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The Negro Militia Movement During Radical Reconstruction.

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THE NEGRO MILITIA MOVEMENT
DURING
RADICAL RECONSTRUCTION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

Otis Arnold Singletary
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1949
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ABSTRACT

Much of the violence which characterized the Reconstruction period was directly associated with the militia movement inaugurated by Radical politicians in the South. Protection was the motivating influence behind their maneuver. Since many Southern whites were openly hostile to the newly created state governments, Radical leaders felt the need to organize a loyal protective force in order to prevent destruction of their administrations at the hands of so powerful an enemy. Due to peculiar local circumstances, this protective force developed into a Negro militia.

Although originally designed as a defensive force, the militia was easily converted into an aggressive political instrument, and was used freely by the Radicals not only during campaigns and on election days but also in enforcing declarations of martial law against counties of dubious political preference. The resentment of Southern whites which resulted from this political activity was further aggravated when crimes of violence, depredations, and minor social offenses were committed by militiamen. Exorbitant costs of military operations and frauds involving

militia funds gave rise to additional discontent. The white man's fundamental enmity to the militia, however, stemmed from what he considered to be the racial implications of a policy which not only armed the Negro but also placed him in a position of authority.

From the very beginning of the militia experiment, opposition had been manifested. Legal stratagems and other measures short of force were employed by whites in an effort to impair the effectiveness of the troops. Seizures and confiscations of arms and equipment occurred frequently. Direct retaliation upon militiamen assumed two forms: economic discrimination and physical violence. The final blow to the militia, however, was dealt by white volunteer rifle companies; illegal, armed counter forces which were at the very core of the White Line movement. These were the men who participated in those ferocious attacks upon militiamen, the most notorious of which was at Hamburg, South Carolina, where the whites effectively instituted a policy of disbandment through extermination.

INTRODUCTION

When the definitive account of the South during Reconstruction is finally written, it will contain deep and depressing undertones of violence. The long standing Southern proclivity in this direction, which has already brought down the judgments of several generations of historians, only partially explains its prevalence during this particular period. Add to this historical predilection the social unrest which inevitably follows military conquest, the perplexing new social, economic and political problems associated with the freedmen, and the presence of a large number of men well-schooled in the art of killing and grown sullen from tasting the bitterness of defeat, and a formula emerges that at least begins to explain why Reconstruction was pre-eminently a period of violence.

When Charles Nordhoff made his observation tour in 1875, he expressed amazement in finding that not only the men but even boys of fourteen were frequently armed, and that "every trifling dispute is ended with the pistol."¹ One of the innumerable Senate investigating committees which held hearings in the South was shocked to learn that carrying arms was an almost universal practice there. Numerous witnesses appeared before the group fully armed; and when the committee had returned to the relatively peaceful environs of the nation's

¹ Charles Nordhoff, The Cotton States In the Spring and Summer of 1875, (New York, 1876), p. 78. Cited hereafter as Nordhoff, Cotton States.

Capitol, they reported:

Almost every man, black or white, who has enough money to buy firearms has them. It is the greatest place on the face of the earth for pistols. No man is comfortable² down there unless he has got his pistols.

The novelist Albion W. Tourgee, a disillusioned participant in the Reconstruction experiment, captured the violent spirit of the times in a harsh passage written in 1879:

Of the slain there were enough to furnish forth a battlefield and all from those three classes, the negro, the scalawag, and the carpetbagger -- all killed with deliberation, overwhelmed by numbers, roused from slumber at the murk midnight, in the hall of public assembly, upon the river-brink, on the lonely woods-road...shot, stabbed, hanged, drowned, mutilated beyond description, tortured beyond conception.³

He was only using poetic license to say what the ever-suspicious historian can now support with a respectable set of statistics; that the South during Reconstruction was the stage for an almost incredible drama of pitiless violence.

One of the most sinister yet interesting struggles of this turbulent period resulted from the organization of Negro militia forces in the Southern states. These forces were created by the Radicals in an attempt to fill the power vacuum that would

² Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 56.

³ Albion W. Tourgee, A Fool's Errand, (New York, 1879), p. 246.

be created by the eventual withdrawal of Federal troops when the states had complied with the conditions set forth in the Reconstruction Acts. Their need grew out of the stern dictates of political self-preservation; in the Radical plan for a Republican South these militia forces were assigned the role of perpetuating the existence of these newly created state governments. However, the Radicals knew that as a prerequisite to the formation of any effective force of their own they must first destroy any existing armed counter-forces in the South. Consequently, the provisional militia became their target. This militia had been created by the provisional governors in the days immediately after Appomattox in an effort to combat the evils which accompanied the paralysis of local government. Opposition to this militia was formidable. Carl Schurz, while on his Southern tour in 1865, telegraphed a vigorous protest to Washington against arming a militia. His view was supported by America's foremost soldier, not yet turned politician, who argued that it would indeed be unwise to arm Southern militia so soon after the war.⁴ Federal commanders stationed in the South joined unanimously in bitter condemnation of the scheme.

⁴ William B. Hesseltine, U. S. Grant, Politician, (New York, 1936), p. 69. Cited hereafter as Hesseltine, Grant.

Yet in spite of such distinguished opposition, provisional governors were granted permission to organize their militia ostensibly to apprehend criminals, suppress crime, and protect the people against "any possible combination of vicious white man with negroes."⁵

Once organized, these militia forces pursued a course of action which made them extremely vulnerable when the Radical attack was launched. Membership had been restricted exclusively to whites and was composed primarily of ex-rebel soldiers who persisted in wearing their Confederate gray.⁶ Their activity had been frankly terroristic, aimed directly at Negroes who displayed a tendency to assert their newly granted independence. Disarming the freedmen was apparently considered a primary duty and one that was fulfilled with relish:

The militia of this county have seized every gun and pistol found in the hands of (so-called) freedmen of this section of the county. They claim that the Statute Laws of Mississippi do not recognize the negro as having any right to carry arms.⁷

⁵ S. S. Cox, Three Decades of Federal Legislation, (Providence, 1885), p. 392.

⁶ John T. Trowbridge, A Picture of the Desolated States and the Work of Restoration, 1865-1868, (Hartford, 1868), p. 408. Cited hereafter as Trowbridge, Desolated States.

⁷ Letter dated December 2, 1865, cited in Harper's Weekly, January 13, 1866.

In spite of frequent warnings to militia commanders not to take the law into their own hands, freedmen continued to be assaulted and were often killed, sometimes on private account. These repeated acts of violence forced many governors to disband or otherwise curtail the activities of their militia.⁸ These shortsighted and vicious actions, properly publicized, greatly aided the Radicals in their campaign to popularize the idea that these provisional militia forces had been organized for "the distinct purpose of enforcing the authority of the whites over the blacks."⁹

Consequently, the Radicals were able to abolish the provisional militia with comparative ease. On March 2, 1867, the same day the First Reconstruction Act was passed, an obscure rider attached to the annual Appropriation Act for the Army ordered the disbandment of all militia forces in the Southern states and stated:

that the further organization, arming, or calling into service of the said militia forces, or any part thereof, is hereby prohibited under any circumstances whatever, until the same shall be authorized by Congress.¹⁰

⁸ Trowbridge, Desolated States, p. 374.

⁹ Senate Executive Document no. 2, 39 Cong., 1 sess., p. 36.

¹⁰ Congressional Globe, 39 Cong., 2 sess., p. 217

President Johnson, in order to obtain necessary funds for the army, felt compelled to sign the bill. Immediately after signing it, however, he forwarded to Congress a communication calling attention to the clause prohibiting certain states from employing their militia and lodged a strong protest against the unconstitutionality of such action.¹¹

As state governments were reorganized under provisions of the Reconstruction Acts, the heretofore suspected need for a protective force became an urgent fact. This was true largely because of the sullen attitude of the prevailing number of Southern whites who felt that these governments were based on a calculated policy of disfranchisement-enfranchisement and who considered them as little more than artificial creations imposed from without. It soon became obvious that the new administrations existed precariously amidst this undisguised hostility of a potentially destructive local opposition.

Agitation for the restoration of militia privileges in the Southern states grew directly out of a need to avoid political annihilation of the Radical state governments at the hands of this enemy within. By early 1868, the incoming mail of congressional Radicals contained many requests for

¹¹ James D. Richardson, (ed.), A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1907, (Washington, 1908), VI, p. 472. Cited hereafter as Richardson, Messages.

legislation authorizing the formation of militia units in Southern states. Two points were consistently emphasized in this correspondence: first, the need for protection, and secondly, the need for haste in making that protection available. In answer to these appeals, Senate Bill no. 648 was reported on July 25, 1868, proposing repeal of the law which prohibited the use of militia in the states "lately in rebellion."¹²

The introduction of this bill precipitated an acrimonious debate. The anti-Radical group assumed the offensive in condemning the proposition because they felt the inevitable consequences would be "confusion, disorder, revolution, anarchy, violence, and bloodshed."¹³ Political reasons were ascribed as the motivating power behind the bill. The original prohibition was condemned as a move deliberately intended to weaken non-Republican governments in the South, and the proposed extension of force to the now-sympathetic regimes was denounced.¹⁴ The bitterest attack of all came from Thomas A. Hendricks of Indiana:

¹² Congressional Globe, 40 Cong., 2 sess., p. 4467.

¹³ Ibid., 40 Cong., 3 sess., p. 84.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 84. Senator Charles R. Buckalew of Pennsylvania was the spearhead of this attack on the radicals.

The only necessity in these southern states for the maintenance of a large military force results from the fact that you have attempted to reverse the American doctrine and to declare that by force the power of the states shall be placed in the hands of a minority, stripping classes of the right to participation in the government, and then by force governing them.¹⁵

Radical supporters of the bill moved quickly to its defense. They insisted that the purpose of the militia was to preserve peace rather than to make war. It was argued that lawlessness in the Southern states was due to lack of force by civil governments to quell disturbances, and Congressmen were told:

Unless we bring about a condition of things in which there is a power lodged with somebody to repress by force the violence that takes place there continually, we shall see no end of the troubles of which we have heard so much for the last year.¹⁶

Senator William Pitt Fessenden, an ardent advocate of the militia, asserted that the only cure for the continued outbreaks in the South was "force, to be exercised by men who dare to exercise it."¹⁷ When B. F. Rice of Arkansas promised that if his state were allowed a militia there would no longer be any need for a single Federal soldier to be stationed there, he

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 82. Senator Hendricks was generally recognized as a leader in the Democratic opposition.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 82.

gained considerable support from those becoming increasingly concerned with the nation's purse strings.

From this verbal encounter, the Radicals emerged victorious. Exactly two years and a day after the original prohibition had been enacted, a law was passed providing "that so much of the act...as prohibits the organization, arming, or calling into service of the militia forces of the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana and Arkansas"¹⁸ be repealed. No mention was made of Georgia, Mississippi, Virginia or Texas due to the insecurity of the Radical position in those states. The conservative Virginians, for example, had not yet accepted the proposed constitution. The Texas constitutional convention had not completed its task, and the social unrest of the state was reflected in a fierce wave of Ku Klux Klan activity during 1868. Mississippians had rejected outright their constitution of 1868 which had been drawn up by the highly publicized "Black and Tan Convention", and Georgia was in national disfavor for her intemperate action in having arbitrarily unseated many of the Negro legislators which the costly machinery of the Reconstruction Acts had so laboriously aided in electing. Not until July 15, 1870, when

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 325.

these four recalcitrant states appeared to be safely in the Radical fold, were they authorized to form a militia.¹⁹

Acting on the legal basis so provided, state governments organized and armed their respective militias. As the reader will discover, this militia was then launched on a curious career which included guerilla campaigns, naval engagements, international diplomatic complications, and even full scale pitched battles complete with artillery, cavalry, and deployment of troops.

Before entering into the actual story of the Negro militia movement, however, there are three fundamental facts which must be emphasized in order to place the subject in its proper perspective. In the first place, the militia was not the only instrument used by the Radicals in the South; secondly, militia forces were not active in all Southern states; and thirdly, these units were not made up exclusively of Negro troops.

It is imperative that one understand that these militia forces were only one of several instruments used by the Radicals in the advancement of their Southern program. Two

¹⁹ Ibid., 41 Cong., 2 sess., p. 738. By this date, the ultra-Radical Edmund J. Davis was firmly in the saddle in Texas. Mississippi had accepted a revised constitution and the able scalawag, James L. Alcorn, had been elected governor. Virginia had accepted a compromise constitution, and Georgia had been brought to heel by the purges of General Alfred H. Terry.

others were employed which furnish interesting parallels for the militia. They were the Freedmen's Bureau and the Union League or Loyal League. It is not my purpose here to discuss the motives or analyze the activities of these agencies. It is unquestionably true that the Bureau rendered a genuine service to the freedmen and that the Loyal Leagues which mushroomed over the South furnished him a political indoctrination which he otherwise would not have received. It is also unquestionably true that these two agencies shared with the militia the implacable hostility of the Southern conservatives. The deep-rooted convictions of many Southerners were facetiously, yet accurately expressed in the following anecdote:

I hope I may be pardoned for alluding to a caricature I once saw. It was a picture of an old lady flourishing a broomstick over the head of her husband with a Negro in the background holding a dog by the neck and flourishing an uplifted lash, with these words issuing from the lips of the darkey:

Missus whips Massa, Massa licks me,
and so you infernal dog, I gib you
de debbil.

Congress backs the Freedmen's Bureau, the
Bureau backs the darkey, and the Negro gives
the white man the devil.²⁰

The Union League was more intensely disliked than the

²⁰ Ibid., 39 Cong., 2 sess., p. 62. Speech delivered in the House of Representatives by A. H. Ward of Kentucky, January 19, 1867.

Freedmen's Bureau. Its clandestine meetings and mysterious initiation rites, shrouded in secrecy, led to the wildest speculation and gave rise to all sorts of groundless fears on the part of the whites. When a disappointed Negro Republican wrote in 1877 the following exaggerated account of a League meeting, he only confirmed the long-standing and inaccurate suspicions of many Southern whites:

It was in these secret meetings that the fabulous tales of forty acres and a mule originated, and confiscation ideas made some of the leading subjects for discussion. Lands were apportioned by imagination, and fine rebel mansions seized by hope. Gentlemen of African descent saw themselves rebacked with all the pomp and dignity of princes in their old masters' carriages... civil rights bills were to be passed by Congress, that would allow them to occupy front seats in white churches, sit at the same table with their former masters, and be respected with all the modern civilities in their parlors and drawing rooms.²¹

Both the Freedmen's Bureau and Union League were similar to the militia in that they exacerbated the already strained feelings which existed and were directly associated with much of the violence that occurred during the period.

It is also necessary for the reader to understand that militia forces were not created and employed in all Southern

²¹ John T. Shuften, A Colored Man's Exposition of the Acts and Doings of the Republican Party South, (Jacksonville, 1877), p. 8. Cited hereafter as Shuften, Exposition.

states with uniformity. Staid old Virginia, for example, never organized a Negro militia. Her politicians, acting through a committee of nine, worked out a compromise with the Radicals in Washington concerning the Constitution of 1868 which solved most of the pressing political problems. The Gilbert C. Walker administration, elected in July, 1869, was the result of a fusion of Democrats and Conservative Republicans. Since there was no truly Radical government in Virginia, no protective militia force was necessary.

More surprising was the fact that the usually obstreperous state of Georgia had no regularly organized militia forces, either. Several factors must be considered in order to explain this long step out of character. In the first place, the conservative element was always fairly well represented in Georgia affairs, even during the Bullock administration. Then too, the powerful personal influence of ex-governor Joseph E. Brown, appealing for moderation, was a potent force on the local scene. More important than anything else, perhaps, was the fact that the Democrats, throughout the entire period, maintained their hold on the county offices, thereby preventing the development of conspicuously successful Radical government in

the state.²²

In Alabama, Governor William H. Smith, who held office as an appointee of General George Gordon Meade, had elaborate paper plans for a militia system, but consistently refused to arm any troops. At the height of Ku Klux Klan depredations in that state, he threatened to call out Negro troops to suppress the disorders, but no such order was ever issued. Three years later, his successor ordered the Adjutant General not to enroll Negro militia even in the face of a determined White League movement aimed at the eventual destruction of his regime. However, when Alabama Republicans split in 1874, the "bolters" organized squads of Negro troops. Although they were known as "National Guards", they were not genuine state militia.²³

The situation in Florida was quite similar to that in Alabama. After the inauguration of Harrison Reed in June, 1868, colored troops were organized and armed. But in spite of the numerous outbreaks of violence which marked his administration, he steadfastly refused to use his militia for fear of starting a race war. As a general rule, Reed was satisfied

²² Mildred Thompson, Reconstruction In Georgia, (New York, 1915), p. 365.

²³ Walter L. Fleming, Civil War and Reconstruction In Alabama, (New York, 1905), p. 774.

to allow Federal troops to settle any difficulties which arose in Florida.

In the remaining states, Negro troops were organized and actually employed in varying degrees. In Tennessee, with its own peculiar Reconstruction history, troops were organized by Governor William G. Brownlow early in 1867. His militia did not actually fight any pitched battles but were employed primarily in political assignments, where they proved themselves to be more annoying than overpowering. They were mustered in on several occasions as anti-Ku Klux Klan forces but were never really effective on a state-wide basis.

Arkansas was one of the most active of the Southern states in the Negro militia movement. Negro troops were organized and armed following the inauguration of Powell Clayton in July, 1868. The first great wave of militia activity came during late 1868 and early 1869, when Clayton proclaimed martial law. For four months his troops marched and counter-marched over the state. The second wave occurred during April and May of 1874 when the forces of rival claimants for the governorship fought a fair-sized war for possession of the state government.

The Negro militia in Texas were the product of

Governor Edmund J. Davis. This official used his troops freely during the state election of 1871, and also to enforce a declaration of martial law in several counties during this same period. When Davis was defeated by Judge Richard Coke in December, 1873, there ensued a struggle between Coke's supporters and Davis' Negro troops for possession of the state house in Austin.

In confused and confusing Louisiana, Negro troops were first organized by Governor Henry C. Warmoth in June, 1870, and placed under the command of Lee's renowned ex-war horse, General James Longstreet. From that time until the final Packard-Nicholls struggle ending in 1877, the troops were used on various occasions. In 1872, when the Carter-Warmoth feud split the party in Louisiana, the militia was called out to protect Republicans from other Republicans. They were used again in 1873, during the Kellogg-McEnery contest and in September, 1874, they fought a pitched battle in the barricaded streets of New Orleans against the White League.

In Mississippi, the militia issue remained quiescent during the early years of Radical rule. Following the inauguration of James L. Alcorn in 1870, militia units were organized in a desultory manner. Alcorn never really appeared to shake off enough of his ingrained conservatism to

become a full-fledged Radical and when he resigned the governorship in the following year to go to the Senate, no Negro troops had actually been used in Mississippi. However, after the Republican faction headed by Adelbert Ames won out in the struggle for party leadership, the tempo of violence increased throughout the state. During 1874 and 1875, riot followed riot. Finally, in the harsh after-light of the Clinton slaughter, Ames decided to place his militia on a war footing and a period of feverish preparations followed. A crisis was avoided by the negotiation of a compromise in mid-October, 1875, when the so-called "Peace Agreement" was signed in Jackson by the belligerents.

North Carolina suffered only one spasm of violence connected with the militia. W. W. Holden, elected governor in 1868, first called his troops up to cope with Ku Klux Klan disturbances. In June, 1870, he placed his troops under command of George W. Kirk, an ex-colonel of U. S. Volunteers and a native of Tennessee, and for a period of six months the state was involved in either the physical or legal phase of fighting what has gone down in the history books as the Kirk-Holden War.

South Carolina challenged Arkansas as the most active

of the Southern states in the Negro militia movement. Robert K. Scott, first of the Radical South Carolina governors, armed the Negro troops just prior to the contest which resulted in his re-election in 1870. For several years thereafter, Klan and militia engaged in a bloody vendetta which ended only when President Grant placed nine counties of the state under martial law and sent United States troops to enforce his proclamation. Franklin J. Moses, Jr., who succeeded Scott in office, continued the policy of his predecessor relative to the use of Negro troops, as did his successor Daniel H. Chamberlain with only minor variations. The victims of the massacre at Hamburg were members of a colored militia company and lesser conflicts claimed the lives of many more until the accession of Wade Hampton in 1877.

The third fact which should be understood about what is called the Negro militia is that it was not all-Negro in composition. Whites, in varying numbers, belonged to these militia units in every state. Although the troops were overwhelmingly Negro in Arkansas, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Texas, there was a noticeable mixture of black and white in the formations in Tennessee, Louisiana, and North Carolina. In spite of this blending, the militia was nevertheless considered a "Negro Militia", in keeping with the long-standing

Southern indifference to logic when considering questions involving racial implications. As in heredity, so in the militia, a touch of Negro was sufficient to brand it as all-Negro in the eyes of a majority of Southern whites. The feeling of resentment generated by placing any armed Negro in a place of authority over white men goes a long way in explaining the violent reaction which inevitably accompanied militia activities.

As the reader will soon discover, the militia experiment ended in dismal failure, insofar as its purpose was the perpetuation of Radical state governments. By 1877, it was obvious that the last of these governments were doomed and that the militia forces had either been disbanded, destroyed, or rendered militarily ineffective. Such failures, however, are frequently as instructive to the historian as those more fortunate movements which are rewarded with success, for they, too, are inextricably woven into the historical fabric of the period. Yet, even if this were not true, the story of the Negro militia movement, intricate in design and colorful in execution, would still be worth telling.

ORGANIZING AND ARMING THE MILITIA

Once the legal groundwork had been prepared by Congress, local Radicals, reacting to the increasing pressure of Conservative opposition, speedily assumed the offensive in organizing state militia forces. Although the procedure differed in detail from state to state, the organizational technique which was employed followed a fairly definite pattern. First there came a period of careful cultivation of a favorable climate of public opinion. This was followed by well-timed gubernatorial appeals to state legislatures which led directly to passage of militia laws.

In order to gain public support for creation of the militia, a campaign was inaugurated to emphasize the desperate need for such a force. Incumbent Radical governors were voluble spokesmen in support of the plan. Time and again they cried out against the lack of any real force with which to quell disturbances, while continuing to point out the extremely violent nature of their opposition. R. K. Scott, speaking in the District of Columbia just prior to the state election of 1870, informed his audience that the only law South Carolinians really understood was "the Winchester rifle."¹ Parson Brownlow, while

¹ Henry T. Thompson, Ousting the Carpetbagger from South Carolina, (Columbia, 1927), p. 48.

stumping Tennessee in behalf of his own candidacy, pleaded with the voters to also "send up a legislature to reorganize the militia," and promised to put an end to the violence sweeping over the state if his plea were granted.²

Properly publicized reports of legislative investigating committees, emphasizing the general lawlessness of the period, also aided in creating sentiment favorable to organization of militia. In Texas, for example, the Report of the Committee on Lawlessness presented statistics on deaths by violence in the period from the close of the war to June, 1868. Although the figures showed 509 whites had been killed as opposed to 486 freedmen, it was asserted that over ninety per cent of the total number of killings had been committed by whites, while little more than one per cent of the deaths resulted from attacks by freedmen on whites.³ A similar committee of the Louisiana legislature, investigating fraud and violence in that state during the presidential election of 1868, closed its report with the suggestion that "it might be

² James W. Patton, Unionism and Reconstruction In Tennessee, 1860-1869, (Chapel Hill, 1934), p. 86, citing Nashville Daily Times, January 16, 1865. Cited hereafter as Patton, Reconstruction In Tennessee.

³ This report was published in the Journal of the Convention of 1868 and is cited in Charles W. Ramsdell, Reconstruction In Texas, (New York, 1910), p. 219. Cited hereafter as Ramsdell, Texas.

well to inquire whether a small body of mounted militia, which can be moved to any part of the state where it is needed, upon short notice, should not at once be organized."⁴

At the same time, the governors passed up no opportunity to describe the woeful conditions under which they were forced to operate. Governor Davis, of Texas, spoke for all his comrades-in-office when he complained that "the state government is without any militia or police whatever."⁵ Brownlow, in describing conditions in Tennessee, lamented the fact that "the state arms were carried into the rebellion through the influence of the bad men in authority four years ago, and throughout the length and breadth of the state, she has not arms enough to arm a captain's company."⁶

Considerable public support was generated for the militia movement as a result of these public utterances. When the local political barometer indicated the propitious moment, governors then issued official appeals to their respective legislatures. Citing the obvious imperfections of the

⁴ Report of the Joint Committee of the Louisiana Legislature On the Election of 1868, p. xxxix.

⁵ Senate Miscellaneous Document no. 109, 40 Cong., 2 sess., p. 6.

⁶ Acts of the State of Tennessee, 1865, p. 6.

existing situation, they urged immediate and effective amendment to it. Yet they couched their appeals in very cautious language and gave repeated assurances that if granted a militia they would call it out only in cases of general resistance to the laws. And although the desired result was uniform throughout the Southern states, gubernatorial requests were different in nature. Where the Texas legislature was urged to look into "the question of making some provision for the temporary establishment of martial law,"⁷ Governor Clayton of Arkansas demanded that the legislature, in the interests of public safety, "proceed at once to provide for an efficient and well disciplined militia."⁸ Governor Holden, in his message to the North Carolina lawmakers, virtually pleaded with them to enact laws which would enable him "to suppress violence and disorder,"⁹ and piously added that such action would allow his administration to appear equipped with both "the

⁷ Hilary A. Herbert, (ed.), Why the Solid South, (Baltimore, 1890), p. 371. Cited hereafter as Herbert, Solid South.

⁸ Powell Clayton, The Aftermath of the Civil War In Arkansas, (New York, 1915), p. 41. Cited hereafter as Clayton, Aftermath.

