitude will from the first seriously curtail my audience” (1935). He was right. His work was largely ignored until the Civil Rights Movement. But his basic premise, that the freedmen were fundamental actors in Reconstruction, with agency and capability, was not new. It was recognized and made a central theme by both black-owned papers examined in this study. The *New Orleans Tribune* in 1868 both demanded acknowledgment for black humanity and demonstrated their ideological independence and the *Louisianian*, sensing abandonment from the Republican Party and the government, amplified the call for black political cohesion and power.

Another related strain of scholarly concern that was evident in the *Tribune* and the *Louisianian* was the “Americanization” of the black population during Reconstruction. Francis Simkins, in 1939, wrote that the “loose assertions concerning Reconstruction as an attempt to return the ideals of the jungle, as an effort to re-barbarize the Negro and to make South Carolina and Mississippi into African provinces, seems to have no basis in the truth” (58). He goes on to enumerate the ways in which blacks attempted to imitate the white population with respect to education, culture, religion, and even in their political corruption. Simkins rejects the “numerous writers” before him who cast aspersions on the attempts of freedmen to emulate white culture. Their efforts, he argued, to “attain the standards of American civilization...is a tribute to the sound instincts of these blacks and their Reconstruction mentors” (60).

One finds an element of truth in this characterization when looking at Louisiana’s black papers. “Is not America the land of our birth?” asked the *Tribune*. “Are we not as much American as other of the same nativity? Are we not by birth and by the supreme statutes of the nation American citizens? Then let us drop the term African” (December 19, 1868) And they certainly desired education and access to the political arena, and in making their case often invoked American political ideals. Eric Foner suggests that black leaders during Reconstruction “can best be understood as those most capable of appropriating the available political language of American society and forging from it an expression of the aspirations of the freedmen” (1982, 90).

But in terms of the broader political stance of each of these papers, both Simkins and Foner miss a key point. Rather than displaying a blanket reverence for all things American and fighting for access for the freedmen, the *Tribune*’s petitions for integration

contained an inherent, and loaded, critique— they pointed to *the chasm between purported American ideals and the reality of American society*. The same is true of the *Louisianian's* petition for protection from violence by white terrorist organizations issued eight years later. In the eyes of these papers, the fulfillment of political and civil rights and protections for freedmen were not only a matter of them attaining the status American citizenship, but of the white population of Louisiana and the nation at large living up to fundamental American principles. “And can you expect that four millions of American citizens, of African descent though they be, will tamely submit to be governed by laws which they have no hand in framing?” asked the *Tribune* in 1867. “Is it Democratic in you to desire it? You *call* yourselves Democrats; we *are* Democrats in the legitimate sense. We advocate a government of the people, by the people, and for the people” (April 23, 1868). The *Tribune* and the *Louisianian*, in the tradition of the black papers before them, were advocating not just for the “Americanization” of black people, but the “Americanization” of America.

It is telling that it is difficult to find a historical version of Reconstruction that has taken on as its guiding light something resembling the *Republican's* interpretation of the period in the way the Dunning School did with the *Picayune*, or DuBois and the revisionists did with the *Tribune* and the *Louisianian*. The inability or unwillingness of the *Republican* to express coherent vision on the most essential Reconstruction question also makes it unsurprising. Lawanda and John T. Cox, looking at how historians have evaluated the Republican decision to pass legislation for universal male suffrage, note that “whether historians have condemned or applauded the grant of suffrage to Negroes in the post-Civil War years, they have more often than not viewed the motives behind this

party action with considerable cynicism” (1967, 303). The study goes on to suggest that in fact historians have actually not done a particularly thorough job in examining the *evidence* of Republican motives, such as whether those who voted for the Fourteenth amendment were “acting in a manner consistent with their past public records,” or had “demonstrated a concern for the well-being of free Negroes or a willingness publicly to support the unpopular cause of Negro suffrage” (1967, 329). These criteria make sense when looking at an individual politician. A newspaper affiliated with a political party, however, is charged with providing information and also interpreting that information based on a set of ideals and principles. One might judge the “motives” of that paper, then, based on the comprehensiveness of their interpretation and the consistency of their values. While the *Republican* defended black political and civil rights and condemned white terrorism, they refused to focus on the principles of racial equality, endorse integration, or perhaps most importantly, provide their own vision for what race relations *should* look like in a reconstructed Louisiana. These discrepancies might be taken as enough evidence to account for at least a degree of, if not “considerable,” cynicism regarding their motives.

Just as the debates over the meaning of Reconstruction have continued in historical scholarship, the fundamental issues that these papers were debating at the time have not disappeared from our political and cultural debates. What is the meaning of racial equality? Does it go beyond civil and political equality under the law? Are those things contingent on some degree of economic stability? Does the federal government have the right to intervene when individual states fail to abide by protections put forth in

the Constitution? Who should have the right to vote, and what measures must be put into place so certain populations are not prevented or discouraged from doing so? What is the right way to proceed politically on these issues? Is it better to advocate for gradual change, or to make hardline demands based on moral principles, even in the face of broad and virulent opposition? Nearly any current political issue concerning racial equality can be traced back to the period in which former slaves were first negotiating their position as citizens: affirmative action, employment and housing discrimination, segregation in communities and schools, voting rights, and mass incarceration, to name a few. They are issues that newspapers, and the press at large, continue to struggle with today.

Considering these papers side by side, as products of individuals living and working in the same city at the same time, contending with the same overwhelming circumstances, contrasts both their ideological positions as well as the limits and expanses of their political imagination. The *Picayune*, particularly in 1868, demonstrates the almost unimaginable fear and anger that must have engulfed white Southerners as their former property suddenly transformed into *half* of the voting electorate—a situation that makes current discussions of demographic change and accompanying white anxiety pale in comparison. The hope and subsequent frustration expressed in the *Tribune* and *Louisianian* are emblematic of the always wrought and never linear relationship between struggle and progress that has defined the black experience in America. And if the *Republican's* conduct throughout Reconstruction is the most easily assailable of all the papers, by demonstrating the way attempts at moral and principled advancement can be undermined by questions of practicality, desire for power, and internalized prejudice, it is also perhaps the most easily recognizable. Ultimately, this

study finds that the neither of the white-owned papers understood the project of Reconstruction as part of a broader struggle for racial egalitarianism in the United States. The black-owned papers did, and by establishing their position as elemental to American values they carried the tradition of the black press that had been struggling for racial equality since long before emancipation.

“Old methods have failed utterly...yet we must accept the situation and accommodate ourselves to the new condition of things,” reads a letter published in the *Louisianian* in 1877, following the removal of federal troops. “Our duty now is to comprehend fully our condition and prospects, and set our house in order for the future” (November 10). Though perhaps unconsciously, while engaged in the immediate political contentiousness of Reconstruction, these papers were also simultaneously setting their “house in order for the future” by defining the terms of debate that future historians, politicians, and citizens would use as they struggled with the meaning of Reconstruction. Those terms are vitally important, and the conclusions that America draws about Reconstruction, as evidenced by Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, and the continued struggle for racial justice and equality in America, are indicative of their power.

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