⁹ William W. Holden, Memoirs, (Durham, 1911), p. 121. Cited hereafter as Holden, Memoirs.

olive branch and the sword."¹⁰ Parson Brownlow characteristically promised that if given a militia force, he would bring peace to Tennessee if he had "to shoot and hang every man concerned."¹¹

On the basis of these appeals, state legislators set about the task of drafting and enacting militia laws. When completed, these laws authorized creation of military forces patterned largely after the United States Army and were, in the main, subject to rules quite similar to the Articles of War. Although varying in detail, these laws fundamentally had much in common. In general, they provided for a force made up of two components, the State Guard and a Reserve Militia. The regular or active duty personnel belonged to the Guard, while the Reserve Militia furnished a reservoir of manpower for necessary mobilization. The number of troops allowed varied, of course. Some states, (e.g., North Carolina) were quite specific as to the maximum number which could be enrolled,¹² while others left the decision entirely to the discretion of the

¹⁰ James G. de R. Hamilton, Reconstruction In North Carolina, (New York, 1914), p. 401. Cited hereafter as Hamilton, North Carolina.

¹¹ Patton, Reconstruction In Tennessee, p. 86, citing Nashville Daily Times, January 16, 1865.

¹² The militia bill passed in North Carolina in 1868 prohibited the enrollment of more than six thousand men. See Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 358.

governor.¹³ Eligible age groups also varied, but the average seems to have been between eighteen and forty-five years. The governor was ex-officio commander-in-chief of the state forces, with explicit power to call out the militia whenever in his opinion circumstances might warrant such action. He was further empowered to assess and collect taxes from troublesome counties in order to defray costs of militia operations therein. His personal grip on the militia was virtually assured by placing in his hands complete control over the selection of officers. Exemption clauses, under which less belligerent members of the community might avoid military service in return for payment of an annual tax to the military fund, were frequently included in the militia laws. The tax ranged from as little as two dollars in North Carolina to a much higher figure in other states.¹⁴ North Carolina also provided an exemption

¹³ The wording of the South Carolina militia law passed in 1868 authorized the governor to "employ as many persons as he may deem necessary and proper for the suppression of insurrection, rebellion, or resistance to the laws." See James S. Reynolds, Reconstruction In South Carolina, (Columbia, 1905), p. 114. Cited hereafter as Reynolds, South Carolina.

¹⁴ For figures on North Carolina, See Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 358. In Arkansas, the annual tax was five dollars. Thomas S. Staples, Reconstruction In Arkansas, (New York, 1923), p. 289. Cited hereafter as Staples, Arkansas.

from service for anyone who was excused by written authority of a competent physician.¹⁵ Only two states, however, seem to have been possessed of the necessary piety to recognize that some few members of their society rendered things other than to Caesar. Any North Carolinian imbued with peace-loving "religious scruples" was constitutionally excused from performing militia duty,¹⁶ and professed conscientious objectors in Arkansas were excluded from involuntary service by a specific clause written into the law.¹⁷

Several of the laws contained provisions which, although peculiar to the state concerned, throw additional light on the militia as it was eventually organized. In Mississippi, for instance, militiamen were immune from arrest during attendance at or while going to and from musters. A clause in the North Carolina law called for separation of the races into different companies.¹⁹ The South Carolina law contained two

¹⁵ Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 358.

¹⁶ Specifically stated in the Constitution of North Carolina drawn up in 1868.

¹⁷ Section I, Article XI, of the Arkansas Constitution of 1868.

¹⁸ Journal of the Proceedings In the Constitutional Convention of the State of Mississippi, 1868, p. 641. This provision was included in Section VIII, Article IX, of the Constitution of 1868.

¹⁹ Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 359.

peculiar provisions. The first, reflecting a sound insight into the military importance of transport and communication, authorized the governor to take possession of telegraph and railroads in times of emergency.²⁰ A second provision imposed both fine and imprisonment as penalty against bodies other than the militia for organizing, drilling, or parading anywhere in the state.²¹

Acting on the legal basis of these laws, Radical governors began organizing their militia forces and although enrollment was legally open to both races, it soon became apparent that a majority of volunteers were Negroes. This should not have been surprising. Many whites were officially discouraged from joining up because of justifiable Radical suspicions concerning their intent. On the other hand, the Negro had ample reason to be devoted to the Republican cause.

The Conservatives made a deliberate attempt to organize and receive arms under provisions of the militia laws. This infiltration was encouraged by their political leaders, who could foresee the real advantage inherent in having their

²⁰ Reynolds, South Carolina, p. 115.

²¹ Ibid., p. 119.

personal supporters armed at the expense of the state.²² This attempted wolf-in-sheep's-clothing maneuver was foiled, however. Opposition to the inclusion of Conservatives in the militia was spearheaded by loyal troops already mustered in. Governor Holden was warned against the possibility of Conservatives gaining control of the militia by being the first to offer their services "under the pretence that they are 'alright' and anxious to put down the deprecations that now are being perpetrated in this state."²³ Many protests were heard from organized units:

The present companies that have already been armed and equipped are loyal, peaceable, orderly, and efficient, and can be controlled for the good of the country. They are insensed over the prospect of having an armed and authorized enemy to contend against, and say if the Governor is going to arm the white KK's to operate against them, he, the Governor, can take back the guns and commissions that has already been sent to this county...It will not be so funny if our best men get killed off by those villins....²⁴

²² General J. Z. George, for example, consistently urged Mississippi Democrats to enroll in the militia. James W. Garner, Reconstruction in Mississippi, (New York, 1901), p. 383. Cited hereafter as Garner, Mississippi.

²³ I. C. Williams to William W. Holden, June 28, 1870. William W. Holden Papers, North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. Cited hereafter as Holden Papers.

²⁴ Letter of B. G. Yocum dated September 2, 1870. Published in Report of Joint Investigating Committee on Public Frauds in South Carolina, 1877-1878, p. 674. Yocum was a colonel in the Fourteenth Regiment of South Carolina militia.

One militiaman penned his fervent hope that no Conservative would be allowed to enroll "for if they git controle of the state troots in the different counties as the secessionists did after the surrender (at the close of the war) of the county police our generals may be ever so vigerlent but they will make but little success in putting down the outrages...", and closed his letter with a warning to put "none on garde tonight but loyal citixens."²⁵

Radical governors, taking their lead from this expressed resentment of their own supporters, moved to exclude Conservatives from the militia. In Louisiana, it was demanded that "men should prove they are loyal before they can be trusted to go into the militia."²⁶ The Alabama ordinance provided that commissions in the state militia would be reserved for "persons of known loyalty."²⁷ Governor Ames of Mississippi made the realistic observation that since "the state government commanded the respect of the colored race only, it must depend for military support on colored troops."²⁸ In areas where white companies

²⁵ I. C. Williams to William W. Holden, June 28, 1870. Holden Papers.

²⁶ Ella Lonn, Reconstruction In Louisiana After 1868, (New York, 1918), p. 22. Cited hereafter as Lonn, Louisiana After 1868.

²⁷ Harper's Weekly, December 21, 1867.

²⁸ Garner, Mississippi, p. 385.

of questionable loyalty had been allowed to organize, disbandment, when considered necessary, was easily effected by the expedient of appointing Negro officers to positions of command.²⁹ By these means, white participation in the militia was largely limited to those who had given previous evidence of Republican sympathies.

The Negro, on the other hand, had several positive motives for enlisting in the militia. In the delightful novelty of his freedom, he did not forget the men who had made that freedom possible. And since the Negro was circumstantially a Republican, it was quite natural for him to support party programs. This was particularly true of the militia project where participation could be interpreted as a personal defense of his freedom. This political affinity was, however, only one of the factors which made the Negro a willing recruit. The pay, normally the same as that received by equivalent grade or rank in the United States Army, was enticing.³⁰ Although not so liberal as that received by present day servicemen, the reward must have appeared magnificent to the average field hand. Then

²⁹ Claude G. Bowers, The Tragical Era, (Cambridge, 1929), p. 359. Reynolds, South Carolina, pp. 136-137.

³⁰ In nearly all states, rates were identical to those paid by the U. S. Army, although there were a few deviations from this practice.

too, the perennial appeal of the uniform must have exercised some influence, especially since regulations were lax enough to allow the sporting of an occasional plume or feather. The promised relief from the routine drudgery of plantation work probably accounted for many more volunteers. The drills, the parades, the barbecues, the speeches offered a pleasant break in the monotony, and "playin sogers" was considered a delightful game.³¹

Perhaps the most important single factor, however, in explaining Negro enlistment was social pressure. Negro women, emulating the role played by their white sisters of the South during the Civil War, were in all probability the most effective recruiters for the militia. Failure to show interest in the movement automatically caused the male Negro to become politically suspect and gave rise to a most rigorous program of discrimination at the hands of the women. Negro men charged with political infidelity were socially isolated; they encountered increasing difficulty in persuading a woman even to wash their clothing. Expulsion from the local church was not considered too extreme a punishment, and on several occasions groups of irate females publicly assaulted and tore the clothing

³¹

J. A. Leland, A Voice From South Carolina, (Charleston, 1879), p. 49. Cited hereafter as Leland, Voice From Carolina.

off suspected shirkers. In cases involving reluctant husbands, wives were known to have imposed restraints which most certainly must have taxed the domestic relationship.³² Such efforts were not without results, and under the additional pressure of circulated handbills bearing the appeal "To Arms! To Arms!! To Arms!!! Colored Men to the Front!",³³ the muster lists were rapidly filled.

Hand in hand with the actual formation of militia forces went the problem of officer procurement. Inasmuch as the selection of officers was generally left in the hands of the governor, no uniform system of appointment evolved. One qualification remained fairly constant, however; the appointee must be a person of known loyalty to the cause. Governors were literally overwhelmed, during periods of militia activity, by letters from commission-seekers. Some requests, and the resulting appointments, were of a strictly political nature while others were based on ability and experience. The governor of Tennessee received the following straightforward appeal:

³² This sampling of Negro discrimination against other Negroes is taken from the sworn testimony of the victims. Senate Miscellaneous Document no. 48, I, 44 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 556, 560 et passim.

³³ Cited in House of Representatives Miscellaneous Document no. 211, 42 Cong., 2 sess., p. 319.

Sir

As I am a man of few words I will tell you at once without any apology or preliminaries what I want I want a Captain's commission to recruit a company of black soldiers for the state guards. I have served three years in the Federal army and can give the best of references as to character and ability.³⁴

In some cases, the men were allowed to elect their officers, although this practice was by no means general. Commissions were sometimes placed on the auction block and fell to the highest bidder.³⁵ In order to obtain the services of physicians, private contracts were negotiated under the terms of which medical officers, then as now, received a higher rate of pay than their less fortunate comrades-in-arms.³⁶

³⁴ N. C. Davis to William G. Brownlow, May 18, 1867. William G. Brownlow Papers, Tennessee Department of Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. Cited hereafter as Brownlow Papers.

³⁵ See Senate Miscellaneous Document no. 48, III, 44 Cong., 2 sess., p. 585, for following letter:

Hamburg, S. C., June 3, 1876

Mr. Henry B. Johnson:

Sir: Would you be kind enough to see what it would cost me to get the commission for one captain and three lieutenants. If you will see Col. Walter R. Jones and ask him to assist you in getting the commissions for me, and send them to me, and I will return the expensy on the return mail....

Col. John Williams

³⁶ Several copies of these negotiated contracts are available in the files of the Tennessee Adjutant General's Office, Tennessee Department of Archives, Nashville. Cited hereafter as AGO Files, State of Tennessee.

Having arranged for the organization of their militia forces, the authorities were next faced with the problem of arming and equipping them. This proved to be a most difficult task. Militia appropriations were bitterly and often successfully contested by Conservative blocs, and governors were forced to seek other methods by which to equip their forces. The first such measure was an attempt to borrow guns and ammunition from the armories of sympathetic northern states. For this purpose Governor Clayton of Arkansas sent a personal envoy, Dr. J. M. Lewis, to enter a plea with the governor of Illinois,³⁷ Warmoth of Louisiana sent a representative to the capitals of Missouri and Illinois,³⁸ while the governor of Florida personally called on Governor John Andrew of Massachusetts and Governor Reuben Fenton of New York.³⁹ Although these appeals generally fell on deaf ears, Vermont, in answer to an appeal from the Adjutant General of North Carolina, sent one thousand Springfield rifles for the use of the citizenry of that state.⁴⁰

³⁷ Clayton, Aftermath, pp. 106-109.

³⁸ House of Representatives Miscellaneous Document
no. 154, 42 Cong., 2 sess., p. 519.

³⁹ John Wallace, Carpetbag Rule In Florida, (Jacksonville, 1888), p. 92. Cited hereafter as Wallace, Carpetbag Rule.

⁴⁰ Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 346.

Failing in this effort, the governors next turned to the Federal government in hopes of securing arms for their troops. Their earliest overtures met with official rebuff. Clayton's request for arms was denied by the army,⁴¹ as was a similar plea from the governor of Florida.⁴² However, as violence in the Southern states continued unabated, the national administration gradually began to look with more favor on the possibility of furnishing arms to state governments. Apparently the Adjutant General of South Carolina was the first to persuade the Federal government to make an issue of arms to a state, for his opponents at home reported with noticeable chagrin: "He CAME to Washington, he SAW the Secretary, he CONQUERED all objections."⁴³ When the North Carolina governor sought Federal aid in outfitting his troops, he received support from no less powerful a personality than President Grant. Holden sent a political associate, William G. Clarke, to Washington as his agent. Clarke, on his arrival, wrote a formal request to General Montgomery C. Meigs, Quartermaster-General of the Army, for equipment to outfit a

⁴¹ Clayton, Aftermath, pp. 106-109.

⁴² Wallace, Carpentbag Rule, p. 92.

⁴³ Proceedings of the Tax-Payer's Convention of South Carolina, 1874, (Charleston, 1874), p. 95.

full regiment of North Carolina infantry.⁴⁴ Clarke then secured a personal interview with Grant during which he gained the president's approval of the project. Grant, the same day, wrote a letter to General Sherman endorsing the plan to outfit North Carolina troops at government expense and said that he was "willing to sign any legal order necessary" to accomplish it.⁴⁵ Sherman then agreed to issue the equipment in exchange for Governor Holden's signature on a bond which would be "payable at the day of Judgment."⁴⁶ Several days later, Holden was informed by Meigs that the quartermaster at Fortress Monroe had been instructed to issue the outfit.⁴⁷

Eventually, Congress passed a law authorizing the distribution of Federal arms to Southern states on a quota basis.⁴⁸ In practice, this system proved quite flexible.

⁴⁴ William G. Clarke to Montgomery C. Meigs, June 17, 1870. Holden Papers.

⁴⁵ Ulysses S. Grant to William T. Sherman, June 17, 1870. Holden Papers.

⁴⁶ William G. Clarke to William Holden, June 18, 1870. Holden Papers.

⁴⁷ Montgomery C. Meigs to William W. Holden, June 21, 1870. Holden Papers.

⁴⁸ Act of March 3, 1873. See Congressional Globe, 42 Cong., 3 sess., p. 300.

Governor Scott, for example, persuaded the authorities to issue South Carolina its quota for the next twenty years in advance.⁴⁹ It is not too unsafe a generalization to say that this law provided the largest single source of arms and equipment used to outfit the various state militias.⁵⁰

Since the organization and arming of the militia was not carried out in secrecy, it was accompanied by vociferous opposition from the Conservatives. Every news organ at their disposal carried on a vituperative campaign against the militia project,⁵¹ denouncing it as a flagrant encroachment on civil liberties. When militia bills were introduced in state legislatures, prominent Democrats led the fight against them.⁵²

⁴⁹ B. R. Tillman, "The Struggles of '76", (pamphlet in writer's possession), p. 40.

⁵⁰ For detailed information concerning Federal issue of arms to Southern states from 1865-1872, see official figures cited in House of Representatives Miscellaneous Document no. 191, 42 Cong., 2 sess., p. 4.

⁵¹ The following quote from the Daily Arkansas Gazette, November 26, 1868, is typical:

The whole affair is a weak and silly attempt to awaken the worst passions of the aggressive party with a view to make them a unit in support of executive violence, and to browbeat and intimidate.... He [Clayton] wants 23,000 negroes armed to protect 70,000 white men and their families in order to promote future peace, quiet and permanency.

⁵² Testimony of Plato Durham. House of Representatives Report no. 22, 42 Cong., 2 sess., p. 317.

The proposed laws were attacked on the grounds of being purely political in nature⁵³ and as potential threats to the preservation of peace.⁵⁴ Nor was opposition confined to the South. As influential a newspaper as James Gordon Bennett's New York Herald matched and often outdistanced the provincial Southern press in rabid denunciation:

The fact is inevitable that bloodshed will follow. Reconstructed governments are bad enough with negro legislators, negro magistrates, negro police, and negro Commissioners of Education and other matters; but when armed negroes appear as military forces to keep white men in order...the spirit...must revolt.⁵⁵

When recruiting actually began, Conservatives loudly claimed they were being discriminated against in not being allowed to join up. They cited the difficulties put in the way to prevent their enlisting as clear evidence of official preference for Negro troops.⁵⁶ They tossed in an incidental

⁵³ A Louisiana senator stated flatly: "I believe the object of the bill, as it stands, is to perpetuate the power of ...the Republican Party." Cited in Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 60.

⁵⁴ Democrats repeatedly threatened that if militia bills were passed, it would become impossible to preserve peace. Testimony of H. C. Warmoth. House of Representatives Miscellaneous Document no. 154, 42 Cong., 2 sess., p. 519.

⁵⁵ New York Herald, October 1, 1868.

⁵⁶ Garner, Mississippi, p. 383.



To all who shall see these Presents,---Greeting:

Know Ye, That reposing special trust and confidence in the patriotism, valor, fidelity, and abilities of James M. Dickerson of the County of Haynes, we do appoint him Captain in the Second Regiment of Infantry of Tennessee Volunteers, in the service of the State of Tennessee, for three years, ~~until~~ ~~sooner~~ discharged, to rank as such from the Fourth day of April, one thousand eight hundred and Sixty Seven.

He is therefore carefully and diligently to discharge the duties of Captain, by doing and performing all manner of things thereunto belonging. And I do strictly charge and require all Officers and Soldiers under his command to be obedient to his orders; and he is to observe and follow such orders and directions, from time to time, as he shall receive from the Governor of the State of Tennessee, or the General or superior officers set over him according to the Rules and Discipline of the Revised Regulations of the Army of the United States.

Given under my hand, in the City of Nashville, this Fourth day of April, in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-Seven, and in the Ninety First year of the Independence of the United States.

BY THE GOVERNOR:

James H. Brownlow
Adjutant General.

W. G. Brownlow

complaint that recruiting among agricultural workers interfered with the harvesting of crops.⁵⁷ Great excitement prevailed over the question of arming the militia. In an attempt to prevent passage of a proposed act allowing the Federal government to issue arms to Southern governors, Representative Nathaniel Boyden, of North Carolina, made this impassioned plea:

Great God, we cannot afford to fight each other.... I warn the House that if arms are sent there, we will be ruined; we cannot live there. If we need anything in the way of arms, in God's name send an army of the United States but do not arm neighbor against neighbor.⁵⁸

Loud protests were registered when rifles were issued for drill purposes, but when live ammunition was subsequently passed out, consternation reigned. The Conservatives maintained that conflict was inevitable after the "buck and Ball" reached the hands of militiamen.⁵⁹

The governors were not intimidated by the clamorings and threats of their political antagonists. They defended their

⁵⁷ . . . Stuart to Governor William G. Brownlow, April 1, 1867. Brownlow Papers.

⁵⁸ Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 372, citing speech made in House of Representatives in August, 1868.

⁵⁹ Testimony of David R. Duncan. House of Representatives Report no. 22, pt. 3, II, 42 Cong., 2 sess., p. 880.

action on the firm grounds that the right of a state to organize a militia was not a new principle but a very old one, and that it was designed not to foment trouble but to preserve peace. Governor Clayton, in a speech at Lewisburg, Arkansas, at the very height of the militia-organization controversy in 1868, courageously said:

I understand that the militia law is distasteful to some. I have only to say that it is a law that will be enforced. The militia forces will be organized in this county and throughout the state.⁶⁰

Nor were the governors without support. Letters from all sections of their states poured into the capitols in praise of the militia movement. This correspondence demonstrated a widespread interest in both the organization of the militia and the desire to see that it was made "both ornamental and useful."⁶¹ In South Carolina, it was reported that "the colored people are rejoicing over their guns."⁶² Governor Davis received this gratifying message from a fellow-Texan:

⁶⁰ Clayton, Aftermath, p. 148.

⁶¹ G. R. Dickson to William W. Holden, April 5, 1870. Holden Papers.

⁶² Letter from J. A. Jackson to John B. Hubbard. July 3, 1870, quoted in Report of Joint Investigating Committee on Public Frauds in South Carolina, 1877-1878, p. 675.

All the Union mens of this county is proud of the militia and Police law and hopes you will enforce them. We have many roughies here should be tried by the military. Elisha Jupe is still prowlin aroun in this county. The Democrats protects and hides him.⁶³

Out of the welter of accusations, exaggerations, re-
criminations, charges and counter-charges which resulted from
the organization of militia forces, a few conclusions emerge
with reasonable clarity. The unprejudiced observer must
certainly agree that the need for a protective force was a
very real one, if the Radicals seriously intended to maintain
their hold on Southern state governments. Their resolute
action in forming militia units was an accurate indication of
their political sagacity. Also, it does not seem likely that
there was any deliberate attempt, except in a few isolated in-
stances, to make this force exclusively Negro in composition.
That it became so was probably a great surprise to the origi-
nators, many of whom lacked the familiarity with Southern atti-
tudes and behavior which usually comes only from long observation
of sectional peculiarities. It must also be said for the Radi-
cals that in spite of an unfavorable publicity campaign of un-
precedented proportions, they persevered in the work of arming

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Undated letter of A. P. Brown to Edmund J. Davis
quoted in J. M. Brewer, Negro Legislators of Texas, (Dallas,
1935), p. 58. Brown was a Negro politician of Hopkins County.

their forces.

Once this was accomplished, the stage was set for the enactment of a drama of violence which was to last until the final, hopeless disintegration of the Radical dream of a Republican South.

THE MILITIA IN ACTION

In the fading days of January, 1889, twelve long years after the dissolution of the last Negro militia unit in the South, there occurred a brutal murder in Conway County, Arkansas. This crime is of particular interest to the reader because the murdered man was John M. Clayton, brother of the Radical governor who originally organized and employed Negro troops in that state. During the investigation which followed, it was rumored that Clayton had been murdered by one Thomas Hooper, of California, in revenge for the killing of his father by Clayton's militia during the hectic days of 1868.¹ Whether or not the story is true is largely beside the point insofar as this monograph is concerned. However, it is certainly indicative of the fact that during periods of militia activity seeds of ill-feeling were sown which were eventually to yield a veritable harvest of violence.

Since much of this ill-feeling resulted directly from deeds involving Negro militia forces, it is necessary to analyze their activities in order to arrive at some acceptable picture of this phase of their history. In attempting such an analysis, one must overcome the problem of extremes and establish a neutral

¹ For full account see Clayton, Aftermath, p. 191.

ground in between the poles of prejudice which were reflected in the uniform denunciations of the opposition and the unparalleled praise of its advocates. Historians of Reconstruction offer little aid here, since their accounts of the militia in action vary almost as widely as contemporary ones. Dunningites, for example, persistently portray the militiamen as arrogant, swaggering bullies bent on a rapacious campaign of violence against and humiliation of the South. Revisionists, on the other hand, when they mention the militia at all, tend to describe their activities as little more than a series of playful pranks committed by a troupe of benevolent comics.² As is so often the case when differing schools of thought assume such remote positions, the truth lies somewhere in between. In this case, Negro militia units were neither as evil an influence as their Conservative opponents claimed, nor were they as saintly as their Radical defenders asserted. It is the purpose of this chapter to show that, while militiamen were not nearly so vicious as they were painted, they did from

² S. E. Morrison and H. S. Commager, The Growth of the American Republic, (New York, 1950), II, p. 42, refer to the Negro militia as a "comic force". F. B. Simkins, The South Old and New, A History 1620-1947, (New York, 1947), p. 195, erroneously states that Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina employed no Negro troops in their respective militia forces. He also erroneously concludes that there was little actual violence connected with the militia experiment.

time to time become involved in activities which contributed to the deterioration of relations which led almost inevitably to outbreaks of violence.

By far the greatest area of activity for the militia was in the realm of politics. Throughout their career, from start to finish, they were a factor in local political strategy. The timing involved in organizing these forces strongly suggests a political motivation. In Tennessee, for example, Parson Brownlow mobilized troops just prior to the election in which he defeated Emerson Etheridge for the governorship.³ In Arkansas, Clayton called up his forces in September, 1868, one month before the general election of that year.⁴ Governor Ames, of Mississippi, put his Negro units on a war footing during the heated campaign of 1875 in that state.⁵ The Kirk forces were enrolled in North Carolina during June and July, 1870, just before the scheduled election of August 4.⁶ In South Carolina, Governor Scott armed twenty thousand Negro

³ Patton, Reconstruction In Tennessee, p. 176. The troops were immediately disbanded after the election.

⁴ Clayton, Aftermath, p. 63.

⁵ Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 6.

⁶ Raleigh (N. C.) Daily Sentinel, June 22, 1870.

troops prior to his re-election in 1870.⁷ The effectiveness of the militia in politics can be fairly measured by the following survey of results of the presidential election of 1868. Grant and Colfax were the Republican nominees; Seymour and Blair represented the Democrats. In the Southern states, Republicans were victorious directly in proportion to their military preparedness. In Tennessee, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina and Arkansas, where militia forces had actually been organized prior to the election, Grant and Colfax carried the day. In Louisiana and Georgia, where no militia forces had been organized by November, 1868, Seymour and Blair won out. Alabama, where militia laws had been enacted although troops had not actually been enrolled, supported Grant.⁸

Militia forces were frequently employed during political campaigns. Nineteen companies were distributed over

⁷ Francis B. Simkins and R. H. Woody, South Carolina During Reconstruction, (Chapel Hill, 1932), p. 451. Cited hereafter as Simkins and Woody, South Carolina. See also James Ford Rhodes, History of the United States From the Compromise of 1850 to Final Restoration of Home Rule At the South in 1877, (New York, 1910), VII, p. 157. Cited hereafter as Rhodes, History of the United States.

⁸ Mississippi, Texas, and Virginia were not yet reorganized and did not, therefore, take part in the election.

Tennessee in one pre-election period.⁹ Brownlow's opponent in the canvass, when speaking at Franklin, had to contend with a noisy company of Negro militia placed in close proximity to the platform.¹⁰ A prominent South Carolinian complained that during the campaign of 1870, almost every public meeting was "attended by the militia of Governor Scott."¹¹ Any anti-Radical politician was considered fair game for heckling.¹² When one governor informed his troops that he did not consider it their duty "to stand quietly by and hear men excite the mob spirit by denouncing the Federal and state governments,"¹³ he was, in effect, authorizing them to interfere in local campaigns since almost any Democratic political speech could have been interpreted as a denouncement of one or the other. Reports from militia detachments show that they were not entirely unaware of their political responsibilities. "We are

⁹ E. Merton Coulter, William G. Brownlow, Fighting Parson of the Southern Highlands, (Chapel Hill, 1937), pp. 338-339. Cited hereafter as Coulter, Parson Brownlow.

¹⁰ Nashville Union and Dispatch, July 11, 1867, cited in Patton, Reconstruction in Tennessee, p. 177.

¹¹ House of Representatives Report no. 22, pt. 3, II, 42 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1185.

¹² Verton M. Queener, "A Decade of East Tennessee Republicanism", The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications, XIV, (1942), 59-88.

¹³ Herbert, Solid South, p. 198.

making every effort to carry the county and can do so..."¹⁴
 said one informant, and another categorically promised: "I
 will carry the election here with the militia.... I am giving
 out ammunition all the time."¹⁵ In Mississippi, pre-election
 preparations were described in the following letter from Yazoo
 City:

Mr. Thompson My Dear
 friend, it is with Pleasure I write you
 this to inform U of some Politocal newse.
 They are preparing for the election very
 fast... and are buying ammunition. The
 colored folks have got 1600 Army guns All
 prepared for busness.¹⁶

During one campaign in South Carolina, the story was circulated
 among freedmen that any one of them caught voting the Democratic
 ticket would be shot by the Negro militia.¹⁷

On election days, troops were very much in evidence

¹⁴ J. Winsmith to R. K. Scott, September 20, 1870.
 Robert K. Scott Papers, South Carolina Historical Commission,
 Columbia, South Carolina. Cited hereafter as Scott Papers.

¹⁵ J. Crews to Constable . . . Hubbard, July 8, 1870,
 quoted in Report of Joint Investigating Committee On Public
 Frauds In South Carolina, 1877-1878, p. 675.

¹⁶ B. F. Eddin to . . . Thompson, July 31, 1875, quoted
 in A. T. Morgan, Yazoo: On the Picket Line of Freedom In the
 South, (Washington, 1884), p. 452. Cited hereafter as Morgan,
 Yazoo.

¹⁷ E. Merton Coulter, The South During Reconstruction,
 (Baton Rouge, 1947), p. 355. Cited hereafter as Coulter, South
 During Reconstruction.

around the polls. This was normally done with the unpublicized acquiescence of party leaders, although in several instances official sanction was explicitly given. The governor of Texas, for example, issued a proclamation prior to the election of 1871 in that state, in which he expressly forbade loitering around the polls, jeering at other voters, drinking liquor, or carrying firearms on election day; he instructed "militia on duty at the polls" to enforce compliance.¹⁸ General Joseph A. Cooper, of the Tennessee forces, issued this significantly worded order to his men:

Commanders of companies and detachments of Tennessee State Guards will on the day of election on consultation with their Union friends distribute the men of their commands to the best possible advantage....¹⁹

As a result, militia forces were almost always to be found around the polls and often times were involved in the frequent election day disorders and disturbances.²⁰

¹⁸ Proclamation quoted in Herbert, Solid South, pp. 375-376.

¹⁹ Circular no. 2, issued July 25, 1867. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

²⁰ Patton, Reconstruction In Tennessee, pp. 177-178, 231. Thompson, Ousting the Carpetbagger From South Carolina, pp. 72-73. The Nation, March 9, 1871.

Another area of political action in which the militia participated was in the numerous state house struggles which took place during the period. The Texas affair offers a typical example. In December, 1873, the faltering Republican cause in Texas was dealt a stunning blow when Judge Richard Coke, Democratic nominee, defeated Edmund J. Davis, the Radical incumbent, for the governorship. Davis, in one last desperate attempt at political survival, refused to surrender the office.²¹ When Coke arrived in Austin on January 12, 1874, to claim the State House, he found his defeated rival firmly entrenched in the building, guarded by a body of Negro militia.²² For several days, great excitement prevailed. While Davis hung on awaiting a reply to his appeal for Grant's support, Coke called up the Travis Rifles, an armed white rifle company; open conflict seemed unavoidable.²³ At this point, Davis received Grant's telegram refusing to send troops.²⁴ Seeing the hopelessness

²¹ Charles W. Ramsdell, Reconstruction In Texas, (New York, 1910), p. 316. Cited hereafter as Ramsdell, Texas.

²² Ibid.

²³ New York Herald, January 17, 1874.

²⁴ Ibid., January 18, 1874.

of his situation, Davis thereupon capitulated and the State House was taken over by Coke and his supporters. In addition to this incident, Negro militia forces were present during the Kellogg-McEnery struggle in Louisiana, the Hampton-Chamberlain controversy in South Carolina, and by some curious set of circumstances they fought on both sides during the Brooks-Baxter War in Arkansas.

Still another political function of the militia was the enforcement of gubernatorial declarations of martial law, sometimes levied against counties of dubious political preference. The largest operation of this type occurred in Arkansas. On November 1, 1868, two days prior to the general election, Governor Clayton informed each state legislator of his intention to declare martial law.²⁵ A proclamation followed immediately, the effect of which was to throw the state into a four month spasm of violence.²⁶ To facilitate execution of the proclamation, the state was divided into four military districts. The District of the South East, comprising seven counties, was placed under command of Colonel S. W. Mallory, and martial law remained in effect in this area until February 6,

²⁵ J. M. Harrell, The Brooks-Baxter War, (St. Louis, 1893), pp. 66-67. Cited hereafter as Harrell, Brooks-Baxter War.

²⁶ Clayton, Aftermath, p. 63.

1869, having been enforced by three companies of Negro troops. The District of the South West, made up of twenty counties, was assigned to R. F. Catterson, an ex-brigadier-general of U. S. Volunteers. In this district, the proclamation remained effective until January 12, 1869. The District of the North West, thirteen counties in all, was commanded by Colonel J. T. Watson, whose forces consisted of four companies of Negro troops officered mostly by white men. The District of the North East, made up of the remaining twenty counties, was under the authority of General D. P. Upham, an ex-agent of the Freedmen's Bureau upon whose life one attempt had previously been made. Four Negro companies were included in the forces under his command.²⁷ Conditions in Arkansas during this period were deplorable:

Many of the best citizens have fled for safety...and many others have been arrested.... Several men have been shot... [and] a large number of horses have been taken.... Scarcely a cabin in the county has escaped plunder. This work has been done by the Arkansas militia...and has been going on for more than two months with almost incredible shamelessness.²⁸

²⁷ For full account of martial law period, see Staples, Arkansas, pp. 295-301, and Clayton, Aftermath, p. 63 et passim.

²⁸ Thomas Black to Andrew Johnson, January 14, 1869. Andrew Johnson Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. Cited hereafter as Johnson Papers.

Other states had similar experiences. In Texas, Limestone and Freestone counties were placed under martial law by Governor Davis for a ten day period in 1871. State troops were called in and the counties were subsequently assessed fifty thousand dollars to defray costs of the operation.²⁹ The Kirk- Holden War in North Carolina, which lasted from June to November, 1870, is another illustration of the close relationship between martial law and political necessity.

While pursuing these political assignments, the Negro militia committed certain acts which, although not of a political nature themselves, did much to aggravate already strained feelings. When the militia was called into service anywhere, the Conservative press filled the air with atrocity stories, many of which have found their way into the literature of the period. It is imperative to point out that many of these stories were either greatly exaggerated or entirely untrue. This is not to say, however, that militia forces were altogether guiltless in this direction. The most serious of these offenses were crimes of violence committed by militiamen, usually resulting in immediate and fierce retaliation.

Several murders were committed in which state troops

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Ramsdell, Texas, p. 310.

were implicated. One such case occurred in South Carolina early in 1871. One Matt Stevens, while driving a wagon loaded with barrels of whiskey, was accosted by a group of approximately forty of Governor Scott's Negro militia, evidently in great thirst. Upon Stevens' refusal to give them any of his liquid cargo, an altercation followed during which Stevens was killed. Reprisals followed immediately. Thirteen Negro militiamen were arrested and jailed. Five of these were forcibly taken from confinement; two were shot to death, three escaped. The remaining eight prisoners, while being moved to Columbia for safekeeping, were captured in transit by a large body of armed and disguised men and shot to death. In order to restore peace, it was necessary to send Federal troops to the scene.³⁰

Less sensational killings involving militiamen took place in other areas. During December, 1868, a "disguised party" attacked the home, in Conway County, Arkansas, of Alvin and Wash Lewis, two Negroes suspected of living with white prostitutes. Alvin escaped, but the less fortunate Wash was killed. This brought to the scene a colored militia company under the command of one Captain Matthews. Several arrests were made, and one suspect was shot and killed while ostensibly

³⁰ Charleston Daily News, January 5, 1871. Reynolds, South Carolina, p. 183. Harper's Weekly, April 29, 1871.

attempting to escape.³¹ Similarly, a detachment of militia under Captain W. O. Rickman was involved in the killing of A. P. Brown in Franklin, Tennessee, during May, 1867. Brown had been arrested by Brownlow's militia for suspected bushwhacking, and also for having threatened "to clean out Rickman's" company.³² En route to a place of confinement, Brown made a break for freedom and was shot and killed by a squad of militiamen under Lieutenant Holt.³³ Militiamen occasionally killed one another in personal disputes, but assaults of this nature were most infrequent.

Several cases of incendiarism were charged against state troops, but the evidence against them was flimsy in the extreme. For instance, a fire broke out in Lewisburg, Arkansas, during the period of martial law in 1868, and the militia forces then stationed there were blamed for it.³⁴ Available evidence suggests that the troops were more concerned with putting out the fire than in starting one. Again,

³¹ New York Herald, December 10, 1868. Clayton, Aftermath, pp. 153-154.

³² S. Hunt to W. G. Brownlow, June 3, 1867. AGO File, State of Tennessee. Hunt was the governor's official representative to investigate and report on this incident.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Clayton, Aftermath, p. 155, citing Arkansas Gazette, December 20, 1868.

in South Carolina, the so-called Ned Tennant troubles in January, 1875, resulted from a fire which broke out on the plantation of M. C. Butler. Tennant, Negro captain of the Edgefield militia, which had already engaged in one skirmish with the local whites, was charged with having started the fire, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. Tennant thereupon mobilized his unit and the resulting inability of local authorities to make the arrest led to the formation of a posse. The forces collided, and an exchange of fire took place. Tennant was arrested, nonetheless, and his troops turned in their guns at the Edgefield Courthouse.³⁵

Cases involving militiamen of rape or attempted rape occurred infrequently. Arkansas, during late 1868 and early 1869, seemed to be plagued with more offenses of this nature than any other Southern state. In December, 1868, four Negro militiamen belonging to a Helena company, raped two white women. They were arrested, tried by court-martial, and condemned to be shot. Sentence was carried out by a firing squad composed entirely of Negroes.³⁶ When General Horace Porter, who

³⁵ Francis B. Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, (Baton Rouge, 1944), pp. 60-61. Cited hereafter as Simkins, Ben Tillman. See also Reynolds, South Carolina, p. 301.

³⁶ Letter of J. T. Watson to P. Clayton, October 3, 1889, cited in Clayton, Aftermath, p. 128. Watson was a colonel in the Arkansas state militia during the Reconstruction period.

had been sent to investigate conditions in Arkansas, reported to his superiors, he cited an instance where a "negro militiaman committed rape on a white woman" and "was immediately arrested by General Catterson...tried, convicted, and promptly executed."³⁷ Governor Clayton ruefully admitted that there were cases in Arkansas where white women had been violated by Negro militiamen.³⁸

Additional cause for bad feeling resulted from militia activities during periods of enforcement of martial law. Arbitrary arrests and lengthy detentions were not unknown,³⁹ and there were instances where prisoners were recipients of both verbal and physical abuse.⁴⁰ Trials by court-martial were held in several states, and in certain extreme cases convicted prisoners were executed.⁴¹ Confiscation of private property by militia forces also occurred, but these losses were

³⁷ Letter of General Horace Porter to U. S. Grant, December 26, 1868, quoted in New York Tribune, January 9, 1869.

³⁸ John Gould Fletcher, Arkansas, (Chapel Hill, 1947), p. 220. Cited hereafter as Fletcher, Arkansas.

³⁹ Senate Report no. 1, 24 Cong., 1 sess., p. 311.

⁴⁰ William H. Battle, The Habeas Corpus Proceedings, (Raleigh, 1870), p. 67.

⁴¹ Stokely Morgan was publicly shot after conviction by a military court in Arkansas in 1868. Morgan was tried by military commission for complicity in the brutal murder of a Negro and a deputy sheriff. Clayton, Aftermath, pp. 117-118.

in many cases made good by subsequent legislative action.⁴² While operating in the field, militia forces also perfected and employed refinements in the art of blackmail. A favorite practice was to extort money from relatives in exchange for the release of a kinsman then in custody of the militia.⁴³ "Protection papers" were another source of revenue for militia-men. One prisoner paid one hundred fifty dollars for immediate release and future immunity, while another, in order to secure the necessary two hundred dollars for his freedom, was given a "parole" to go home and raise the cash.⁴⁴ "Safeguards", such as the following, were issued by commanders in exchange for specified sums:

Headquarters, North East Arkansas
Augusta, December 29, 1868

A safeguard is hereby granted James B. Currie and family and all property of whatsoever kind belonging to him. All officers and soldiers under this command are therefore commanded to respect this safeguard.

D. P. Upham
Brig. Gen'l, Commanding.⁴⁵

⁴² Letter of Captain Rodney, USA, to Colonel Franks, USA, July 30, 1870, quoted in Senate Report no. 1, 42 Cong., 1 sess., p. lxxvii. Harrell, Brooks-Baxter War, p. 82.

⁴³ Letter from M. Gregory to U. Rose, August 14, 1915, quoted in U. M. Rose, "Clayton's Aftermath of the Civil War in Arkansas", Publications of the Arkansas Historical Association, IV (1917), 35.

⁴⁴ Harrell, Brooks-Baxter War, p. 82.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Less important but equally disturbing were the minor depredations committed by the militia. Brawling was not as infrequent as might have been desired. Whenever a militiaman became involved in a street fight, he could generally count on and usually asked for the support of his comrades.⁴⁶ A fight between a white resident and a Negro militiaman almost led to a riot in Yorkville, South Carolina, in February, 1870. Only through the intervention of a brigadier-general of state militia, who rushed via train to the scene, was bloodshed averted.⁴⁷ The Laurens, South Carolina, riot of October 20, 1870, in which several Negroes were killed, was precipitated by a fist fight.⁴⁸ Additional causes for complaint against the militia resulted from their use of threatening gestures and obscene language.⁴⁹ Then, too, thefts and rumors of thefts, were quite commonplace.

⁴⁶ Testimony of James Chesnut. House of Representatives Report no. 22, pt. 3, I, 42 Cong., 2 sess., p. 450.

⁴⁷ Testimony of Thomas Graham. Ibid., p. 711.

⁴⁸ Anderson (S. C.) Intelligencer, October 27, 1870. Reynolds, South Carolina, p. 137. Leland, Voice From Carolina, p. 52.

⁴⁹ . . . Gamble to J. Cooper, July 14, 1867. AGO File, State of Tennessee. Cooper was in command of the Tennessee State Guard.

Militiamen were accused of taking "anything in sight" and one Conservative spokesman complained: "If we have anything... they want, they take it...curse us for d....d rebels, and say they will pay us back."⁵⁰ While encamped on the Fair Grounds of Brownsville, the free-handed actions of the Tennessee State Guards brought forth the following comment:

'Brownlow's melish' have arrived... and their first act was to capture some fifty dollars worth of lumber at the depot on their arrival. Afterwards they directed their attention to robbing of hen-roosts.⁵¹

Occasional acts which might best be described as social annoyances also caused resentment. For example, the wedding of a prominent local couple in Johnson County, Arkansas, was broken up by a detachment of Negro militia in a still unexplained military diversion. In the subsequent firing, four of the Negroes were wounded.⁵² When "Kirk's Lambs", as the North Carolina troops were derisively nicknamed, were stationed at Camp Holden, near Yanceyville, they very nearly

⁵⁰ Daily Arkansas Gazette, December 13, 1868.

⁵¹ Nashville Union and Dispatch, February 19, 1867.
Also Nashville Republican Banner, March 6, 1867.

⁵² Harrell, Brooks-Baxter War, pp. 84-85.

proved a riot by undressing and bathing within full view of the inhabitants of the town.⁵³ Captain Clingan of the Tennessee State Guard, aroused the ire of the countryside by having a man ridden out of town on a rail for having tried to persuade his Negro soldiers to desert.⁵⁴ Governor Holden was roundly denounced by North Carolinians for threatening to use his troops to prevent the arrest of one of his subordinates by the civil authority.⁵⁵

Other annoyances of considerable nuisance value were directly connected with militia drills. According to one report,

They were constantly parading the streets with these guns on their shoulders. You would pass along the road at any time of day and meet these negroes with guns; could hear them firing constantly during the day time and night time.⁵⁶

⁵³ Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 516.

⁵⁴ Nashville Union and Dispatch, June 1, 1867.

⁵⁵ Holden, on hearing of the arrest of his auditor, exclaimed: "Supreme Court or no Supreme Court, Chief Justice or no Chief Justice, d....d if my officials shall go to jail. If they do, it shall be over the dead bodies of my militia." Hamilton, North Carolina, pp. 382-383.

⁵⁶ Testimony of Robert W. Shand. House of Representatives Report no. 22, pt. 3, II, 42 Cong., 2 sess., p. 969.

Shots were fired indiscriminately by militiamen going to and returning from musters; using guns furnished them by the state, they frequently visited their spite on their white neighbor's property. Livestock were frequently ambushed, and the white man's dog, that creature which so often outdistanced its master in noisily discriminating against the black man, became a favorite target.⁵⁷ Numerous crises were brought about as a result of militia companies marching "company front", thus forcing whites off the streets. Such a trivial thing was the immediate cause of the bloody riot at Hamburg, South Carolina. Then, too, militia captains seemed to have felt an irresistible compulsion to deliver incendiary speeches to their troops. Joe Crews, militia leader in Laurens, South Carolina, was quoted as telling his men that they should never unite with the whites in any movement, and that if they wanted provisions and could not afford them, to go into the fields and take what they wanted; and if whites "did not settle with them the way they thought was right," then they should "burn them out of house and home," adding that "matches were cheap."⁵⁸ Such speeches, although received with great enthusiasm by the

⁵⁷ Testimony of James Chesnut. Ibid., p. 467.

⁵⁸ Columbia (S. C.) Daily Phoenix, September 7, 1870.

assembled troops, served only to enrage the already suspicious whites.

Perhaps the greatest nuisance of all was the incessant noise associated with the militia drills. A favorite trick of men returning from muster was to scrape a bayonet rapidly along a picket fence, arousing all light sleepers within a respectable radius.⁵⁹ Every drill squad somehow managed to obtain a drum, and the evening calm was shattered by the steady cadence of their beat. Many fights resulted from attempts by whites to silence these nocturnal poundings.⁶⁰ Drummer boys were often singled out for individual attention at the none too tender hands of anti-militia groups.⁶¹ Certain more favored militia units had, in addition to their drummers, full-scale military bands whose musicians eagerly contributed to the din. That these bands played a role involving more than music is strongly suggested by the following request from a bandleader to the

⁵⁹ James Brewster, Sketches of Southern Mystery, Treason, and Murder, (n.p., n.d.) p. 165. Cited hereafter as Brewster, Sketches.

⁶⁰ A good example is the riot at New Hope Church, Mississippi in September, 1875. Harper's Weekly, September 11, 1875.

⁶¹ Testimony of Wesley Alexander. Report of Evidence Taken Before the Military Committee, 35th General Assembly, State of Tennessee, 1868, p. 26.

Radical governor of his state: "I would like to borrow about 24 guns for the use of our brass band...."⁶²

Before moving on to the consideration of specific case histories of militia pursuits, it should be re-emphasized that the purpose of this chapter was not to compile a catalog of horrors by which to condemn the militia, but to furnish sufficient factual data in order to arrive at something like a true picture of militia activity. As the reader shall see, these activities were not, in themselves, the real reason for the eventual destruction of the militia, but they must be recognized as having kept alive the coals of hatred which were to make destruction inevitable.

From the foregoing survey, certain generalizations can be advanced. For one thing, although originally organized as a protective device, militia forces were inevitably converted into aggressive political instruments. For another, this participation in politics, plus the resulting depredations, disturbances, and minor social annoyances were the immediate causes for the expressed hostility of the Conservatives. Last of all, crimes of violence committed by militiamen were so infrequent that they can be dismissed as the

⁶² H. Smith to A. Ames, August 30, 1875, quoted in Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 25.

inevitable concomitant of protracted military activity. When viewed from the perspective of overall militia operations in the South during Reconstruction, one's reaction is not so much of horror at an excessive number of overt acts committed, but one of surprise that there were no more.

MINSTRELS AND BRINDLE-TAILS

Among the grim ironies of Reconstruction, none was more prophetic than the fact that Arkansas, after the inauguration of Governor Clayton in July, 1868, was welcomed back to the sisterhood of states with a military salute of fifteen guns. This was a most fitting celebration, since that turbulent state would continue to hear sporadic firing for six years following. A not inconsiderable amount of this shooting was directly connected with the Negro militia, for in no other Southern state were these forces used as often or as actively as in Arkansas.

The first wave of militia activity resulted from the gubernatorial declaration of martial law lasting from November, 1868, to February, 1869.¹ This purgative failed to cure any fundamental political sickness in that most afflicted state and when viewed in retrospect, the social unrest, mobilisation of Negro troops, and resulting violence were mere harbingers of things to come. For once again, in the spring of 1874, political difficulties were to throw that unfortunate

¹ For details, see Chapter III.

state into a full-fledged civil war, and Negro farmers were once more to leave their fields to enroll in the military forces of the state. Only, this time, the circumstances would be considerably different. Both parties in the struggle would be Arkansas Republicans, and as is so often the case when good friends fall out, the fight would be a fierce one.

The background for the so-called Brooks-Baxter War of April, 1874, is hopelessly entwined in the elusive political history of the preceding years. Powell Clayton, who had come to Arkansas with the Union Army and had decided to remain, was elected governor in 1868 and held that office until March, 1871, when he entered the United States Senate. During his most active administration, the Republican Party in Arkansas was faced with the serious problem of internal division. Clayton, while essentially a courageous man, was wanting in the tact and foresight which are so necessary in order to weld disparate segments into a homogeneous party.² For two years, he successfully prevented a schism, but seeds of discord were firmly planted in the political soil of Arkansas; visible signs of dissension had appeared as early as 1870. When Clayton resigned the governorship in order to take a Senate seat, his

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Staples, Arkansas, pp. 276-278

continued control of the state was practically assured through execution of a maneuver which brought O. A. Hadley, long-time Clayton satellite, into the executive mansion. Hadley was considerably less adept than his predecessor in political diplomacy, and during his brief administration, the party split wide open. This splintering was due to two considerations. The first of these was the fact that bitter enmities on the local scene made it impossible for contending forces to operate within the framework of one party. A second consideration was that Arkansas was only a microcosm of the national political scene, where the Republican Party was being ripped by the Liberal Republican revolt. The bolters in Arkansas rallied to the standard of Joseph Brooks, "black-bearded, heavy set, sullen looking former exhorter and evangelist from Iowa," who had first come to Arkansas as chaplain to a Negro regiment of United States troops.³ The Regular Republicans remained under the control of Clayton.

The election of 1872 brought the intra-party battle out into the open with each group nominating a complete ticket.

³ Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 206. Powell Clayton, in reference to Brooks, once said: "with the exception of myself, he perhaps was...the most unpopular man in the whole state." Clayton, Aftermath, p. 347.

The liberal faction, with Brooks as their candidate, began an all-out war on the Clayton group. The Regular Republicans, with Clayton still in the driver's seat, chose Elisha Baxter, a quiet, hard working, ex-circuit judge as their man. Baxter's two most prominent qualifications seemed to have been his indictment for treason by the Confederacy and his freedom from any participation in the shady financial deals of the Clayton era. The Baxter ticket endorsed the Grant administration while the Brooks group pledged themselves to support Horace Greeley and Gratz Brown.⁴ The Democrats, in order to play their advantage to the hilt, made no nominations themselves, but informally agreed to support Brooks, largely because he was anti-Clayton.

A very lively campaign ensued, in which the two wings of the shattered Republican Party received nicknames destined to become part of the political vocabulary of Arkansas. The Clayton supporters, or Regulars, were dubbed "minstrels", and although the actual reason is vague, one authority suggests that it was derived from the fact that they sang "more sweetly to Clayton's ears."⁵ The Brooks followers, on the other hand, became known as "Brindle-Tails", as a result of a Brooks

⁴ American Annual Cyclopaedia, 1874, (New York, 1875), p. 37.

⁵ Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 230.

supporter's comparison of his leader to a brindle-tail bull which "bellowed so loud that it scared all the other cattle half to death."⁶ Republican versus Republican produced a campaign as lively and interesting as any two party contest before or since. Negro Republicans in one group used many of the generally recognized Conservative cliches to describe the shortcomings of Negroes on the other side. Prominent carpetbaggers outstripped one another in denouncing carpet-baggery,⁷ and Brooks set the tone of the campaign by declaring that, if elected, he would fill the county jail "so full of Clayton's followers that their arms and legs would stick out of the windows."⁸

The election of November 5 was accompanied by many irregularities. The state militia, now legally under control of Hadley, but actually still at the disposal of Clayton, were placed around the polls. When the results were officially

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ One group of Negro soldiers voiced the sentiment that "no damned carpet-bagger would be allowed to stay in the country." Their leader, John J. Williams, was the most prominent local member of the species. Testimony of John Ellis. House of Representatives Report no. 2, 43 Cong., 2 sess., p. 345.

⁸ Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 231.

announced in the legislature, Baxter was declared the victor and duly installed.⁹ Brooks attempted to obtain an injunction in the United States courts to prevent Baxter's accession, but the case was thrown out.¹⁰ A subsequent appeal to the legislature was also rejected. Finally, in desperation, Brooks filed suit against Baxter in the Pulaski County Court, but it was by this time generally assumed that nothing would come of the action. Subsequent events were to prove this one of the great miscalculations of the decade.

Fifteen months later, on Wednesday, April 15, 1874, the Pulaski court rendered a surprise decision, apparently based more on politics than on law, favoring Brooks.¹¹ Armed with a court order and surrounded by loyal supporters, among whom was General Catterson of martial-law fame, now dressed in full militia uniform and carrying a rifle, Brooks invaded the State House and ordered Baxter out.¹² Upon his refusal to comply,

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ American Annual Cyclopaedia, 1874, p. 38.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Van Buren (Arkansas) Free Press, April 21, 1874. Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 234. American Annual Cyclopaedia, 1874, p. 38.

Baxter was forcibly ejected from the office by two of Catterson's men. As he was led from the room, he turned to his rivals and slowly, deliberately, and prophetically uttered what might easily be called the understatement of the era: "You will hear from me again soon."¹³

The next five days were marked by feverish activity as both sides took steps to solidify their positions. Brooks settled down in the State House with approximately three hundred armed men, mostly Negroes, on guard.¹⁴ The Baxter forces set up headquarters in the Anthony House, favorite political gathering place in Little Rock, within easy gunshot of the State House.¹⁵ Arkansas now had two governors, both of whom were frantically sending claims of legitimacy to President Grant. As soon as Brooks had become acclimated to his new surroundings, he sent a telegram to Grant claiming to be the legal governor of Arkansas, and requested that the state arms in storage at the Federal arsenal be delivered to him.¹⁶ Baxter simultaneously

¹³ Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 235.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁵ American Annual Cyclopaedia, 1874, p. 38.

¹⁶ Joseph Brooks to Ulysses S. Grant, April 15, 1874, quoted in ibid, p. 39.

reported the details of his ouster to the president, and although he expressed hope that the dispute would be settled "without bloodshed", he stated his firm intention "to take measures immediately to resume possession of the state property" and to maintain his authority as rightful governor.¹⁷ The president, acting through his Attorney General, George H. Williams, answered both claimants on the following day. Perhaps previous reactions to his Southern policy had made him cautious, for without recognizing the authority of either, he refused to send troops to support Baxter¹⁸ or to allow Brooks to secure guns from the arsenal.¹⁹

Baxter thereupon declared martial law in Pulaski County in which the capitol, Little Rock, was situated.²⁰ He reorganized the militia, placing them under command of General Robert C. Newton, former Confederate officer.²¹

¹⁷ Elisha Baxter to Ulysses S. Grant, April 15, 1874, quoted in ibid.

¹⁸ Ulysses S. Grant to Elisha Baxter, April 16, 1874, quoted in ibid.

¹⁹ Ulysses S. Grant to Joseph Brooks, April 16, 1874, quoted in ibid.

²⁰ Van Buren (Arkansas) Free Press, April 21, 1867.

²¹ Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 239.

At the same, Brooks issued an order revoking all of Baxter's militia appointments, announced his own selections, and placed supreme command in the hands of James F. Fagan, also an ex-Confederate.²² All in all, the scene was ludicrously reminiscent of that unseemly period in medieval church history when rival popes hurled anathema and excommunication upon one another. And while these scenes were being enacted, Captain T. E. Rose, in command of the Federal troops stationed in Little Rock, acting on orders from Washington, issued warnings to both sides to avoid collision.²³

Meanwhile, both sides continued preparations for war. Arms were zealously sought for their respective supporters. Attempts to borrow guns from the Federal arsenal met with flat refusal from Captain Rose. Brooks forces broke into the state arsenal and took a hundred stand of arms and two cannon which were strategically placed around the State House.²⁴ A personal friend of Brooks' named McDiarmid was sent to St. Louis to procure arms on the basis of a fifty thousand dollar appropriation which Brooks claimed to have. His efforts were amply

²² Harrell, Brooks-Baxter War, p. 207.

²³ American Annual Cyclopaedia, 1874, p. 41.

²⁴ Harrell, Brooks-Baxter War, p. 214.

rewarded; two thousand Springfield rifles, thirteen thousand rounds of ammunition, and several cases of revolvers were shipped into Little Rock for Brooks partisans.²⁵ The occupants of the State House were also supplied with several carloads of provisions, in preparation for an extended siege.²⁶ Baxter adherents had not been idle either. The stocks of three local gun merchants were seized and issued to recruits as they arrived.²⁷ The deposed governor sent William E. Woodruff as his personal envoy to Texas on a gun-raising expedition,²⁸ while on the local scene, some of the more fervent Baxterites unearthed a sixty-four pound siege gun which had lain encrusted in river bank mud for the nine long years since the end of the war. Unofficially christened "Lady Baxter", it was unspiked and refurbished, then hauled to the Anthony House lawn where, aimed forbiddingly in the general direction of the enemy, it enjoyed one last moment of glory before being honorably retired, with a suitably inscribed plaque attached, to a place of distinction on the State House grounds to receive homage from future

²⁵ Benjamin S. Johnson, "The Brooks-Baxter War", Publications of the Arkansas Historical Commission, II (1908), 145-146.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 241.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 252.

generations of sightseers.²⁹

Reinforcements, primarily for Baxter, poured into Little Rock from all directions, coming by horseback, wagon, train and boat. Upon arrival, they were sworn into the state guard, armed, and assigned a billet. The most colorful leader to emerge on either side was H. King White, "tall, rawboned, red-headed and freckled" swashbuckler, who although only twenty-eight years of age, was a veteran of Morgan's raiders.³⁰ At the outset of the trouble, he had telegraphed Baxter promising to "furnish 1,000 men, if necessary, to reinstate you."³¹ He was as good as his word. On Saturday, April 18, the steamer Mary Boyd arrived in Little Rock bearing White and his army of three hundred "strawhatted, coatless, and largely unarmed mob of Negro field hands."³² Greeted by an imposing array of local dignitaries in a ceremony complete with brass band and martial tunes, the Negroes paraded from the landing to the Anthony House headquarters singing what was to become known as the "Baxter

²⁹ "Lady Baxter" can still be seen today by visitors to the Old Capitol in Little Rock.

³⁰ Harrell, Brooks-Baxter War, p. 230.

³¹ King White to Elisha Baxter, April 16, 1874. Quoted in ibid., p. 216.

³² Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 241.

Song³³:

Do you see that boat come around the bend?
Goodbye, my lover, goodbye;
It's loaded down with Baxter men.
Goodbye, my lover, goodbye!³³

Another boatload of Baxter troops arrived aboard the Kitty Hegler. The owner, J. D. Hegler, of Cincinnati, hoping to make a quick profit as a troop carrier, took on a load of Negro soldiers at Pine Bluff. Hegler's hopes were unfortunately blighted by his passengers, who, before reaching Little Rock, had succeeded in looting his cargo "to the amount of a thousand dollars" in liquors, canned fruits and candies.³⁴

Behind all these preparations for war, strange things were happening in the political field. In a dazzling display of political footwork, earlier alignments were exactly reversed. A majority of Regular Republicans, following the lead of the unpredictable Clayton, swung over to the support of Brooks.³⁵ This came about as a result of Clayton's discovery that Baxter, as governor, intended to make his own decisions.³⁶ After a

³³ Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 241.

³⁴ Testimony of J. D. Hegler. House of Representatives Report no. 2, 43 Cong., 2 sess., p. 370.

³⁵ Clayton, Aftermath, p. 348.

³⁶ Baxter later said: "I had to choose between being their tool or their enemy." Printed statement of Elisha Baxter, April 28, 1874, in possession of the writer.



"A PLAGUE O' BOTH YOUR HOUSES!"

II. Cartoonist's View of the Brooks-Baxter War

quarrel over calling up the militia, during which Baxter flatly refused to comply with Clayton's demands, the latter joined forces with Brooks, creating an alliance that caused one politician to recall, with some humor, the campaign of 1872 in which "Mr. Brooks was painted blacker than midnight darkness by the very men who today are trying to make him governor of Arkansas."³⁷ Original Brooksites, more out of anti-Clayton feeling than anything else, but also prompted by the knowledge that Baxter, during his short term had proved a capable and honest administrator, moved into the ever-widening circle around the Anthony House. This amazing political about-face was accompanied by considerable name calling and bad feeling; and the mounting number of reinforcements arriving daily turned Little Rock into an armed camp.³⁸

As so frequently occurs when belligerents are fully armed, they stumbled accidentally into a fight. Late in the afternoon of Tuesday, April 21, King White held a dress parade to show off his army which had by then grown to nearly two

37

Speech of W. W. Wilshire delivered in Arkansas House of Representatives, May 28, 1874. Copy in possession of writer.

38

New York Herald, April 19, 1874. The Independent, May 7, 1874.

thousand men. Using the sought after military band, he marched his troops through the streets of Little Rock for almost an hour before drawing them up in formation before the Anthony House. The "colored braves" clamored for Baxter, who presently appeared on the hotel balcony to address them.³⁹ He recounted the events which had led up to the present situation and reiterated his intention of retaking the office, but refused to give any definite orders:

Officers and commanders cannot give, in advance, to the troops or to the country, a detailed account of their proposed operations. They are necessarily military secrets; they are matters which necessarily must be kept quiet; and you will not expect of me on an occasion as public as this to detail my plan of operation.⁴⁰

At this juncture, the impetuous White interrupted and asked pointedly whether Baxter planned to have them take the State House or not.⁴¹ Baxter replied by cautioning the men to restrain themselves and had begun to leave the balcony when King White, all the while protesting that he had not, of course, come to make a speech, made a very fiery one indeed:

³⁹ Daily Arkansas Gazette, April 22, 1874.

⁴⁰ Harrell, Brooks-Baxter War, p. 226.

⁴¹ Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 247.

I have brought with me here a number of colored men. It has been said, sir, that these colored men will prove treacherous to you. I now ask these colored men, in your presence, and in the presence of this assemblage, whether we shall stand firm to Elisha Baxter?⁴²

Then, warming to his task, he continued:

Furnish us simply with the means -- give us the authority -- pronounce the order, and I will guarantee to you, sir, that in twenty five minutes from the time the order is written, Joseph Brooks will either be in hell or the archives....⁴³

Baxter protestingly thanked White, expressed his own great confidence in the black soldiers, and withdrew with the admonition to "be patient, conduct yourselves orderly, and have no fear for the consequences."⁴⁴

The Negro band had just struck up a lively tune when an incident occurred which precipitated a general outbreak. White gave an order for his troops to march. Captain Rose, who had been watching the scene from horseback nearby, fearing that White planned to move against the Brooks forces, suddenly spurred his horse toward White accidentally knocking down two

⁴² Harrell, Brooks-Baxter War, p. 226.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

of the musicians. When Rose reached White, angry words were exchanged. White warned Rose that he would not be permitted to ride over the colored soldiers, even if he was an officer of the United States.⁴⁵ Rose hotly ordered White to keep his place and to restrain his men, to which White answered: "You are an officer and should be a gentleman. Whether you are or not, I am; I'll not permit you to ride over my men nor over me, sir."⁴⁶ What happened next is a matter of dispute. One account says Rose drew his pistol and fired at White.⁴⁷ Another claims that one of the Negroes fired at Rose.⁴⁸ All that is certain is that a shot rang out, which was the signal for a wild outbreak of indiscriminate firing which lasted for at least five minutes.

When the shooting died down on this first battle of the Brooks-Baxter War, the casualty list was hardly a tribute to the marksmanship of either side. An elderly citizen of Little Rock, D. Y. Shall, who had been enjoying the scene from a window in the Anthony House, was shot through the head and died within the hour.⁴⁹ One of Brooks' "colonels" was shot

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 227.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 228.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 248.

through both legs, and several soldiers on both sides were wounded.⁵⁰ Other casualties included a chambermaid who unwisely jumped from an upstairs window of the Anthony House in her excitement, and one Reverend Gillem, a colored divine, who was badly cut as a result of a spectacular leap through the glass door of a merchantile establishment to make way for the combatants.⁵¹ By nightfall, quiet had been restored.

Three immediate repercussions were felt from this initial engagement. The first was the issuance of a general order closing "all establishments selling intoxicants" in Little Rock until further notice.⁵² The second was a proclamation by Baxter calling the legislature into extraordinary session to convene May 11.⁵³ The third was a telegram from President Grant to Baxter expressing the unlikely hope "that the military forces will now be disbanded."⁵⁴ Needless to

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Harrell, Brooks-Baxter War, pp. 228-229.

⁵² General Order 16, April 22, 1875. Adjutant-General's Office File, State of Arkansas, Arkansas Historical Commission, Little Rock. Cited hereafter as AGO File, State of Arkansas.

⁵³ American Annual Cyclopaedia, 1874, p. 43.

⁵⁴ Ulysses S. Grant to Elisha Baxter, April 22, 1874. Cited in Harrell, Brooks-Baxter War, p. 231.

say, the forces were not disbanded, and Little Rock remained in an unsettled and agitated condition. Protests began to be voiced by merchants, in particular, and by taxpayers, in general.⁵⁵ One such report reached the desk of President Grant:

The country is now full of marauding parties recruiting soldiers, and unless soon checked and sent home will degenerate into a band of robbers. To sustain their lawless, idle vagabondism, they offer their dupes \$22 a month and board to enlist on their side. Where, sir, is the money to come from to pay and support these betrayed poor negroes who leave their crops and families....⁵⁶

The war languished in Little Rock after this first explosion, largely because King White and his troops had been evacuated to Pine Bluff. But if quiet reigned in the capital city, such was not the case in the provinces. The pugnacious White, still anxious for a fight, soon found an excuse for one. A Brooks supporter named Murphy recruited a company of some two hundred Negroes at New Gascony, approximately fifteen miles from Pine Bluff. White, chafing under a forced inactivity, decided to make a move. This he did, and with considerable vigor. On the morning of April 30, he loaded two hundred of

⁵⁵ B. S. Johnson, "The Brooks-Baxter War", pp. 155-156.

⁵⁶ C. Taylor to U. S. Grant, April 27, 1874. Quoted in Senate Executive Document no. 51, 43 Cong., 1 sess., p. 5.

his colored militiamen aboard the steamer Hallie and sailed for New Gascony.⁵⁷ Murphy's men were gathered at Cornerstone Church preparing for a parade.⁵⁸ White arrived without being discovered, landed his forces and mounted them on horses pressed into service for the occasion before charging the surprised Murphy forces.⁵⁹ The latter retreated behind a nearby fence and opened fire, but the charge had done its work. The Murphy troops were routed and that unfortunate man was shot in the head, taken prisoner, and lodged in the jail at Pine Bluff.⁶⁰ Nine of Murphy's troopers were killed and twenty-odd wounded, while White suffered only four casualties in this most furious single encounter of the war.⁶¹

The last significant engagement took place on May 7, and was, oddly enough, a sort of amphibious operation. The Baxter forces learned that a shipment of arms for the enemy

⁵⁷ Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 251.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 238.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 251.

⁶¹ Harper's Weekly, May 16, 1874. Harrell, Brooks-Baxter War, p. 238.

was on its way down river by flatboat. General Newton detailed forty men to sail aboard the ubiquitous Hallie to intercept the guns. Their clandestine departure at three in the morning did not, however, escape the watchful eyes of the Brooksites. General Fagan, upon receipt of this intelligence, sent a body of his men by train ahead of the Hallie, and had them prepare an ambush near Palarm Creek.⁶² One officer walked back upriver in an attempt to persuade the Hallie to turn back. His shouts were ignored, however, and as the river boat came abreast of the camouflaged Brooksites, a volley was fired. Several men aboard the Hallie were killed and every man but one was wounded.⁶³ The good ship was damaged in the exchange and drifted helplessly to the opposite side of the river, where those who were able escaped.⁶⁴ The ill-starred Hallie was taken back to Little Rock a prize of the Brooks forces, to be scuttled shortly thereafter under cover of darkness by persons unknown.⁶⁵ As a result of this engagement, those Baxter men who had participated, or what was left of them, were consigned to permanent

⁶² Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 255.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 256.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 257.

glory by being officially designated the "Hallie Rifles".⁶⁶

Meanwhile, official pressure from Washington was being increased. On May 9, Attorney General Williams informed both claimants that settlement of the question by the gathering legislators would be considered binding. He beseeched both men to disband their forces.⁶⁷ Baxter's refusal caused the President to send a personal request to each side favoring disbandment, but this time Brooks refused.⁶⁸ With matters practically at a standstill, the extraordinary session of the legislature convened and promptly sent a resolution to President Grant which led to the issuance on May 15, of a presidential proclamation recognizing Baxter as the legal governor of Arkansas and ordering the Brooks forces "to disperse and return peaceably to their respective abodes within ten days...."⁶⁹ Generals Newton and Fagan conferred and agreed

⁶⁶ Ibid. In the museum of the Arkansas Historical Commission in Little Rock, there hangs a faded portrait of the Hallie affair.

⁶⁷ Dispatch from Attorney General G. H. Williams to both "governors", May 9, 1874. Quoted in American Annual Cyclopaedia, 1874, p. 44.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 45.

⁶⁹ Proclamation dated May 15, 1874. Quoted in Harrell, Brooks-Baxter War, p. 256.

to terms of disbandment which provided for the turning in of state arms, immunity from assault to the losers, and state subsidized transportation back to their homes.⁷⁰

The war was over. But before returning to the mundane pursuits of everyday life, King White held one last grand review of the Baxter forces, and his faithful Negro troops left Little Rock as they had entered it, singing. When the last chorus of "We'll Hang Joe Brooks to a Sour Apple Tree" had died down,⁷¹ and the last militiaman had returned to his fields, the results of the war seemed pitiful indeed. Beyond doubt, the state Republican Party had suffered a blow from which it was never to recover, for within a few short months the Democrats were to return to power under the leadership of A. H. Garland. Only Joe Brooks really salvaged anything at all; President Grant appointed him postmaster of Little Rock.⁷² Most ironic of all, the Negroes had once again been called to arms, this time to fight to the death,

⁷⁰ General Order 10, May 16, 1874. AGO File, State of Arkansas.

⁷¹ Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 263.

⁷² The Nation, April 1, 1875.

if necessary, in behalf of two white claimants for the governorship and the result had been the elimination of the Negro as a political factor in Arkansas.

ANOTHER BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS

The bloodiest single encounter of the entire Reconstruction period in which Negro militia forces were engaged was fought in New Orleans on September 14, 1874. Late in the afternoon of that day, two armed groups clashed in a full-scale pitched battle complete with infantry, artillery, and deployment of troops. The White Leaguers fought against a combined force of Negro militia and metropolitan police. After the short but fierce struggle had ended, over a hundred men bled from wounds while partisans collected for burial the twenty-odd corpses which lay in the streets.

Had nothing else occurred during the period, this incident alone would make it worthwhile to trace the story of the Negro militia in Louisiana. However, as one painfully unravels this tale from the confusing maze of local politics, other factors emerge which further justify individual consideration. For nowhere else were Federal troops so freely employed to do or undo the work of the militia. Nowhere else were these militia forces so exclusively the governor's private

army, consistently used in either the furtherance of his own political career or in opposition to someone else's. And nowhere else could one witness the strange spectacle of one of the half-dozen most famous of all Confederate generals, in one last exercise of military command, riding at the head of a column of Negro militiamen.

The roots of the militia movement in Louisiana go back to the period just after the close of the war. In February, 1866, a rising young politician named Henry Clay Warmoth, an ex-Union army officer turned New Orleans lawyer,¹ wrote this account describing the attitude of many Louisiana residents:

They openly declare that when the military is removed they will make it too hot here for Union men; and only a few days ago I heard a young man on the streets say that 'hereafter a northern man might just as well be in hell as try to live here.'²

¹ Warmoth, born in Illinois in 1842, became a lieutenant colonel in the 32nd Missouri Volunteers in 1862. He served on J. A. McClelland's staff during the Vicksburg campaign, was dishonorably discharged, and later reinstated by presidential order. After the war, Warmoth opened a law office in New Orleans, became a prominent political figure for a decade, then lived quietly on in Louisiana until his death in 1931. Allen Johnson (ed.), Dictionary of American Biography, (New York, 1928), XIX, pp. 457-458. Cited hereafter as DAB.

² Henry C. Warmoth, Letter of H. C. Warmoth, Claimant of a Seat in the House of Representatives As a Delegate From the Territory of Louisiana, (Washington, 1866), p. 33.

When this same Warmoth was inaugurated as governor two years later, local sentiment had apparently not abated. The law passed by Congress in March, 1867, prohibiting the organization of militia forces in the Southern states, was strictly observed by Warmoth even though he complained that "it strips me of all power."³ The resulting weakness of his administration was fully appreciated by his opponents, for violence continued apace. In September, 1868, the Opelousas riot erupted, and from then until the general election on November 4, the state passed through a veritable reign of terror. During all these disorders, Warmoth remained practically helpless; time and again he was forced to appeal for aid to the Federal commander stationed in New Orleans.⁴

Upon repeal of the militia prohibition in 1869,⁵ Warmoth took immediate steps to remedy his deplorable lack

³ H. C. Warmoth, War, Politics and Reconstruction: Stormy Days in Louisiana, (New York, 1930), p. 76. Cited hereafter as Warmoth, War, Politics, and Reconstruction.

⁴ On October 25, 1868, for example, Warmoth issued the following appeal to General Lovell Rousseau: "I am compelled to appeal to you to take charge of the peace in these parishes and to use your forces to that end." Ibid.

⁵ Congressional Globe, 49 Cong., 3 sess., p. 325.

of armed force. As a result of his insistent urging, the legislature passed a militia bill in early April, 1870, authorizing the organization of a militia and appropriating one hundred thousand dollars to carry the law into effect.⁶ The organization and subsequent use of this militia must be considered as part of the larger story of internal political struggle in Louisiana, and in order to re-create the tale in its entirety, a survey of the local political scene becomes imperative.

As in several other Southern states, the Radical Party which emerged triumphant as a result of the Reconstruction Acts enjoyed a relatively short period of unity and was then rent by internal strife. The split among Louisiana Republicans began as early as 1870 when the anti-Warmoth group opposed the governor in his successful maneuver to remove the restriction making him ineligible for re-election.⁷ Open rupture between the two wings of the party took place during the state convention of August, 1871. In the coalitions which resulted, Governor Warmoth was supported by P. B. S. Pinchback, a Negro politician who exercised considerable

⁶ Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 66.

⁷ Ibid., p. 73.

influence over members of his race, while the opposition formed what became known in local circles as the "Custom-House" faction.⁸ The latter was built around the combined forces of United States Marshal S. B. Packard, George W. Carter, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and J. F. Casey, brother-in-law of the President and collector of customs for the port of New Orleans.⁹ Actually, two conventions were held simultaneously; the Packard faction held closed sessions in the Custom House while the Warmoth group met in Turner's Hall.¹⁰

The first test of strength between the two forces took place in November, 1871. On the 22nd of that month, Lieutenant Governor Oscar Dunn died, and both factions attempted to put one of their men in the office.¹¹ Warmoth won out by arranging for the election of Pinchback as president of the Senate, automatically placing him next in line for the governorship. Whether or not the charges of bribery levied against Warmoth are true, there can be no doubt that

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 102.

¹¹ Alcee Fortier, A History of Louisiana (New York, 1904), IV, p. 117. Cited hereafter as Fortier, Louisiana.

his victory only widened the party breach.¹²

When the legislature reconvened in January, 1872, existing bad feelings led to the outbreak of the Carter-Warmoth feud during which the Louisiana militia were organized and used for the first time. The feud was essentially a struggle to control the legislature. On January 4, Speaker Carter was expelled from his position amidst great confusion and excitement, and a Warmoth man installed in his place.¹³ The ousted Carter gathered his followers and moved into a room over the Gem Saloon on Royal Street and set up another legislative body.¹⁴

The existence of this rival body spurred Warmoth into action, and he decided to call up the militia. In looking around earlier for a satisfactory leader, his eyes had fallen upon none other than James A. Longstreet, Lee's former corps commander who had in 1866 settled down in New Orleans to the routine life of a cotton broker.¹⁵ Longstreet's

¹² Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 107.

¹³ Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁴ Fortier, Louisiana, p. 118.

¹⁵ H. J. Eckenrode and B. Conrad, James Longstreet: Lee's War Horse, (Chapel Hill, 1936), pp. 372-375. Cited hereafter as Eckenrode and Conrad, Longstreet.

willingness to be reconstructed cost him both social and business standing in New Orleans, but President Grant, in whose wedding Longstreet had been best man, appointed him surveyor of customs in New Orleans in March, 1869.¹⁶ Warmoth followed suit by appointing him Adjutant General of the state militia on May 13, 1870, with a salary of three thousand dollars per annum.¹⁷ When the trouble broke out in 1872, Longstreet was placed in a position of active command upon receipt of this letter dated January 6:

General: I have the honor to hand you herewith a commission constituting you Major General of Louisiana State Militia, and by order of his excellency the governor, to state that you are thereunder assigned to the immediate command and supervision of the entire militia, police and all civil forces of the State of Louisiana within the city of New Orleans.

O. D. Bragdon
Private Secy.¹⁸

As a result of this communication, Longstreet found himself

¹⁶ Hesseltine, Grant, p. 153.

¹⁷ D. B. Sanger and T. R. Hay, James Longstreet, (Baton Rouge, 1952), p. 349. Cited hereafter as Sanger and Hay, Longstreet.

¹⁸ House of Representatives Miscellaneous Document no. 211, 42 Cong., 2 sess., p. 811. Sanger and Hay, Longstreet, p. 356.

in command of a strange force. Warmoth had found it "judicious" to arm and organize some twenty-five hundred whites "notwithstanding the fact they were soldiers in the Confederate Army," and another twenty-five hundred Negroes.¹⁹

The metropolitan police, under Superintendent A. S. Badger, were incorporated into the militia and were armed with Winchester rifles, breech-loading guns, and a six-pound howitzer.²⁰

By this time, a triangular situation existed in New Orleans. Warmoth and his legislature were in the State House, protected by the militia and police; Carter and his legislature were in the Gem building, surrounded by a large number of deputized citizens; and a detachment of United States troops under General W. H. Emory stood by for any possible emergency.

On January 10, the Warmoth faction took forcible possession of the Gem without any real opposition. The dispossessed Carterites reassembled in the Cosmopolitan Club,²¹ and from this new headquarters mounted a premature counter-

¹⁹ House of Representatives Miscellaneous Document
no. 211, 42 Cong., 2 sess., p. 295.

²⁰ Testimony of A. S. Badger. Ibid., p. 103.

²¹ Fortier, Louisiana, p. 118.

attack which ended in a blustering and bloodless failure to take the State House. Failing in his attempt to get the support of Federal troops, Carter sensed that he must either make a decisive move or surrender. On Saturday, January 20, therefore, thousands of circulars were distributed calling for a mass meeting on Monday, and urging Negroes, in particular, to take arms against "Warmoth and his thieving crew."²² On Sunday night, the Algiers armory was broken into by Carter followers, and the arms in storage there were distributed among the men.²³ Next day, several thousand men assembled in answer to Carter's appeal and were prepared to march on the State House when word arrived that President Grant had telegraphed General Emory to use his troops, if necessary, to prevent violence.²⁴ The President's action made a Warmoth victory certain, and the Carterites returned to the legislature on the governor's terms. The state militia, on its first assignment, had been used primarily for guard duty and had not been called upon to do any actual fighting. Relative quiet returned to Louisiana and within a few weeks General Longstreet

²² Circular reprinted in House of Representatives Miscellaneous Document no. 211, 42 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 318-319.

²³ Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 132.

²⁴ American Annual Cyclopaedia, 1872, (New York, 1873), p. 472.

was able to resign his command, giving as his reason the somewhat significant desire to remain "untrammelled in the approaching political canvass."²⁵

The next period of militia activity resulted from the incredibly confusing election of 1872. The split in the party was made more permanent when one side joined forces with the Liberal Republican movement which was then taking place on the national scene. Both factions decided to enter a ticket. Warmoth broke with Grant and threw his support to the Liberal Republican movement while the Custom House crowd, with S. B. Packard now in control, continued behind the Grant administration. These two factions were not the only ones, however, for at one time, as many as five different slates were being offered the Louisiana voter. Out of this situation several spectacular political shifts developed. Warmoth, in one of the strangest alliances of all time, joined with the Democrats, who for years had been implacable in their opposition to him, to support a fusion ticket headed by John McEnery and D. B. Penn. Pinchback, lieutenant governor by the grace of Warmoth, deserted his benefactor and joined the Custom

House group in support of another fusion ticket favoring William Pitt Kellogg and C. C. Antoine.²⁶

The election was held on November 4, and hardly had the last ballot been cast before both sides began charging fraud. And as though the situation was not already sufficiently confused, two Returning Boards emerged, each supporting the legitimacy of a different candidate. This distressing condition continued until the legislature convened. A few days prior to that occasion, however, the Packard forces obtained a court order from Judge E. H. Durrell authorizing them to take over Mechanics Institute, site of the scheduled legislative session.²⁷ Packard accomplished this with the aid of Federal troops. When the legislature eventually met, its first acts were to impeach Warmoth, install Pinchback as governor, and proclaim Kellogg and Antoine the victors in the recent election.

In the meantime, Warmoth and his supporters set up shop in Lyceum Hall, and once again Louisiana had two legislatures. On January 13, the climax of the comedy was reached when two governors were added to the growing list of office

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Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 161.

²⁷

Ibid., p. 194.

holders; Kellogg was inaugurated at Mechanic's Institute while McEnery was taking the same oath in Lafayette Square.²⁸

The comedy was not without its grim side. Pinchback called up the militia, alerted the police, and placed both under arms. Longstreet, originally hired by Warmoth, was persuaded to return again to his post of command in the militia, now to be used against Warmoth.²⁹ McEnery countered by issuing a call to all citizens of the state between the ages of eighteen and forty-five to enroll in the state militia which he was organizing.³⁰ A few days later, on March 6, the McEnery forces attempted to capture the police stations in New Orleans, but were repulsed. On the following day, the McEnery legislators were arrested and jailed,³¹ bringing a temporary cessation to the Kellogg-McEnery hostilities. For the second time, Louisiana militiamen had been called up, and as had been the case during its earlier mobilization, no real fighting had resulted.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 223.

²⁹ J. F. Casey to U. S. Grant, December 12, 1872. Quoted in Warmoth, War, Politics, and Reconstruction, p. 217.

³⁰ Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 228.

³¹ American Annual Cyclopaedia, 1873, (New York, 1874), p. 449.

Even though the first two calls had resulted in false alarms, the third one was to prove a charm. When the militia was next called up, they were to face a well-organized White League which was spoiling for a fight. This White League grew out of a state-wide movement which enjoyed its greatest growth in the period from April to September, 1874. The first known League was formed in Opelousas in April of that year,³² and the movement spread so rapidly that by August it was estimated that membership approximated fourteen thousand.³³ Since the White Leagues are to be discussed in detail later,³⁴ it need only be said here, in the most general terms, that they were politico-military organizations dedicated to the restoration, by force if necessary, of white supremacy. Only whites were allowed to join, and great emphasis was placed upon being adequately armed and "prepared to meet any and every emergency."³⁵ In New Orleans, the Crescent City White League was formed in July, for purely defensive purposes, it was claimed, and it was this particular

³² Fortier, Louisiana, p. 135.

³³ Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 258.

³⁴ See Chapter IX.

³⁵ Natchitoches Vindicator, July 25, 1874. Quoted in Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 259.

group which was destined to clash with the state militia.

The immediate cause of the fight grew out of a dispute over the seizure of arms by the metropolitan police. During the month of August, 1874, several large shipments of arms reached New Orleans. These arms were undoubtedly distributed among the White Leaguers, and there was considerable boasting concerning the ultimate use to which the guns would be put.³⁶ On September 10, a detachment of policemen entered the Canal Street store of Arthur Olivier, an importer of firearms, placed the merchant under arrest, and seized the three cases of guns and twelve kegs of ammunition which had only recently arrived.³⁷ Judging from the reaction, this equipment was also scheduled for delivery to the Conservatives. The act was condemned as "one of the most tyrannical and highhanded outrages which has yet disgraced the memory of freedom in this city,"³⁸ and many citizens professed a feeling of insecurity for life and property unless they were allowed their constitutional

³⁶ Brewster, Sketches, p. 187.

³⁷ Fortier, Louisiana, p. 138.

³⁸ New Orleans Picayune, September 10, 1874.
Quoted in Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 269.

right to bear arms.³⁹

The steamer Mississippi was scheduled to arrive in New Orleans on Monday, September 14, carrying another shipment of guns for the White Leagues. When it was rumored about town that the police planned to seize the shipment, as they had already done in other instances, the Leaguers became infuriated,⁴⁰ and determined to call a protest meeting. Consequently, an appeal to the "citizens of New Orleans" appeared in the newspapers on September 13, deploring the infringement of the right to bear arms:

We therefore call upon you on Monday morning, the 14th day of September, 1874, to close your places of business, without a single exception, and at eleven o'clock A.M. to assemble at the Clay statue on Canal Street, and in tones loud enough to be heard throughout the length and breadth of the land, Declare That You Are Of Right, Ought To Be, And Mean To Be, Free.⁴¹

The women of New Orleans also got a plug in for such incidental causes as racial integrity, preservation of a free-

³⁹ Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 269.

⁴⁰ Brewster, Sketches, p. 189.

⁴¹ New Orleans Bulletin, September 13, 1874. Quoted in Fortier, Louisiana, p. 139.

born heritage, and the honor of wives and daughters.⁴²

In answer to the appeal, some three to five thousand citizens assembled on the proposed site at the scheduled hour. As the meeting progressed, it became apparent that the arms-bearing question had been lost in the larger political issues of the day, for the Kellogg-McEnery controversy was deliberately reopened. At the conclusion of a long address which claimed that McEnery and Penn had really defeated Kellogg and Antoine and that the latter held office only through "fraud and violence", it was resolved that Kellogg immediately abdicate. Five emissaries were sent to Kellogg to present the resolution, demand an immediate answer, then report his decision back to the meeting.⁴³

The committee departed, called upon Kellogg, but failed to see him personally. Henry C. Dibble, of Kellogg's staff, received the resolution and answered for the governor saying that no communication could be received while "large

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Brewster, Sketches, p. 191. Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 270. Harper's Weekly, October 3, 1874.

bodies of armed men⁴⁴ were assembled in the city. When this information was repeated to the crowd, it was greeted with violent disapproval. Several fiery speeches were made; then the men were instructed to go to their homes, get their arms, and report back at two-thirty in the afternoon ready for action.⁴⁵ Inasmuch as John McEnery was out of the state, Lieutenant Governor Penn issued a proclamation calling on the militia, "embracing all persons between the ages of eighteen and forty-five years, without regard to color or previous condition", to arm and assemble for the purpose of "driving the usurpers from power."⁴⁶ Penn then issued General Order no. 1 appointing Frederick Nash Ogden as provisional general of Louisiana State Militia.⁴⁷

By three o'clock in the afternoon, the Conservatives had reassembled under arms. Since New Orleans had long been sensitive to Parisian fashion, it was not surprising that the

44

H. C. Dibble to Committee, September 14, 1874.
Quoted in Fortier, Louisiana, p. 143.

45

Ibid., p. 145.

46

Proclamation quoted in ibid., pp. 145-146.

47

Ibid., p. 146.

first preparation for battle was to barricade the streets. The situation was tense; General Ogden, in command of a force composed primarily of New Orleans White Leaguers but disguised as a state militia, was opposed by the combined forces of Badger's metropolitan police and Longstreet's militia. Once again, General Emory and his regulars stood anxiously by.⁴⁸

At about four fifteen P. M., Longstreet and Badger, with some five hundred men in possession of a Gatling gun, two twelve pounders, and several other pieces of artillery, moved into position against the Ogden forces. Firing broke out on both sides shortly thereafter. A flanking movement by a company of Ogden's men followed by a frontal assault caused the metropolitans to fall back, abandoning their artillery to the enemy.⁴⁹ One participant claimed that General Longstreet "blanched" when he heard the White Leaguers give the rebel yell during their charge.⁵⁰ Longstreet received a minor wound, and General Badger was taken captive by his

⁴⁸ William H. Dixon, White Conquest, (London, 1876), II, p. 25.

⁴⁹ F. N. Ogden to E. J. Ellis, September 17, 1874. Quoted in Fortier, Louisiana, pp. 148-153.

⁵⁰ Cited in Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 271.

enemies after having been wounded three times, one of which necessitated a leg amputation.⁵¹ On the following morning, the metropolitan police surrendered, as did the Negro militia stationed in the State House.⁵² Kellogg retreated into the sanctity of the Custom House, and Penn took over the governorship pending McEnery's return to the state. The total number of casualties was estimated to be sixteen killed and forty-five wounded among the White Leaguers plus eleven killed and sixty wounded among their opponents.⁵³

Messages were immediately sent from Louisiana to influential persons in the North in an attempt to head off criticism of the revolutionary occurrences of September 14th. One non-participant asserted that he could easily understand "how hot-headed and imprudent men goaded as they are daily by Kellogg's seizures and illegal acts could not forego the opportunity...."⁵⁴ Another more succinct account merely stated that "disgust...came to a head and like a huge boil burst"⁵⁵

⁵¹ New York Herald, September 15, 1874.

⁵² Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 272.

⁵³ Fortier, Louisiana, p. 153.

⁵⁴ G. Moorman to W. T. Sherman, September 15, 1874. William Tecumseh Sherman Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. Cited hereafter as Sherman Papers.

⁵⁵ D. F. Boyd to W. T. Sherman, September 16, 1874. Sherman Papers.



THE LOUISIANA OUTRAGES—ATTACK UPON THE POLICE IN THE STREETS OF NEW ORLEANS.

III. The Battle of September 14, 1874, in New Orleans

But apparently the most influential message which left New Orleans was the one sent by the deposed Kellogg to President Grant seeking aid. For on September 15, the President issued a proclamation ordering the "turbulent and disorderly persons," namely the Penn-Ogden-White League coalition, to "disperse and retire peaceably to their respective abodes within five days...."⁵⁶ Additional Federal troops and three naval vessels were ordered into New Orleans, and on September 19th, Kellogg slipped back into the State House, there to remain in uneasy equilibrium for the remainder of his term.⁵⁷

The militia were to have yet another brief though anti-climactic period of activity in Louisiana. Following the election of 1876, the state was once again thrown into the unhappy situation of having two governors, when both Stephen B. Packard and Francis T. Nicholls claimed to have been elected. Packard, the Republican candidate, settled down in the State House, derisively called "Fort Packard" by his enemies,⁵⁸ and issued the customary appeal to the President. Negotiations

⁵⁶ Richardson, Messages, pp. 276-277. Harper's Weekly, September 16, 1874.

⁵⁷ Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 275.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 487.

on the national scene relative to Hayes' election had caused a decided change in attitude on the Southern question. Grant, operating only in a caretaker status until the inauguration of Hayes, notified Packard on March 1, 1877, that the military would no longer be used to maintain state administrations in Louisiana.⁵⁹ On April 20, 1877, President Hayes issued the official order for the withdrawal of Federal troops from New Orleans, and four days later the barracks were emptied.⁶⁰ The Packard government, protected only by the Negro militia and remnants of the metropolitan police, dissolved immediately thereafter, and that unhappy gentleman, all the while crying "betrayal", departed for Liverpool, there to pacify himself with a consolation prize, an appointment as United States Consul.⁶¹

With this collapse, the Negro militia movement came to an end in Louisiana. It had never, with the single exception of the September 14th engagement, been a particularly active movement. Its lethargy was due to several reasons. In the first place, local Radicals had been late in organizing their forces as compared to their brethern in other Southern

⁵⁹ Garnie W. McGinty, Louisiana Redeemed, (New Orleans, 1941), p. 110.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 121-122.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 123.

states. Then, too, since the seat of government was New Orleans, and since the troops were used almost exclusively in defense of incumbent administrations, militia activity was confined to that city alone; it never spread to the provinces, as it did in other states. But the most important single factor, by far, which kept the militia from engaging in little more than guard duty was the presence, in appreciable numbers, of Federal soldiers in the city. In Louisiana, they, and not the militia, were the prevailing force when a dispute arose, and it was indeed a fortunate coincidence for that militia that, until the very last, both forces championed identical causes.

ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

Never, perhaps, was race war so imminent in Mississippi as during the autumn of 1875. The condition of near-anarchy which accompanied almost any election in that state during Reconstruction was aggravated by the presence of two armed and hostile forces. One group was the Negro militia which had been called up by Governor Adelbert Ames in the wake of the fearful slaughter at Clinton in September of that year; the other was the illegal white volunteer military companies which had sprung up throughout the state as part of the Democratic program for victory in the oncoming election. Both sides were adequately armed and were busily engaged in the risky business of making frequent demonstrations of force in the face of the other. The air was heavy with threats and counter threats, and a collision appeared inevitable. Both sides paraded through the streets while booming artillery salutes kept tender nerves aquiver.¹ One eyewitness gave the following report of the situation in Jackson:

I found the town in great excitement; ununiformed militia were parading the streets, both white and colored. I found that the white people - democrats -

¹ Paul Lewinson, Race, Class, and Party, (New York, 1932), p. 55.

were very much excited in consequence of the governor organizing the militia force of the state. I found that he was about sending arms to Clinton and Edwards and other places along the line of the railroad. I found that these people were determined to resist his marching the militia to these points with arms, and that they threatened to kill his militia-men.²

Outright war was avoided only by the complete capitulation of one of the belligerents at the so-called Peace Agreement negotiated in October, 1875. But in order that the end of this story might be better understood, it is necessary to reconstruct the sequence of events leading up to the final surrender.

On March 10, 1870, James L. Alcorn was inaugurated governor of Mississippi.³ In his inaugural address he urged citizens not to violate the laws or persecute other citizens. Although expressing a wish to avoid the cost of maintaining an armed militia, he gave fair warning that he would call up these forces if it became necessary to bring the people "to

² Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1801.

³ Alcorn was a lawyer-planter of Coahoma County. Although a leader of the anti-secessionist forces in Mississippi, he joined the Confederate army and attained the rank of brigadier general. In 1866, he was elected to the United States Senate but along with other "Confederate Brigadiers", he was refused a seat. Shortly thereafter, he joined the Republican party and was elected to the governorship on that ticket. DAB, I, pp. 137-138.

a sense of their obligations to society."⁴ The fact that violence was held in check during 1871-1873 was not due primarily to fear of reprisal by the governor, however, but to a combination of peculiar local circumstances. In the first place, Alcorn, although he fell in disfavor with many persons because of his alleged defection into Republican ranks, was never so bitterly resented by the Conservatives in Mississippi as was his successor. Basically conservative in outlook, it was almost inevitable that he would eventually break with the Radical wing of his adopted party and find his way back into the Democratic fold.⁵ Then, too, during this particular period, both the internal weakness of the state Democratic party and the fear of Federal intervention aided in keeping the peace.

In November, 1871, Alcorn resigned the governorship in order to succeed Hiram H. Revels in the United States Senate, and it was here that the split developed between him and Adelbert Ames, the other Senator from Mississippi. Both

⁴ Garner, Mississippi, p. 279.

⁵ Alcorn lived to become the leader in Mississippi of the opposition to Federal legislation favoring the Negro. He was prominent in drafting the discriminatory Constitution of 1890. DAB, I, p. 138.

men, seeking vindication at the hands of their constituents, entered the governor's race in the campaign of 1873. Ames headed the Radical faction of his own party while Alcorn was supported by conservative Republicans and a not inconsiderable number of Democrats. When the vote was tallied, Ames was declared elected.

Dating from this rejection of Alcorn in 1873 and the subsequent increase in office-holding by Negroes,⁶ the tempo of violence increased throughout the state, and Negro militia forces were called upon to play a more dominant role in political affairs. Several factors were responsible for this increasing unrest, chief among them being the intensity of feeling directed against Ames personally.⁷ He had come to Mississippi in 1866 in command of a detachment of Federal troops assigned to garrison duty and had been appointed provisional governor by General Irwin McDowell in 1868, following

⁶ Vernon L. Wharton, The Negro In Mississippi, 1865-1890, (Chapel Hill, 1947), p. 182. Cited hereafter as Wharton, Negro In Mississippi.

⁷ Ames, a native of Maine, graduated from West Point just as the Civil War broke out. He rose from lieutenant to brevet major general during the war, and came to Mississippi with the 24th Infantry which was assigned there for garrison duty after the war. Dunbar Rowland, (ed.), Encyclopedia of Mississippi History, I, 84-109. Cited hereafter as Encyclopedia of Mississippi History.

the removal of Governor Benjamin G. Humphreys.⁸ In March of the following year, he was given command of the entire Mississippi area and enjoyed the dual role of civil governor and military commander until the accession of Alcorn. In 1870, Ames beat his sword into a political plowshare and resigned from the army in order to be free to exchange his tunic for a toga. Along with Hiram Revels, he presented himself for acceptance to the United States Senate where the irregularity of his credentials, which had been signed by Ames himself, caused an uneasy delay in his being seated. While in the Senate, his dedication to the advancement of the Negro race served only to widen the breach with the Conservatives back home.⁹ In addition to this, his personal stature had not been enhanced on the local political scene by the contracted alliance which made him the son-in-law of Benjamin F. Butler.¹⁰

In addition to this personal dislike of Ames, two

⁸ Percy L. Rainwater, (ed.), "The Autobiography of Benjamin Grubb Humphreys, August 26, 1808-December 20, 1882," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXI, (September, 1934), 231-254.

⁹ For a concise account of Ames' personal and political career, see Encyclopedia of Mississippi History, I, pp. 84-109.

¹⁰ Ibid.

other factors contributed to an increase in violence. For one thing, the heretofore defunct Democratic party began to wax stronger, and its recovery was attended by a growing emphasis on the use of force for political ends. At the same time, fear of Federal intervention was on the wane; the Grant administration, under the pressure of public opinion, was becoming more cautious in its Southern policy. At any rate, Ames was inaugurated on January 22, 1874, and before that year had run its course, the first great outbreak occurred.

This conflict revolved about the figure of Peter Crosby, Negro sheriff of Vicksburg. A "Taxpayers Convention", on December 6, 1874, demanded his resignation and upon his refusal to comply, forcibly ejected him from office.¹¹ Crosby immediately departed for Jackson where he interviewed Governor Ames and received his promise of cooperation in retaking his office.¹² Hurrying back to Vicksburg, Crosby issued an appeal for all good Republicans to come to his assistance. Ames was as good as his word, and on December 4, he had his private secretary, A. G. Packer, who, incidentally, doubled as Adjutant General of the state, send this message:

¹¹ Garner, Mississippi, p. 329 et passim.

¹² Ibid.

Captain P. C. Hall, care sheriff - co-operate with your militia company with Sheriff Crosby in his efforts to regain possession of his office....¹³

Hall was the Negro captain of a seventy-five man all-Negro company which had been organized in Vicksburg¹⁴ and was at the time fully armed and equipped.¹⁵ As he mobilized his forces, the situation grew tense. The mayor of Vicksburg, an anti-Ames man, issued a proclamation on December 7, closing all saloons and placing the city under martial law, granting military command to an ex-Confederate officer with a force of one hundred men.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Crosby continued to recruit supporters from the outlying Negro settlements by circulating the story that both President Grant and Governor Ames were in Vicksburg, and that to join the march on the city was the "Republican thing" to do.¹⁷ Before the sun had set, the antagonists met in two separate battles, the latter being fought

¹³ Quoted in House of Representatives Report no. 265, 43 Cong., 2 sess., p. xxv.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. iv.

¹⁵ Edward Mayes, L. Q. C. Lamar, His Life, Times and Speeches, (Nashville, 1896), p. 235. Cited hereafter as Mayes, Lamar.

¹⁶ Garner, Mississippi, p. 329 et passim.

¹⁷ The Nation, January 7, 1875.

at the Pemberton monument,¹⁸ resulting in the deaths of two whites and approximately thirty-six Negroes.¹⁹ President Grant, on December 21, issued a proclamation demanding the restoration of order and on January 4, 1875, Governor Ames received this gratifying message from General Philip Sheridan: "I have tonight assumed control over the Department of the Gulf. A company of troops will be sent to Vicksburg tomorrow."²⁰

Reaction to the Vicksburg riot was mixed. The local Conservatives went to the unnecessary trouble of electing another sheriff, only to see him deposed in mid-January by United States troops and the hated Crosby reinstated.²¹ One Mississippian suggested that a double inscription be put on the Pemberton monument reading: "Here surrendered the Confederate chieftan in 1863, and here fell 100 Dupes to the unhallowed ambition of Adelbert Ames in 1874."²² The Northern

¹⁸ Garner, Mississippi, p. 329 et passim.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Philip H. Sheridan to Adelbert Ames, January 4, 1875. Philip H. Sheridan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. Cited hereafter as Sheridan Papers.

²¹ Garner, Mississippi, p. 329 et passim.

²² Charles Furlong, Origin of the Outrages at Vicksburg, (Vicksburg, 1874), p. 16.

press voiced a slightly different view:

The latest outbreak of negrophobia has occurred in Mississippi, in Vicksburg, and with more disastrous results than have usually attended these terrible evidences of an irreconcilable antagonism of races.... It was, in fact, from the Vicksburgian point of view nothing but a quiet little affair in which seventy colored citizens were murdered in cold blood and one white citizen had lost his valuable life...

Once more, as always, it is the negroes that are slaughtered, while the whites escape.²³

Following the trouble in Vicksburg, Ames sought to strengthen his position. In a message to the legislature, he decried the lack of a "well-organized or disciplined militia," and reminded the law-makers that even if such men were available, he did not have "a dollar to expend" for such a purpose.²⁴ Veering sharply away from his earlier desultory enforcement policies, he threw his weight behind a metropolitan police bill designed to create the hard core of a loyal army.²⁵ Although this move was defeated, he refused to give

²³ The Independent, December 17, 1874.

²⁴ Message to legislature, December 17, 1874. Quoted in J. S. McNeilly, "Climax and Collapse of Reconstruction in Mississippi, 1874-1896," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, XII (1912), 325.

²⁵ Garner, Mississippi, pp. 327-328.

up. On February 25, he managed to push through the legislature an act disbanding existing militia companies, revoking previously issued commissions, and requiring state arms to be turned in.²⁶ By this measure he hoped not only to curb the growing white rifle companies which were multiplying throughout the state but also to regain possession of state arms for reissue to a reinvigorated militia. His hopes were foiled again, largely because the act was ignored by those in possession of the arms. Continued pressure by the governor, however, led to the passage in the spring of 1875, of what became known as the "Gatling Gun Bill", which authorized the governor to organize two regiments of ten companies each and appropriated sixty thousand dollars to carry the act into effect. Of this money, five thousand dollars was to be used for the purchase of arms, specifically including Gatling guns.²⁷

With this law safely on the statute books, Ames, either lulled into a false sense of security or fearful of creating a race war, took no action to organize his militia even as the campaign of 1875 approached. Unfortunately for

²⁶ Mayes, Lamar, p. 239.

²⁷ Garner, Mississippi, p. 382.

the governor, he apparently failed to comprehend the earnestness with which the Mississippi Democrats determined to regain control of the state. While he continued to hope for a free ballot and a fair election, his opponents were perfecting their quasi-military organization which would later serve as a blueprint for the technique in political violence known as the Shotgun Plan. It was no mere coincidence that the Democrats selected as their campaign manager James Z. George, a man experienced in affairs military as well as political.²⁸ He personally conducted the subsequent campaign which set an all-time high for frenzied eruptions of political violence.

The first, and mildest, of the disturbances associated with the campaign took place in Vicksburg on July 4, 1875, some three months prior to the election. The Negroes held a meeting at the court house "for the performance of patriotic exercises", in which the scheduled speaker was T. W. Cardoza, perhaps the most bitterly hated of Mississippi's Negro politicians. An altercation between Cardoza and a local judge

²⁸ George returned to Mississippi after the war and resumed the law practice which he had abandoned for military service. He was instrumental in directing "The Revolution of 1875" and was later rewarded for his services by appointments to the Mississippi Supreme Court and the United States Senate. DAB, VII, pp. 216-217.

resulting from an unflattering editorial written by the former led to a general outbreak,²⁹ during which several Negroes were killed.³⁰

Peace had hardly returned to the countryside before another and more violent outbreak occurred in Yazoo City. Conditions in that delta town had remained agitated because of the activities of A. T. Morgan, Republican sheriff. Morgan, a carpetbag-planter turned politician, had previously been involved in a Yazoo City murder, having shot the man whose job he subsequently filled.³¹ In addition, he had committed the social indiscretion of marrying a Negro schoolmistress, an act which did nothing to increase his popularity in local circles.³² On September 1, 1875, a political meeting was held in Bedwell's Hall with Morgan as the featured attraction. The meeting was attended by a group of Democrats who interrupted and heckled Morgan as he tried to speak. An argument followed, whereupon pistols were drawn and the hall took on the appearance of a

²⁹ Senate Report no. 527, I, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. lxi.

³⁰ Encyclopedia of Mississippi History, I, p. 100.

³¹ Senate Report no. 527, I, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. lxi.

³² Ibid.

shooting gallery.³³ One white man and three Negroes were killed, and the city was immediately placed under martial law.³⁴ According to the Yazoo Banner, Morgan "hastened to Cassius Ames to whom he cries to help him, ere he sinks."³⁵ Ames threatened to restore Morgan by returning him under escort of three hundred Negro militiamen. He was persuaded to change his plan when he learned that the people of Yazoo City had assembled under arms to resist any such maneuver,³⁶ and were threatening to hang Morgan and kill the Negro militiamen to the last man.³⁷ Morgan discreetly decided to remain in Jackson under the protective wing of the governor.

Before the Yazoo City dead were decently buried, the worst of the pre-election riots broke out in the Baptist-seminary town of Clinton, only a few miles from the capital city. At a political meeting and barbecue held in Clinton

33

A. T. Morgan to A. Ames, September 4, 1875. Adelbert Ames Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi. Cited hereafter as Ames Papers. Morgan wrote Ames a fifty-odd page report of the Yazoo City riot.

34

Garner, Mississippi, p. 375.

35

Cited in Morgan, Yazoo, pp. 468-469.

36

Senate Report no. 527, I, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. lxii.

37

Testimony of G. K. Chase. Ibid., p. 1803.

on September 4, it was planned to allow both Democrats and Republicans to speak. Prior to the meeting, the Republicans staged a demonstration in which some eight hundred Negroes, armed and organized into a cavalry company, rode through the streets of the town on gaily beribboned steeds more accustomed to the plow than the parade ground, followed by several more companies afoot.³⁸ When the speaking started, so did the trouble. While a Republican named Fisher attempted to address the crowd, a fight broke out nearby between a white man and a Negro concerning a bottle of whiskey.³⁹ A shot was fired, and in the melee which resulted, three whites were killed and several others wounded.⁴⁰ When word of this incident spread, armed groups of whites from Jackson, Vicksburg and Edwards' Station rushed to Clinton by special train bent on revenge.⁴¹ For nearly two days, this mob combed the surrounding area shooting and killing Negroes indiscriminately.⁴² Many blacks fled to Jackson seeking aid and protection from Ames, while

³⁸ Charles H. Brough, "The Clinton Riot", Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, VI (1902), 56.

³⁹ Senate Report no. 527, I, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. lxiii.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. lxiv.

⁴¹ Garner, Mississippi, p. 378.

⁴² An estimated 20-30 Negroes were killed during this outbreak.

others "hid out" in the woods, struck "with a terror not easily described."⁴³

The governor issued a proclamation on September 7, against "persons in various parts of the state" who had formed themselves into military companies and commanded them to disband immediately.⁴⁴ His order was openly defied, and the Yazoo City Herald made this bitter retort:

Our dapper little Governor Ames comes to the front with a proclamation ordering the disbandment of all military companies now organized in the state. If he has brains enough to know his right hand from his left, he ought to know that no more attention will be paid to his proclamation than the moon is popularly supposed to pay to the baying of a sheep-killing dog.⁴⁵

While his opponents were defiant, his supporters were worried. Letters like the following poured into the governor's office describing the chaotic conditions which existed throughout the state:

To Excellency Gov. Ames:

The rebels turbulent; are arming themselves here now today to go up to Sartartia to murder more poor negroes.

⁴³ T. Dabney to E. Dabney, October 20, 1875. Quoted in Susan D. Smedes, A Southern Planter, (London, 1889), p. 232.

⁴⁴ Senate Report no. 527, I, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. xii.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Morgan, Yazoo, p. 470.

Gov., aint the no pertection? This confederate military all over the state, now called Granger. They are better prepared now for fighting than they was before the war. They read yr proclamation today and damn you and proclamation too; they intend to hang you ore get some secret scoundral to kill you...⁴⁶

These unsettled conditions caused Ames to turn to the Federal government for aid. On September 8, he appealed to President Grant for troops to restore order in Mississippi. General George simultaneously telegraphed Washington insisting that "peace prevails."⁴⁷ On September 14, Grant, through his Attorney General, refused Ames' request and declared that "the whole public are tired of the annual autumnal outbreaks in the south."⁴⁸ Ames was now left to his own devices.

Pressure began to mount favoring effective organization of the Negro militia. Ames continued to fret over the possibility of drifting into race war, and as late as September 11, he voiced his opposition to a "militia of colored men"⁴⁹ for

⁴⁶ Letter to Ames signed by "We colored citizens" of Vicksburg dated September 8, 1875. Quoted in Senate Report no. 527, II, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 89.

⁴⁷ Garner, Mississippi, p. 380.

⁴⁸ Cited in Wharton, Negro In Mississippi, p. 194.

⁴⁹ Adelbert Ames to A. T. Morgan, August 14, 1874. Ames Papers.

fear that such action would develop into "a war of races which would extend beyond the borders of this state."⁵⁰ More and louder demands for the militia were heard as the trouble within the state continued. The governor's close political advisors favored the move, hoping it would be possible to "preserve the peace with these men."⁵¹ Even the Northern press joined the hue and cry against Ames, calling him "a mere sham" and demanding to know the whereabouts of the state militia.⁵² Thus Ames, harassed by the internal conditions of the state, abandoned by the Federal government, and influenced by the advice of his nearest and most trusted friends, began to act.

On September 24, Adjutant General Packer sent the following message to every sheriff in the state:

Sir: I am directed by his excellency the governor to inquire if any militia organizations are needed in your county to assist the civil officers? Are there any threats from the opposition that in your judgment, will be carried into effect...⁵³

⁵⁰ Telegram of Governor Ames to Attorney General Edwards Pierpont dated September 11, 1875. Quoted in J. W. Garner, Mississippi, pp. 382-383.

⁵¹ Charles W. Clarke to A. Ames, September 16, 1875. Quoted in Senate Report no. 527, II, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 92.

⁵² The Independent, September 16, 1875.

⁵³ Cited in Senate Report no. 527, I, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. lxviii.

Responses to this feeler were varied. Some sheriffs definitely wanted militia, others did not. Most reluctant of all those contacted was the sheriff of Pike county:

I intend to do all in my power to preserve the peace and make arrests without bringing about conflict. And when it comes to that, I shall think it my first duty to keep out of it...our party is not composed of fighting material.⁵⁴

Ames was not deterred from his course, however, for on the last day of September he wrote President Grant: "I am organizing the militia and will fight...if necessary."⁵⁵

The governor called up what he believed to be "the only available force, the colored militia";⁵⁶ these troops were confined primarily to the area around the capital city. The Negro companies were composed chiefly of refugees from the recent Clinton riot and were under the leadership of the fiery mulatto, Charles Caldwell.⁵⁷ In an effort to train and

⁵⁴ J. S. McNeily, "Climax and Collapse of Reconstruction in Mississippi, 1874-1896", Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, XII (1912), 146.

⁵⁵ Adelbert Ames to Ulysses S. Grant, September 30, 1875. Ames Papers.

⁵⁶ Adelbert Ames to James W. Garner, January 17, 1900. James W. Garner Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi. Cited hereafter as Garner Papers.

⁵⁷ Frank Johnston, "The Conference of October 15, 1875, Between General George and Governor Ames", Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, VI (1902), 67. Senate Report no. 527, I, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. lxx. Garner, Mississippi, p. 382. Hinds County (Mississippi) Gazette, September 29, 1875.

equip his forces, Ames ordered a hundred copies of Upton's Infantry Tactics from a New York publisher, a thousand Springfield rifles, fifteen hundred haversacks, and five thousand rations of pork and bacon.⁵⁸ These warlike preparations caused an immediate reaction. The Conservatives shrieked that the governor's action was unconstitutional,⁵⁹ and charged that it was his intention to deliberately bring about a collision of the races.⁶⁰ The usually eloquent L. Q. C. Lamar was plunged into despair and wailed over the future of Mississippi: "Ames has it dead. There can be no escape from his rule. His negro regiments are nothing. He will get them killed up and then Grant will take possession for him."⁶¹ The Jackson Vindicator made the following analysis of the situation:

The organization of militia companies still goes bravely on. Jackson's sons with Jackson's guns will fight for Jackson's glory. All this seems like preparing for war, but not so; only preparing to attack \$60,000.00 of the people's money in the state treasury....⁶²

⁵⁸ Garner, Mississippi, p. 382. Senate Report no. 527, I, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. lxix.

⁵⁹ Jackson Weekly Clarion, October 13, 1875.

⁶⁰ Senate Report no. 527, I, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. lxxi. Garner, Mississippi, p. 383.

⁶¹ Mayes, Lamar, p. 211.

⁶² Quoted in Hinds County (Mississippi) Gazette, September 29, 1875.

The most extreme reaction came in the form of anonymous threats against Ames. The following is typical:

A. Ames

The White Leaguers of Claiborne have determined to get rid of J. J. Smith... and other scallawags in this county. Our brothers in your section will look after you. Send out your negro troops and Gatlin guns, and we will wipe them from the face of the earth, which they disgrace. We have the best rifles, and are eager for an opportunity to use them.⁶³

In early October, 1875, the last concentrated outbreak of violence erupted at Friar's Point, home of ex-Governor James L. Alcorn, situated in alluvial Coahoma County in northwest Mississippi. Alcorn, moving back toward his original political position, had allied himself with the Conservatives in that county and had led in denouncing the local Negro ring headed by Sheriff Brown. Alcorn made a speech accusing Brown of being a defaulter,⁶⁴ and when the sheriff prepared to answer the charge, Alcorn let it be known that he would personally attend the speech "at all hazards" because of Brown's "habit of denouncing me Alcorn with all the vulgarity...possible."⁶⁵ Brown thereupon sent messengers into

⁶³ Quoted in Senate Report no. 527, I, 44 Cong., 1 sess. p. 26.

⁶⁴ New York Herald, October 6, 1875.

⁶⁵ Senate Report no. 527, I, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 69

the surrounding countryside to bring in an armed force to protect him "in his right to speak", and on the following Tuesday, several hundred armed Negroes marched toward the town.⁶⁶ The white company in Friar's Point sent a messenger to the advancing column ordering them to disperse within fifteen minutes or risk attack. After a hasty consultation, the Negro force retreated a mile or so away from town to await reinforcements.⁶⁷ Because of the threatening nature of the situation, the women and children were evacuated from Friar's Point and sent across the river to Helena, Arkansas, where a volunteer company was raised and sent to aid Alcorn.⁶⁸ The whites decided to attack before enemy reinforcements could arrive, and although they expressed the intention of merely firing over the Negroes' heads, eight persons were killed in the fray. The Negroes were dispersed and Brown later turned up in Memphis with the explanation that he had been "detached from his friends early in the trouble."⁶⁹

Reports from other sections of the state showed that

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 69-70.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 70.

⁶⁸ New York Herald, October 6, 1875.

⁶⁹ Ibid., October 7, 1875.

conditions were uniformly agitated. Less than a week after the Friar's Point affair, Ames received this letter from Vicksburg:

Governor Ames:

Dear Sir: I think this morning that you ought to be notified how things are going on in Warren County around Vicksburg. Ever since Sat the democrat party has been like roaring lions; they have sworn to not let us colored militia organize in this city, and been going every since Sat night with their guns - going round the halls to see if any of them are gathered together, to break them up, and making their threats what they intend to do with the governor; that if he sends Chas. Caldwell down to Vicksburg with guns and ammunition to arm the negroes, that he will never get there.

...an extra train leaving here in the morning for Jackson, who supposed to be the leading tigers of this city, going out to make Governor Ames call in them arms and disband that negro militia...⁷⁰

Meanwhile, in Jackson, where Ames had placed several Negro companies on a war footing, danger of an outbreak increased hourly. Parading companies of armed whites and Negroes furnished a handy excuse for conflict. Excitement had reached fever point and bloodshed seemed inevitable when on October 15, 1875, the adversaries negotiated a "Peace Agreement", which proved to be the undoing of the governor. The agreement was

⁷⁰ Anonymous letter to Adelbert Ames, October 13, 1875. Quoted in Senate Report no. 527, II, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 85.

reached largely through the influence of G. K. Chase, "a gentleman of intelligence and good address", who had been sent to Mississippi by Attorney General Edwards Pierrepont to report the true condition of affairs there.⁷¹ Chase was instrumental in getting representatives of both groups together, and a committee headed by General George called upon the governor in an effort to work out details of a compromise.⁷² The committee suggested that the best way to settle the unrest in the state would be to disband the militia; Ames countered by proposing to disband them but allowing them to keep their guns.⁷³ This was objected to on the grounds that such action would "be the source of serious disturbances", and the eventual decision was to deposit the arms with the commander of Federal troops stationed in Jackson.⁷⁴ The general terms of agreement were that Ames would disband the militia in exchange for assurances of a peaceful and orderly election.⁷⁵

The announcement of the compromise was greeted with

⁷¹ A. J. Brown, A History of Newton County, (Jackson, 1894), p. 184.

⁷² Garner, Mississippi, pp. 387-388.

⁷³ James D. Lynch, Kemper County Vindicated, and A Peep at Radical Rule In Mississippi, (New York, 1879), p. 300. Cited hereafter as Lynch, Kemper County Vindicated.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Garner, Mississippi, p. 388.

varied reactions. Generally, the press applauded the suspension of military operations,⁷⁶ but such sentiment was by no means unanimous. The editor of The Nation, for example, remarked with some acerbity that "the spirit of concord" in all probability resulted from the fact "that the gunpowder had given out."⁷⁷ One perturbed Mississippian came extremely close to the truth when he remarked that "J. Z. George and Co. Heckwinked the President of U. S. about Peace in Miss. Election."⁷⁸

The results of the "Peace Agreement" were disastrous to the Republicans for two very good reasons. In the first place, it left them defenseless in the face of an armed and pitiless adversary, and in the second place, the Democrats deliberately avoided living up to their end of the bargain. By a calculated program of fraud, violence, and intimidation, the Democrats won an overwhelming victory in the election of November 3rd. And as soon as the new legislature convened, the first order of business was to draw up articles of impeachment against Ames, who, by another compromise, was allowed to resign the governorship.

⁷⁶ New York Herald, October 16, 1875.

⁷⁷ The Nation, October 28, 1875.

⁷⁸ J. Meek to Adelbert Ames, November 2, 1875.
Ames Papers.

YOUNG MEN, JAMES, MARK, & CO.
Moore, Durant and Peyer:

GENTLEMEN,—In reply to your suggestion I beg to say that in consequence of the election of last November I found myself confronted with hostile legislation, and embarrassed and hampered in my endeavors to carry out my plans for the welfare of my State and my party. I resolved, therefore, to resign my office as Governor of the State of Mississippi; but immediately articles of impeachment were instituted against me, and of course I could not and would not retire from my position under the imputation of any charge affecting my honor and integrity.

For the reason indicated, I still desire to escape burdens which are compensated by no public usefulness; and if the articles of impeachment presented against me were dismissed I should feel at liberty to carry out my desire and purpose of resignation.

I am very truly yours,
 AMES



KILLING POLITE

THE MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE HAS KILLED ITSELF BY WITHDRAWING THE IMPEACHMENT, AND THE GOVERNOR HAS KILLED HIMSELF BY RESIGNING HIS OFFICE.

IV. The Resignation of Governor Ames

The election of 1875, which marked the return to power of the Democrats in Mississippi, is significant for this story because it also marked the end of Negro militia in that state. No one can say what the results might have been had Ames been willing to employ rather than merely organize his Negro troops. This much, however, is certain. The governor should never have organized them unless he intended to put them to use, for, as it worked out, he only made them sitting ducks for the enemy. Ames' dawdling half-measures in regard to the Negro militia, all sound and no fury, stamp him as a timid Caesar, unwilling to cross the Rubicon.

LIFE IN THE MILITIA

No study of the Negro militia movement would be complete without some mention of the conditions under which these men lived. To write such an account, however, is a doubly difficult task because in addition to the usual problem of synthesis, one is further handicapped by a regrettable scarcity of source material. In spite of these obstacles and the limitations they impose, this chapter begs inclusion for two very good reasons. In the first place, such information is an integral part of the over-all militia narrative; and in the second place, it is essential that one be familiar with internal militia conditions in order to understand not only what they accomplished, but also what they failed to accomplish.

An analysis of any particular militia unit discloses two distinct and dissimilar phases of its history. The first was the early organizational period during which enthusiasm was extremely high and participation in the movement was merely an extension of the social and political life of the community. The second phase began with the calling up of a unit for active service. During these periods of military operations, militia-men came face to face with the less attractive features of

soldiering. The physical discomforts and material inconveniences of camp life were aggravated by the administration of military discipline. The joy previously shown on the parade ground disappeared in the face of long and extended marches through the countryside, while both the pleasure and security of being under arms were dampened by the sporadic outbreaks of violence which took the lives of many of their comrades. Since militia-men were generally lacking in any fundamental military training or indoctrination, it is not surprising that morale and discipline practically disappeared.

It is not sufficient, however, to remark that there were two such phases in the life history of a militia company. Something more is demanded if one would understand this study in contrast. In order to comprehend the gradual disintegration which took place, one must take a closer look at each of the evolutionary phases.

During the initial organizational period while the units were being molded into shape, enthusiasm reached its highest point. This was due not only to the novelty of the experience but also to the fact that the Negro felt that by joining up he was participating in a crusade on his own behalf. In addition to this vague impulse toward self-help, there were

several very concrete attractions which helped keep him interested and delighted in his unit. For one thing, militia activity was often times tied directly in with the social life of a community. Militia captains, for example, enjoyed an enviable position in the social hierarchy and were very much in demand at local functions. Musters and drills furnished welcome relief from the oppressive boredom of routine plantation life and were usually attended by genial and jovial recruits. Recreation and entertainment became closely associated with militia exercises. Pleasure trips and picnics were frequently scheduled and special occasions were commemorated by some more spectacular activity such as competitive target shooting.¹ Political campaigns, as well as social affairs, were also allied with militia organizations and their activities. Military parades in support of Republican candidates were quite common, and were usually followed by gigantic barbecues where all present could feast not only on succulent spareribs but also on the pretentious orations of political hopefuls.

Another reason for the Negro's enthusiasm during

¹ Testimony of Doc Adams. Senate Miscellaneous Document no. 48, I, 44 Cong., 2 sess., p. 49. Adams was captain of the militia company which was later annihilated at Hamburg, South Carolina.

this early stage resulted from his delight in the trappings of military life. The pay, while not exceedingly high, furnished a welcome augmentation to the small income of the average agricultural worker.² The fact that he actually enjoyed "playing soldier" caused him to look on his pay as being in the nature of a gift.³ Then, too, he undoubtedly experienced much gratification in wearing the uniform of his state militia. The laxity of uniform regulations allowed considerable freedom in the matter of military dress with the result that many outfits were extremely colorful, some downright gaudy. For example, Ned Tennant, leader of the Edgefield, South Carolina, militia unit wore a long ostrich plume as the piece de resistance of his uniform.⁴ Oliver Cromwell, who led the huge Negro parade in Clinton, Mississippi, prior to the riot of September, 1875, not only decorated his own person with a plumed hat and cavalry saber, but also sat astride a horse trimmed in red, white and blue ribbons.⁵ In addition to his satisfaction with the pay and the uniform, the Negro dearly

² Although all classes of Negroes joined the militia movement, the overwhelming majority seem to have been recruited from among agricultural workers.

³ Leland, Voice From South Carolina, p. 49.

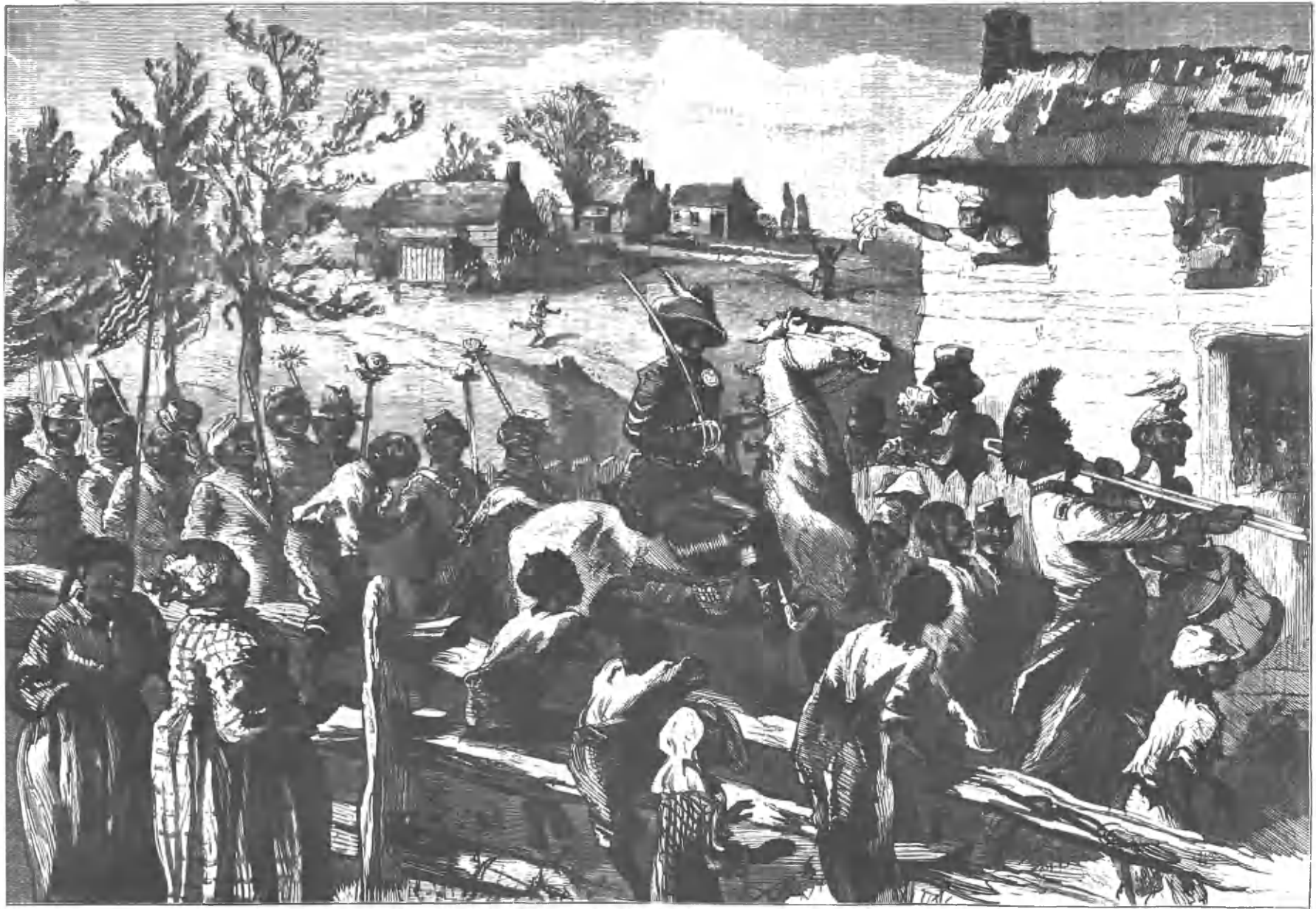
⁴ Simkins, Ben Tillman, p. 59.

⁵ C. H. Brough, "The Clinton Riot," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, VI (1902), 56.

loved the gun issued him by the state. In some cases, this was the first firearm ever possessed by the freedman, and in almost all cases it was the finest he had ever had. That the Negro had an aptitude for marksmanship is attested to by the fact that, to this day, he remains the feared, respected though inveterate enemy of the rabbit, the squirrel and the quail.

These, then, were the influences which were responsible for the early flush of enthusiasm for the militia; participation in the social and political life of the community plus the personal delights associated with military ritual. Because these things impressed him favorably, the Negro soldier was happy, loyal to his command, proud of his association with his unit, and eager to attend drills and musters. This pleasant situation usually lasted only so long as the requirements of service did not include full-scale mobilization followed by genuine military operations.

The second phase of a militia unit's history began when it was called up for such operational duty and placed on a war footing. The one significant feature of this action was that it was almost always accompanied by a gradual yet seemingly irresistible deterioration of morale. Time and



"BE JUBILEE AN COME"—FOURTH OF JULY, 1876.—DRAWN BY SOL EYTINGER, JUN.—[SEE ARTICLE "'76," PAGE 574.]

V. A Negro Militia Parade

again, commanders in the field complained of the "demoralized and very unsatisfactory condition" of their troops.⁶ As morale continued to ebb, the thin layer of military varnish wore away and disappeared while at the same time even the most rudimentary forms of discipline were ignored or forgotten. Subsequent results were disastrous to the movement. The accoutrements of war which had been issued militiamen were inadequately or improperly cared for. Guns were carelessly lost, misplaced or stolen,⁷ and little effort was wasted in the maintenance chores of cleaning and oiling the weapons.⁸ Uniforms were arbitrarily altered to suit the sartorial tastes of the wearer, with cavalier indifference to existing regulations. So general did this practice become that, in certain areas, changing the shape or style of the uniform was made a court-martial offense.⁹ Selling or pawning of these gratuitous issues in order to raise cash for immediate and generally non-military pursuits was standard procedure. Several steps were taken to prevent

⁶ Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Louisiana, 1874, p. 3. Cited hereafter as Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana.

⁷ K. Danforth to Lt. ___ Gibbons, June 25, 1869. AGO File, State of Arkansas.

⁸ Report of the Inspector General, Louisiana State Militia, January 6, 1871. Quoted in Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1870, p. 21.

⁹ General Order no. 3, February 6, 1874. Quoted in Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1874, p. 38.

disposition of state-owned clothing for personal gain. In Tennessee, periodic inspections and inventories were prescribed,¹⁰ while in Louisiana uniforms were kept under lock and key in the state armory and were issued only on days when actually needed.¹¹

Equally as serious as neglect of equipment was the progressive tendency to violate the principle of command. Officers experienced increasing difficulty in enforcing discipline and disobedience of orders was a common charge in military trials.¹² Threats against officers' lives were not unheard of, and cases of actual mutiny were reported.¹³ Life within the camp was not unaffected by these conditions. Thefts of personal and state property were common. Fist fights and other forms of rowdiness frequently broke out, and drunkenness became a problem of some magnitude.¹⁴

¹⁰ General Joseph Cooper to Col. ___ Gamble, March 13, 1869. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

¹¹ General Order no. 15, May 29, 1874. Quoted in Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1874, p. 48.

¹² General Order no. 11, in General Order Book, Tennessee State Guards, 1869. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

¹³ During the period of martial law in Arkansas in 1868-1869, the Negro troops under General Mallory rebelled and threatened his life. So explosive was the situation that the colored troops were disbanded. Harrell, Brooks-Baxter War, p. 87.

¹⁴ Regimental Order no. 3, February 23, 1869. General Order Book, Tennessee State Guards, 1869. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

Disaffection and dissatisfaction found a ready outlet in desertion. Ranks were continually decimated as militiamen simply melted away from encampments. In one company, there were fourteen desertions during a ten-day period,¹⁵ and thirty Tennessee guards deserted in a body.¹⁶ Defection was deliberately encouraged by the whites in an attempt to place the militia project in an unfavorable light. In South Carolina, Negroes were offered seventy-five cents a day plus rations, with a promise of steady employment, if they would desert.¹⁷ Militia captains were forced to take extreme measures to combat this situation. A Tennessean was ridden out of town on a rail in punishment for inciting the soldiers to desert.¹⁸

Several attempts were made to improve conditions within the militia, in hopes of halting the disintegration of morale and discipline which was taking place. General Longstreet, for example, requested a revision of the Louisiana

¹⁵ Captain . . . Clingan to General Joseph Cooper, July 11, 1869. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

¹⁶ Nashville Union and Dispatch, September 17, 1867.

¹⁷ R. B. Elliott to R. K. Scott, September 13, 1869. Military Affairs File, State of South Carolina, South Carolina Historical Commission, Columbia, South Carolina. Cited hereafter as South Carolina Military Affairs File.

¹⁸ Nashville Union and Dispatch, June 1, 1867.

militia law as the first step toward a reinvigorated force. He stressed the harmful effects resulting from delay in payment of troops and proposed the abolition of several existing restrictions.¹⁹ Another prominent general felt that the problem could be solved through a weeding-out process, and he argued in favor of "one good full regiment of well-drilled, efficient, reliable troops...in place of a brigade on paper."²⁰ Still another maneuver to improve morale was the granting of preferential treatment to militiamen by allowing them exemption from jury duty and a specified amount of taxation in return for faithful service.²¹

A more direct approach was adopted with regard to the problems of drunkenness and rowdyism. In an effort to keep the soldiers from obtaining whiskey, proclamations of this nature were posted by commanders:

Any citizen who shall sell or give any
intoxicating beverage to any officer or
enlisted man of this command will have

¹⁹ Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1870, p. 5.

²⁰ Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1874, p. 4.

²¹ Recommended by Inspector General of Louisiana State Militia in annual report of January 6, 1871. Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1870, p. 22. He claimed that "by these means, the militia will always be kept up to a proper standard and composed of the right class of men."

his place of business closed up and will
be arrested and severely punished.²²

Rowdyism led to an increased emphasis on discipline, the deplorable lack of which was constantly cited as an evil. Claiming that a "non-disciplined militia establishes a false idea of the duties of a soldier and makes the force entirely useless",²³ officers attempted to take up the slack. A new severity of tone crept into published orders threatening trial by "drum-head court martial" and prompt punishment.²⁴ When all else failed, there was recourse to military law. Court-martial boards were constantly being called into session to hear cases and pass judgment. Punishment varied with the offense committed; minor violators were assigned extra hours of duty with the camp labor force²⁵ while more serious convictions resulted in penalties such as reduction in rank, fines,

²² Post Order no. 3, February 26, 1869. General Order Book, Tennessee State Guards, 1869. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

²³ Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1874, p. 5.

²⁴ General Order no. 4, Tennessee State Guards, issued February 23, 1869. Quoted in Senate Report no. 21, pt. 1, 42 Cong., 2 sess., p. 460.

²⁵ General Order no. 11, General Order Book, Tennessee State Guards, 1869. AGO File, State of Tennessee

dishonorable discharge, and in isolated cases, death.²⁶ It can hardly be claimed that justice was administered in an even-handed fashion because the severity of the punishment varied from place to place. For example, a Tennessee private, found guilty of desertion, was subjected to the humiliation of being

dishonorably drummed out of camp and the service of the State of Tennessee with one side of his head shorn and his right breast bearing the inscription Deserter in large and plain characters and marched to the tune of the Rogue's March escorted by a guard to at least one mile from camp.²⁷

On the other hand, a lieutenant in the Louisiana militia was found guilty of the impressive charges of "mutiny, insubordination, disobedience of orders, neglect of duty, contempt and disrespect to superior officers, conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline and conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman" yet his sentence was merely "to be reprimanded in General Orders."²⁸

²⁶ The death penalty was pronounced in Arkansas by a court-martial upon several Negro militiamen found guilty of rape. See Chapter III.

²⁷ Order of March 4, 1869 issued by Colonel _._. Gamble. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

²⁸ General Order no. 27, October 8, 1874. Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1874, p. 56.

In this survey of the two distinct phases through which militia units passed, one is struck with the fact that the first period was marked by enthusiasm and interest while the other was characterized by depression and dissolution. Such a contrast naturally gives rise to many questions. How can the two extremes of attitude be reconciled? Is it possible to explain the metamorphosis from a feeling of affinity to one of repugnance displayed by militiamen? These questions can only be answered by emphasizing the basic causes which were responsible for the drastic reduction in effectiveness.

One of the most prominent causes for the growing dissatisfaction and lowering of morale in the militia was the inferior quality of the officer corps. Although some were both competent and conscientious, the over-all level was very low indeed, resulting from the fact that most of them were either political appointees or had been elected by the men, usually without regard for past experience or proven ability. Lack of interest was reflected in their failure to properly uniform or arm themselves and in irregular attendance at drills and musters.²⁹ Twenty-three commissions in the Louisiana militia

²⁹ Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1874,
p. 60.

were revoked in one fell swoop on these grounds.³⁰ Unauthorized absences from their command also gave cause for concern,³¹ and charges of neglect of duty were common, especially when forces were in the field.³² Violations of even the most elementary code of military conduct were responsible for many courts-martial, where "drunkenness and conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman" were popular charges.³³ Lieutenant E. K. Brown of the Tennessee State Guards was tried on the dual charges of "habitual drunkenness and utter worthlessness",³⁴ while Captain S. L. Chambers was dishonorably discharged from service for 'getting drunk, threatening civilians with his pistol, and using obscene language.'³⁵ These, of course, were extreme cases, but there is considerable evidence pointing to the fact that improvement among officer personnel was sorely

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ In Tennessee, General Joseph Cooper issued a circular warning officers against this practice. Copy of circular in AGO File, State of Tennessee.

³² General Order no. 13, August 24, 1867. General Order Book, Tennessee State Guards, 1867. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

³³ This charge appears more frequently than any other in the court-martial records.

³⁴ General Order no. 12, August 21, 1867. General Order Book, Tennessee State Guards, 1867. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

³⁵ Colonel . . . Gamble to General Joseph Cooper, July 14, 1867. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

needed. The inspector-general of Louisiana militia declared that "company officers seem to have lost their energy and ambition" and complained that "the whole command is...demoralized."³⁶ He insisted that "competent officers" were needed throughout the entire force.³⁷ Another general reported to his superiors:

The officers in this brigade are inefficient and incompetent to a degree that constrains me to request that they be ordered before a Board of Examinations to pass upon the question of their fitness for the positions which they now hold.³⁸

Another factor contributing to the lowering of morale in the militia was the neglect shown in paying off the troops. As in any army in any age, these soldiers looked forward to payday and its attendant pleasures. Anger and dissatisfaction were immediately voiced when this occasion was overlooked. This problem repeatedly arose in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee. Longstreet urged that his troops be paid more promptly in the interest of efficiency.³⁹ Quite often, wages

³⁶ Report dated January 6, 1871. Quoted in Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1870, p. 21.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ General Frank Morey to General Henry Street, December 1, 1874. Quoted in Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1874, p. 19.

³⁹ Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1870, p. 5.

were long overdue. One field officer of the Tennessee State Guards complained that his men had "over five months [pay] due them,"⁴⁰ and the Adjutant General of Arkansas wrote a letter to each member of that state's legislature in an attempt to raise money to pay the troops for services rendered a year earlier.⁴¹ The failure of the paymaster to settle arrears undoubtedly contributed to the desertions which increased at an alarming rate.⁴² A company in Edgefield, South Carolina, threatened to disband unless they were paid their due.⁴³ Commanders continually protested to legislators that until the militia forces were properly cared for by the state, "they will exist simply in name and remain practically a farce."⁴⁴

Perhaps no other influence was so deleterious to morale as were the poor conditions under which militiamen lived when they were called into active service. The inadequacy

⁴⁰ Major . . . Robeson to General Joseph Cooper, December 14, 1867. -- AGO File, State of Tennessee.

⁴¹ Copy of letter dated June 1, 1870, in possession of writer.

⁴² Nashville Union and Dispatch, September 17, 1867.

⁴³ R. B. Elliott to R. K. Scott, September 13, 1869. South Carolina Military Affairs File.

⁴⁴ Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1874, p. 18.

of the quartermaster in supplying the forces resulted in part from the methods under which he was forced to operate. Logistic support, excepting the single category of arms and ammunition, was accomplished by empowering the quartermaster-general "to impress such stores, supplies and buildings for quarters as may be required."⁴⁵ They literally lived off the countryside, levying contributions on inhabitants for which they gave receipts promising future payment.⁴⁶ These irregular methods were not conducive to effective replenishment; consequently, living conditions left much to be desired. Although every army complains of its food, justifiable protests were heard from time to time. Troopers complained about the "irregular manner" in which they received their rations and were particularly vociferous whenever denied "an allowance of coffee, sugar and other necessaries pertaining to a soldier's allowance."⁴⁷ One private wrote the following dismal description:

We have never had a change of diet, which you know is contrary to the laws of nature, hygiene, and army regulations. We draw meal, bacon, sugar and coffee and occasionally a

⁴⁵ General Order no. 7, April 18, 1874. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

⁴⁶ Clayton, Aftermath, p. 133.

⁴⁷ R. B. Elliott to R. K. Scott, September 13, 1869. South Carolina Military Affairs File.

small quantity of beans, salt and soup, all of which is deficient in quantity and inferior in quality, which we have to carry daily for one mile for lack of water.⁴⁸

Shortages of equipment, as well as food, gave additional cause for discontent. Requests for arms and ammunition were continually forwarded to headquarters by field commanders, many of whom were forced to arm their men as best they could.⁴⁹ Although this lack of arms was a serious matter, it was not nearly so destructive of morale as the shortage of uniforms. One officer reported that many of his men "had not sufficient clothing to protect them in ordinary weather, much less when exposed..."⁵⁰ On Christmas night of 1868, a detachment of Arkansas militia encamped in the woods near Madison experienced undue hardship when a six-inch snowfall blanketed them.⁵¹ Lack of heavy weather uniform equipment caused "much suffering" among the men.⁵² The captain of a Negro unit in Tennessee wrote this pitiful account of his men:

⁴⁸ Letter quoted in Patton, Reconstruction In Tennessee, p. 198.

⁴⁹ Clayton, Aftermath, p. 126.

⁵⁰ Colonel ___. Watson to P. Clayton, October 3, 1889. Quoted in ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

They are laying on the ground at night in the dew. I want blankets, coats, tents, drawers and shirts. The men are to go on a march in one or two days and have not the things to go with.⁵³

Medical attention, when furnished at all, was of the most casual type and was restrictive in nature. For example, General Cooper instructed commanding officers of Tennessee State Guard units that in cases of sickness due to misconduct, which is the military euphemism for venereal disease, physicians should not be allowed to "medicate at the expense of the state" but at the personal expense of the person "so afflicted."⁵⁴

One last factor tending to cool enthusiasm for militia duty was the omnipresent evidence of Conservative enmity. Any time a militia unit made its appearance, the soldiers were jeered at, taunted, and insulted. The Tennessee militia, for example, were called "damned cowardly Brownlow sons of b____s,"⁵⁵ and were informed that their detractors had no earthly use "for any...Brownlow militia, socially, politically or any other way."⁵⁶ By encouraging militiamen to desert, Conservatives

⁵³ Quoted in Patton, Reconstruction In Tennessee, p. 199.

⁵⁴ General Order no. 7, August 9, 1867. General Order Book, Tennessee State Guard, 1867. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

⁵⁵ Captain ____ Hall to General Joseph Cooper, November 24, 1867. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

⁵⁶ Captain ____ Clingan to General Joseph Cooper, July 11, 1867. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

deliberately undermined the effectiveness of the organization. On repeated occasions, outright assaults were made on Negro troops. Sniping, ambushes and midnight raids on bivouacked detachments were fairly common, and the citizens of Rogersville, Tennessee, engaged in a rock-throwing war which put a militia company to rout.⁵⁷ The constant threat of attack was responsible for the fact that most militiamen "slept on their arms at night."⁵⁸

Considering these circumstances, there can be small wonder that the militia movement was militarily ineffective. Officered by men who were indifferent, inefficient, and more often than not, incompetent; neglected by the very politicians in whose interest they were fighting; and living sometimes under frightful hardships in the ominous presence of an implacable enemy, the very fact that they survived at all stands yet as a remarkable and commendable achievement, appreciated wherever devotion to a cause is still a valued attribute.

⁵⁷ Anonymous letter to J. P. Brownlow, August 24, 1867. AGO File, State of Tennessee.

⁵⁸ New York Herald, July 24, 1870.

THE CONSERVATIVE REACTION

From its very inception, the Negro militia experiment was bitterly opposed by the white Conservative element of Southern society. Throughout the entire period and at every stage of development they continued their attack on the movement. Militia laws were challenged in state legislatures, where they were condemned as sinister political maneuvers. When, after passage of these laws, attempts were made to arm and organize troops, Conservative denunciations grew more shrill, for they professed to see in this action "a dangerous and offensive design" to spy on them.¹ When militia units were actually put to use, the outcry of the opposition became deafening and the troops were charged with every conceivable crime. The controlled Conservative press was the most popular medium for the transmission of this propaganda; the most obvious feature of the editorial page was the harshness of the language used to lash out against the enemy. And not only were local Negroes, carpetbaggers and scalawags excoriated; even the inhabitants of distant Yankeeland received a share

¹ W. W. Davis, Civil War and Reconstruction In Florida, (New York, 1913), p. 544. Cited hereafter as Davis, Florida.

of flagellation. Perhaps the height of vituperation was reached in an anti-Yankee verse which appeared in the Panola, Mississippi Star. After a savage and almost hysterical attack on Northerners in general, the poet requested that Southerners be remembered as a people

What hates the Cotton Mather
And the Roger Williams stock,
That dirty pile of Hell's manure
First dumped on Plymouth's Rock.²

Opposition to the militia was not confined merely to the realm of verbal assault. As the Democratic party in the South regained its strength, other and bolder measures were adopted in an effort to neutralize militia effectiveness. Although actual destruction of these forces was to come later as a result of the creation of armed military counter-forces, efficient operation was seriously impaired by a miscellany of Conservative tactics which included the use of legal stratagems, threats, and bribes in addition to seizures of equipment destined for the militia and direct retaliation upon militia-men.

Within the general category of opposition through political strategy, the Conservatives employed several techniques. Prominent Democrats led the fight in state legislatures

² Quoted in Senate Report no. 45, 44 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1002.

against passage of militia laws and further attempted to block enabling acts.³ When unable to defeat these appropriations outright, they resorted to use of the injunction to prevent expenditure of funds. The North Carolina treasurer was legally forbidden to pay loyal troops out of the military appropriation,⁴ while in Louisiana, money which had been set aside for the purchase of uniforms was enjoined by the attorney general.⁵ Mississippi Democrats secured an injunction to restrain the state auditor from issuing warrants against militia appropriations.⁶

Impeachment was another legal weapon in the hands of the Conservatives and was used primarily against Radical governors under whose direction militia forces had been organized. Threats of impeachment were continually heard, and abortive

³ Militia laws apparently figured consistently among campaign issues. In Louisiana, for example, one group threatened not to vote for any man unless he would refuse to support militia appropriations. Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 67. A Mississippi political club adopted a resolution advocating "the appropriation of nothing" in support of the militia. Garner, Mississippi, p. 297.

⁴ Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 531.

⁵ Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1874, p. 7.

⁶ Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 6. Garner, Mississippi, p. 384.

attempts in that direction were made against Clayton in Arkansas and Warmoth in Louisiana. Governor Ames of Mississippi was impeached, but resigned his office through a compromise which included the withdrawal of official charges against him.⁷ North Carolinians impeached Governor Holden, and one of the charges against him was "unlawfully recruiting a large body of troops...."⁸ Before the trial, Holden "got religion", was converted and publicly baptized,⁹ an act which led one editor to remark that "no record of any similar preparation for impeachment" could be discovered but that its effect would be "watched by jurists with deep interest."¹⁰ In spite of his reformation, he was convicted, removed from office, and disqualified for future office-holding in that state.¹¹ The fact that several Republicans voted for his conviction led one Negro legislator to comment that the governor had been "bit by his own dogs."¹²

⁷ See Chapter VI.

⁸ Archibald Henderson, North Carolina, The Old State and the New, (Chicago, 1941), II, p. 332. Cited hereafter as Henderson, North Carolina.

⁹ Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 545.

¹⁰ The Nation, December 22, 1870. Quoted in ibid.

¹¹ Henderson, North Carolina, II, p. 332.

¹² Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 543.

Still another technique of legally sabotaging the militia was the support of laws specifically designed to lower military efficiency or to make soldiering a less attractive avocation. Outright disbandment was accomplished in Tennessee,¹³ and in Texas the active duty troops were transferred to the reserve militia.¹⁴ Existing laws were either repealed or modified wherever possible. In Mississippi, for example, the pay of officers was cut to five cents a day,¹⁵ making service considerably less rewarding. Adjutant generals were treated spitefully by having their salary cut to practically nothing.¹⁶ The Texas legislators amended the law of that state so as to deprive the governor of exclusive control of the forces,¹⁷ and in Louisiana laws granting preferential treatment or exemptions to militiamen were repealed.¹⁸ Whenever Negro legislators could be

¹³ J. A. Sharp, "The Downfall of the Radicals In Tennessee", The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications, no. 5 (1933), 108.

¹⁴ Ramsdell, Texas, p. 313.

¹⁵ Garner, Mississippi, p. 411.

¹⁶ Proceedings of the Tax-Payer's Convention of South Carolina, 1871, (Charleston, 1871), p. 107. Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 559.

¹⁷ Ramsdell, Texas, p. 313.

¹⁸ Report of Adjutant General of Louisiana, 1874, p. 11.

persuaded to support these maneuvers, they were lionized by their Conservative colleagues. When a Mississippi Negro voted against the Ames-sponsored police bill, he was publicly presented with a gold headed cane.¹⁹

In addition to these legal attacks, Conservatives displayed their hostility to the militia by employing several other measures short of actual force. The verbal onslaught continued unabated, to be sure. Militia units were subjected to a continuing program of sarcastic abuse. Newspapers printed taunting queries such as: "Why do not the white Radicals volunteer in the colored militia? They are just as good as the colored men."²⁰ When a rumor of Brownlow's death was circulated in Tennessee, a group of Conservatives called upon one of the Parson's supporters, a fuel merchant, and inquired as to the price of eleven hundred cords of wood which they desired to purchase in order "to make hell hotter for him."²¹ The North Carolina State Militia, because of the initials N.C.S.M. which appeared in their insignia, were derisively called the "Negro,

¹⁹ Garner, Mississippi, p. 328.

²⁰ Hinds County (Mississippi) Gazette, October 13, 1875.

²¹ Report of Evidence Taken Before the Military Committee, 35th General Assembly, State of Tennessee, 1868, (Nashville, 1868), p. 34. Cited hereafter as Report of Tennessee Military Committee, 1868.

Carpetbag, Sealawag Militia."²²

Acts of a more threatening nature designed to intimidate Negroes were frequently perpetrated. In Mississippi, for example, a group of whites descended upon the town of Clinton and began to take down names of Negroes, implying that retribution would soon be visited upon them.²³ Negro leaders were ostentatiously enrolled in "Dead Books",²⁴ and coffins were paraded through the streets marked with the names of prominent Radicals and labelled with inscriptions bearing such incidental intelligence as "Dead, damned and delivered."²⁵ One of the most effective methods used to intimidate the militia was the firing of cannon in possession of the Conservatives. These guns were very much in demand not only because of their persuasive power but also for use should warfare actually break out. A leader of the Mississippi Democracy borrowed a cannon from Governor Warmoth of Louisiana during the honeymoon period of co-operation on the Greeley candidacy. He assured Warmoth,

²² Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 347.

²³ Anonymous letter to Adelbert Ames, September 6, 1875. Ames Papers.

²⁴ Wharton, Negro In Mississippi, p. 188.

²⁵ Testimony of John Ellis. House of Representatives Report no. 2, 43 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 343-344. Also Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 279.

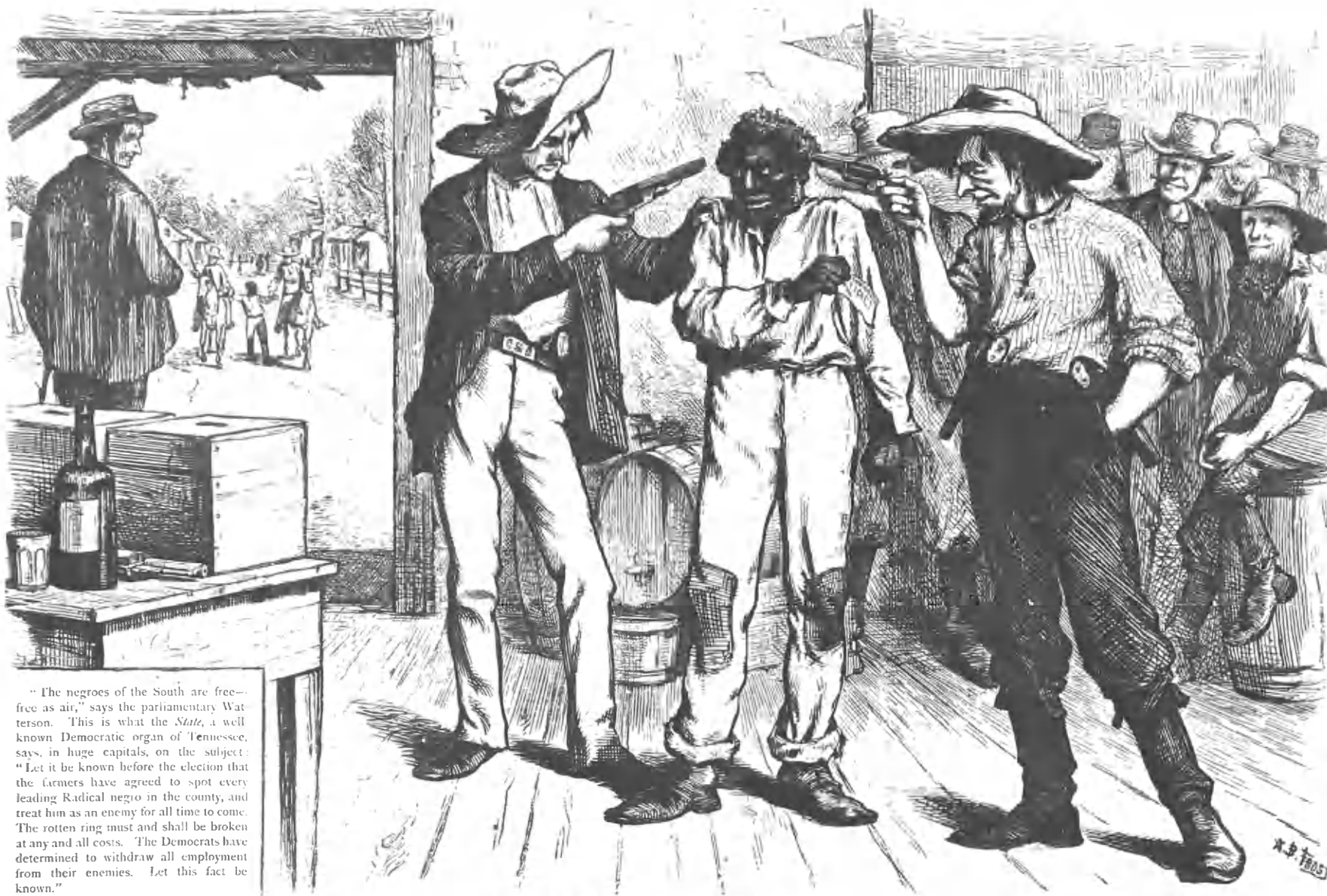
of course, that Mississippi Liberals and Democrats were working in "perfect accord".²⁶ During the campaign of 1875, Mississippi Democrats, using what apparently must have been incredible powers of persuasion, borrowed a cannon from the commander of United States troops stationed in Jackson. During a subsequent parade which passed in front of the governor's mansion, the gun was deliberately fired near enough to that building to break several windows. Although no action was taken against the paraders, the Federal commander was court-martialed for allowing his ordnance to be used in so carefree a manner.²⁷ There can be little doubt that terrorization through cannon-ading was effective. A Negro militiaman involved in the South Carolina troubles testified that when the cannon procured by the whites in his neighborhood was first fired, he made this prediction to his brothers-in-arms: "Jesus! God! We are all done killed."²⁸

Disarming Negroes was another practice aimed at destroying their military effectiveness. Individual militia-

²⁶ H. Barksdale to Henry Clay Warmoth, August 5, 1872. Warmoth Papers.

²⁷ Garner, Mississippi, p. 374.

²⁸ Testimony of Harry Mays. Senate Miscellaneous Document no. 48, I, 44 Cong., 2 sess., p. 32.



"The negroes of the South are free—free as air," says the parliamentary Waterson. This is what the *State*, a well known Democratic organ of Tennessee, says, in huge capitals, on the subject: "Let it be known before the election that the farmers have agreed to spot every leading Radical negro in the county, and treat him as an enemy for all time to come. The rotten ring must and shall be broken at any and all costs. The Democrats have determined to withdraw all employment from their enemies. Let this fact be known."

"OF COURSE HE WANTS TO VOTE THE DEMOCRATIC TICKET!"

DEMOCRATIC "REFORMER" "You're as free as air, ain't you? Say you are, or I'll blow yer black head off!"

VI. Political Intimidation of the Southern Negro

men were sometimes attacked for this purpose, and in one section of Mississippi, they even had their pocket-knives taken away from them.²⁹ Governors experienced increasing difficulties in supplying their forces with enough material to keep them in a state of combat readiness. Due to the persistent spying of whites, successful delivery depended upon acting in the utmost secrecy and failure to exercise sufficient caution led inevitably to losses of equipment. Governor Clayton of Arkansas suffered one such bitter experience while attempting to procure arms for his militia in 1868. An agent which he had sent to Detroit purchased four thousand rifles, four hundred thousand rounds of cartridges, a million and a half percussion caps, and a large quantity of gunpowder.³⁰ These materials were shipped via railroad as far south as Memphis where they were to be picked up and transported by steamer to Little Rock for the avowed purpose of "preserving the peace on election day and in securing a free ballot to all."³¹ When no steamboat captain in Memphis would agree to take the cargo aboard, the resourceful Clayton chartered a steamboat, the Hesper, which was lying

²⁹ Deposition of Sheriff John P. Matthews of Copiah County, Mississippi, dated September 13, 1875. Ames Papers.

³⁰ Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 218.

³¹ New York Daily Tribune, November 4, 1868.

alongside the wharf at Little Rock, and sent it to Memphis to pick up the equipment. This was done, and on October 15, 1868, the Hesper set sail from Memphis with its valuable cargo stowed safely in the hold.³² While taking on wood some twenty miles downriver from the city, the Hesper was suddenly challenged by a steam tug, the Nettie Jones, which was carrying approximately fifty armed and masked men.³³ The tug maneuvered alongside the Hesper, whereupon the masked men boarded the steamer, overpowered the crew and dumped the entire consignment of costly arms and ammunition into the muddy waters of the Mississippi River, where they remain to this day.³⁴

Governor Reed suffered a similar misfortune in his attempts to arm the Florida militia. After having purchased two thousand rifles in the North, he had them shipped to Tallahassee by train. On the night of November 6, 1868, the train carrying the arms was held up between Lake City and Madison, en route to the capital. In this daring train robbery the guns were thrown from the cars and many of them were

³² Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 219.

³³ Clayton, Aftermath, p. 108. Fletcher, Arkansas, p. 219. New York Daily Tribune, November 4, 1868.

³⁴ Ibid.

deliberately broken; the remainder were spirited away.³⁵

In South Carolina, an amphibious operation by a handful of white volunteers resulted in a sensational seizure of arms destined for delivery to the Negro militia. Two thousand Enfield rifles had been smuggled into the state from Washington and were temporarily deposited in the Savannah depot awaiting distribution. Twelve volunteers from a Charleston rifle company sailed to Savannah aboard two pleasure yachts, the Eleanor and the Flirt, overpowered the guards and stole the guns.³⁶

Confiscations of arms belonging to militia units were not uncommon. On several occasions, whites persuaded militiamen to turn in their guns to some central depository as a move toward keeping the peace. No sooner would this be done than the whites would unlawfully enter the storage place and seize the arms.³⁷ Quite often, these same guns would be distributed among members of white rifle clubs.³⁸

³⁵ New York Times, November 7, 1868. Cited in Davis, Florida, p. 567.

³⁶ Alfred B. Williams, Hampton and His Red Shirts, (Charleston, 1935), p. 225. Cited hereafter as Williams, Hampton.

³⁷ Senate Miscellaneous Document no. 48, I, 44 Cong., 2 sess., p. 857. Simkins, Ben Tillman, p. 61

³⁸ Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 97.

These actions by Conservatives caused considerable concern among loyal supporters of Radical regimes. Governors were constantly being warned to beware of enemy intentions and to exercise great caution in shipping arms into the countryside.³⁹ In order to successfully distribute arms, governors were forced to resort to subterfuge. For example, a consignment of rifles was shipped into Newberry, South Carolina, marked as "agricultural implements".⁴⁰ In Arkansas, two thousand Springfield rifles were sneaked in as "Arkansas State Reports" and thirteen thousand rounds of ammunition escaped detection only because the shipper had wisely labelled the cases "whiskey".⁴¹

In addition to legal stratagems, intimidation and seizures of arms, the Conservatives also employed the technique of personal retaliation against militiamen and their leaders. Retaliation was manifested in several ways including social ostracism, economic discrimination, and physical violence.

The most famous case of social ostracism involved

³⁹ S. W. Gere to Adelbert Ames, October 15, 1875. Ames Papers.

⁴⁰ Columbia (South Carolina) Daily Register, August 15, 1876.

⁴¹ Benjamin S. Johnson, "The Brooks-Baxter War", Publications of the Arkansas Historical Association, II (1908), 122-174.

General James Longstreet who, after becoming allied with Republican politicians in Louisiana, assumed active command of the Negro militia.⁴² His political pronouncements in favor of Republican principles gave rise to some opposition from erstwhile friends but his appearance as commander of the Negro forces in New Orleans was considered unforgivable and led to bitter, even vituperative, attacks upon him. He was virtually eliminated from accepted social circles in that city and was pointedly ignored in public by persons whom he had known well.⁴³

Economic sanctions were also levied against militiamen as a feature of the retaliatory program inaugurated by the Conservatives. Landlords pledged themselves neither to rent land nor give employment to Negro militiamen; the vow was rigidly adhered to since social ostracism was the reward of the apostate.⁴⁴ This tactic was quite effective. Paris Simkins, Negro legislator from Edgefield, introduced a resolution designed to protect South Carolina militiamen from being discharged and driven away from farms where they

⁴² See Chapter V.

⁴³ Eckenrode and Conrad, Longstreet, pp. 372-375.

⁴⁴ Simkins, Ben Tillman, p. 60.

were employed.⁴⁵ George W. Kirk, who commanded the North Carolina forces, regretfully reported to Governor Holden on one occasion that "the farmers and others in Caswell [county] are turning off their hands and refusing to pay them their wages."⁴⁶

Personal violence was visited not only upon Negro militiamen but also on whites associated with the militia movement. T. M. Shoffner, author of the North Carolina militia act which bore his name, learned of a plot against his life in 1870. Word was spread that the Orange County Ku Klux Klan had voted his death and intended to ship his body as a gift to Governor Holden. Whether or not the rumor had any real foundation, Shoffner was so thoroughly alarmed that he removed himself to the more tranquil state of Indiana.⁴⁷ When Holden finally armed his troops, he put them under the command of George W. Kirk of Tennessee, with a New Jerseyite named Bergen as his assistant. After the so-called Kirk-Holden War had run its course, both the governor's henchmen landed in jail. Holden not only visited Kirk during his incarceration but also helped that unfortunate man escape from the state by

⁴⁵ Reynolds, South Carolina, p. 305.

⁴⁶ George W. Kirk to William W. Holden, August 3, 1870. Holden Papers.

⁴⁷ Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 470.

making him a gift of a hundred and forty dollars, which amount enabled him to get to, of all places, Freedom, Tennessee,⁴⁸ first stop on a journey to Washington where he joined the police force which guarded the Federal buildings.⁴⁹ Bergen was not so fortunate. Although he, too, managed to escape the state, this feat was accomplished only after having once been run down with bloodhounds.⁵⁰ He also subsequently turned up in Washington, where Grant nominated him for the consulship at Pernambuco. The nomination was not confirmed, and Grant withdrew it, presumably with the concurrence of Governor Holden.⁵¹ Bergen later remarked with noticeable bitterness that in reward for his services, he "received 94 days imprisonment and six weeks pay."⁵²

Compared to Joseph Crews of South Carolina, these two men were extremely fortunate. Crews was the moving spirit behind the organization of a Negro militia troop in Laurens, during the administration of Governor Scott. After organizing the unit, he assumed active command and in so doing became

⁴⁸ Holden, Memoirs, p. 92.

⁴⁹ Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 533.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 532.

⁵¹ Holden, Memoirs, p. 91

⁵² Senate Report no. 1, 42 Cong., 1 sess., p. 152.

a target for the bitter hatred of the local Conservatives. As early as 1870, he and his followers were involved in a fight with local whites. In the riot of that date, one of the Negroes was killed and two others were wounded.⁵³ Crews eluded the vengeful whites by hiding out in a hollow log and later fleeing on a railroad hand car, hidden under a piece of canvas, disguised as a quarter of beef.⁵⁴ When conditions in Laurens settled down again, he returned and took up his career where it had so abruptly left off, and remained there until his assassination late in the summer of 1875. While riding along in his buggy some four miles out of Laurens, he was ambushed and fatally wounded by a shotgun blast.⁵⁵ The New York Herald reported that the "Honorable Joe Crews, republican politician of note" was dying of buckshot wounds and that the governor of South Carolina had put a price on the head of his attacker.⁵⁶ Another notorious crime was the murder in North Carolina of one Colonel Sheppard, an ex-Union army man from Pennsylvania

⁵³ Leland, Voice From South Carolina, pp. 52-56.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 67.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 134.

⁵⁶ New York Herald, September 9, 1875.

who had organized the Negro militia in Jones County.⁵⁷

Retaliatory attacks on whites were few in number in comparison to similar actions taken against Negro militiamen. The latter were subjected to every imaginable species of intimidation and violence.⁵⁸ Threats were hurled at them constantly, and often times were issued to persons only remotely connected with the militia. An Arkansas horse herder named McCreary was threatened with hanging for merely selling horses to the militia,⁵⁹ and an aged Negro in Tennessee was visited by a masked deputation and threatened severely because his son was engaged in raising a company.⁶⁰

Raids on the homes of militiamen for the purpose of destroying their personal property occurred frequently. A South Carolina militia captain described how he had watched them

taking down my pictures and breaking up
my furniture. They broke up everything
I had in the world; they took all my
clothes, my mattress, my feather bed,

⁵⁷ Testimony of R. T. Boshier. Senate Report no. 1,
42 Cong., 1 sess., p. 102.

⁵⁸ Simkins and Woody, South Carolina, p. 444.

⁵⁹ Clayton, Aftermath, p. 101.

⁶⁰ Report of Tennessee Military Committee, 1868, p. 54.

out it in pieces and scattered it everywhere...⁶¹

Negro militia captains were singled out for destruction and were remorselessly executed. Captain A. J. Haynes, for instance, was murdered on the streets of Marion, Arkansas, in broad daylight. Haynes was commander of the local militia detachment and had for some time been on "unfriendly terms" with Clarence Collier, an alleged member of the local Klan who at the tender age of twenty-one already had one notch in his gun handle.⁶² On July 15, 1869, Haynes was walking along the main street of town when Collier approached him and without warning emptied both loads of a double barreled shotgun into his body.⁶³ To make sure that Haynes was dead, Collier fired five additional revolver shots into the fallen body, strolled back into a nearby store where he had left his coat, put it on, came back outside and rode away from town unmolested.⁶⁴

An even more brutal murder was that of Charles

⁶¹ Testimony of Doc Adams. Senate Miscellaneous Document no. 48, I, 44 Cong., 2 sess., p. 48.

⁶² Clayton, Aftermath, pp. 175-186.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Caldwell, the fiery mulatto state senator of Mississippi. Caldwell had been placed in command of the Negro troops mobilized by Governor Ames following the Clinton riot of September 4, 1875. While serving in this capacity, he had fearlessly led an expedition which left Jackson in October, 1875 carrying arms for distribution to the militia at Edward's Station.⁶⁵ Although his forces were not attacked in transit, the trip caused much excitement and Caldwell became a marked man. Two months later, during the Christmas holidays, his enemies struck. One of the whites living in Clinton invited Caldwell down into the cellar of a local building under the guise of sharing a companionable drink in honor of the season. The unsuspecting Caldwell gladly accepted, and the two men disappeared down the stairway. When the drinks had been poured, a toast was proposed. What Caldwell did not know was that the clinking of the glasses was the prearranged signal for his death, for a strategically placed killer held him in his gunsight. As the glasses touched, a rifle report shattered the quiet and Caldwell fell bleeding to the filthy cellar floor. If this disgraceful story ended here, it would still rank high among villainous deeds, but worse was yet to come.

⁶⁵ Jackson (Mississippi) Weekly Clarion, October 20, 1875.

The wounded Negro, displaying a courage that must have been the envy of his murderers, refused to beg for his life but only entreated them to take him out of the cellar so that he might die in the open air. A local preacher carried him out into the street where the conspirators gathered to finish the job. Caldwell's last words to them were a calm instruction to remember that they had killed a brave man, not a coward. His body was ripped by a volley and the citizens of Clinton were treated to the grotesque sight of seeing his corpse turned completely over by the impact of innumerable shots fired at close range.⁶⁶

A similar case was that of Jim Williams in South Carolina. Williams was the leader of a Negro militia unit in lower York County. His aggressive leadership caused the whites to demand disbandment of his company.⁶⁷ Williams' refusal to comply was his death warrant. Early in the morning of March 7, 1871, his lifeless body was found hanging in the public square with a large placard pinned to his corpse bearing this inscription: "Jim Williams gone to his last muster."⁶⁸ A

⁶⁶ This story has been reconstructed from the sworn testimony of Mrs. Charles Caldwell. Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 435-440.

⁶⁷ Reynolds, South Carolina, p. 188.

⁶⁸ Louis F. Post, "A Carpetbagger In South Carolina", Journal of Negro History, X (1925), 61.

curious sidelight to this affair was that it involved the United States government in an international diplomatic hassle. A York County physician, Dr. J. Rufus Bratton, who had been implicated in the Williams murder, fled the country and settled down in London, Ontario, to practice. One night during the summer of 1872, he was seized, gagged, blindfolded and taken forcibly across the border where he was turned over to two United States marshalls for return to South Carolina. At this point, Canadian authorities made insistent demands that he be released immediately. Following a slight delay, Bratton was freed and returned to Canada, there to remain until 1876 when he returned to York County and resettled with impunity.⁶⁹

This catalogue of crimes could be continued indefinitely. Equally as horrible were the stories of how James Rainey, a South Carolina militia captain, was taken from his home and hanged,⁷⁰ or how Alexander Leech was shot and his body thrown in a nearby creek.⁷¹ Other militiamen too numerous to give individual accounts of, were slaughtered in veritable orgies of violence.

⁶⁹ For details of the Bratton Case, see J. S. Reynolds, South Carolina, p. 201.

⁷⁰ House of Representatives Report no. 22, pt. 3, III, 42 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1472.

⁷¹ Ibid.

In order to avoid loss of perspective, it should be repeated at this point that the measures described in this chapter did not really destroy the Negro militia. The legal stratagems, threats and confiscations were merely tokens of the white man's resentment, and even his acts of violence against militiamen were sporadic in nature. These acts undermined the effectiveness of the militia movement, to be sure; but actual destruction was to come only after the full fury of the white man's wrath was channelled into the organization of armed military counter forces within the Southern states.

NEMESIS

Although opposition to the Negro militia had been manifested in various ways from the very beginning of the movement, the final devastating blow was the organization, by the Conservatives, of armed military counter forces in the Southern states. Where earlier forms of reaction had been limited either to measures short of force or to only isolated attacks on individual militiamen, these new volunteer rifle companies were specifically designed as instruments of mass force to overwhelm and smash not only the Negro battalions themselves, but also the political regimes which employed them. Such extreme measures were not needed in all states, however, for in several places, the Democratic party had been able to return to power by other means. But in the few remaining states where the Radicals continued tenaciously to maintain their hold, Conservative leaders became more and more partial to the sentiment that victory could be accomplished "in only one way, BY ARMED FORCE."¹ Hence, during the latter years of Reconstruction, armed military companies were organized and

¹ Charleston News and Courier, May 8, 1876. Quoted in W. Allen, Governor Chamberlain's Administration In South Carolina, (New York, 1888), p. 275.

played increasingly important roles in overturning Radical regimes in several states, particularly in Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. This politico-military movement was known by such varied titles as People's Club, White Line, White League, Red Shirts, and White Man's Party.

A great deal of misinformation exists concerning this White Line movement, due largely to the misrepresentations sponsored by both Radicals and Conservatives. On one hand, Radicals claimed that the movement was a revival of the earlier Ku Klux Klan. One governor, in a letter to a friend, stated that "the old rebel forces are being reorganized not under the name of Ku Klux but as the White Leagues, with the same ultimate object in view as had by the Ku Klux."² Actually there appears to have been no direct connection between the Klan and the White League, but their history does reflect many similarities. Both had missions which centered about the doctrine of white supremacy. And both unhesitatingly turned to the use of force and violence whenever necessary to attain their predetermined goals. This, however, is as deep as the similarity goes. The White Line had a narrower, more specific aim than did the Klan. It was primarily concerned with the political problem of

² Adelbert Ames to F. C. Harris, August 4, 1874.
Ames Papers.



VII. Cartoonist's View of White Line Movement

restoring Conservative rule, usually as a result of one particular election, by a carefully prepared program of fraud, violence, and intimidation. In addition to the concentrated nature of its mission, the White Line also differed from the Klan in that it was not fundamentally concerned with secrecy. Clandestine meetings and exotic ritual found no place in the movement. So out in the open were their activities that in most localities the names of members and even of the leaders were common knowledge. This lack of emphasis upon secrecy probably stemmed from a growing conviction that interference by the national government was becoming less and less a probability.

The Conservative legend of the White Line movement has also contributed to the continuation of misinterpretations. For in order to furnish justification for the excesses which were committed, the defensive and protective roles of the clubs were played up. Painted in the pale tones of Conservative whitewash, the movement was portrayed purely as a defense of the white race. Newspapers printed editorials claiming that so long as white military companies existed "the good people...will have protectors and rallying points",³ and Conservative leaders repeated over and over again that they had

³ Hinds County (Mississippi) Gazette, September 22, 1875.

organized "purely for protection; not for any political purpose in the world, but to protect ourselves against the encroachments of the blacks."⁴ Perhaps the most extreme statement of error relative to the movement was made by an overly-sympathetic observer who reported that the leaguers "held no meetings, named no committees, elected no chiefs. It was a sentiment rather than a society."⁵

These partisan views of the movement generally either overstated or understated the case. Actually, the White Line was something distinct and set apart from the Ku Klux Klan, and its mission by no means confined action to defensive or protective measures. It was an aggressive political instrument welded into a military mold for a definite purpose. And it was, indeed, considerably more than a mere sentiment; it was carefully organized and its activities were minutely planned and executed by chosen leaders. But perhaps the most effective way to correct the completely erroneous or only half true impressions which have persisted is to examine in the impartial light of available evidence and report what it really was as opposed to what it was popularly claimed to have been.

⁴ Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. lxvii.

⁵ Dixon, White Conquest, II, p. 24.

To grasp the significance of the White Line movement, one must realize from the beginning that it was essentially of a political nature. It is not too great a generalization to say that the rifle companies were merely the armed wing of the Democratic party. In Mississippi, these companies were under the control of General J. Z. George, who as campaign manager of the state Democratic party was masterminding the political strategy in that state. In South Carolina, the role of the rifle companies was stated explicitly in no less conspicuous a place than the campaign plan of the Democratic party.⁶ Nor was it a mere coincidence that when in mid-September, 1874, the Democrats in Louisiana fought a pitched battle against the Radicals for control of the State House, the "militia" which championed the Conservative cause was almost exclusively composed of members of the New Orleans White League.⁷

Although essentially political in nature and in aims, clubs were deliberately organized into military formations and trained to the use of force. The types of formations varied, although most of them were either infantry or cavalry units

⁶ The South Carolina campaign of 1876 was closely patterned after the Mississippi, or Shotgun Plan, and was drawn up by Martin W. Gary. A copy of this detailed strategy can be found in the appendix of Simkins and Woody, South Carolina, pp. 564-569.

⁷ New York Herald, September 15, 1874.

designated respectively as Rifle Companies and Sabre Clubs. Most clubs possessed at least one piece of artillery and in many instances, several field pieces were owned. Each club had a full complement of officers, many of whom were experienced soldiers.⁸ The military features of the organization were clearly described in the instructions circulated in South Carolina:

The Democratic military clubs are to be armed with rifles and pistols and such other arms as they may command. They are to be divided into two companies, one of the old men, the other of the young; an experienced captain or commander to be placed over each.... Each company is to have a first and second lieutenant.... The number of ten privates is to be the unit of organization.⁹

In addition to the fact that these clubs were political in nature and military in organization, they had a definite purpose which went considerably beyond the mere function of protection. Since their real mission did not lend itself to publicity, Conservative leaders turned to the use of guile and subterfuge when explaining the reasons for their existence. Typical of this tactic was the following letter to the governor of South Carolina:

⁸ J. Z. George of Mississippi, M. C. Butler of South Carolina, and Frederick N. Ogden of Louisiana were all ex-Confederate officers of high rank.

⁹ M. W. Gary's plan for the South Carolina campaign of 1876. Quoted in Simkins and Woody, South Carolina, pp. 564-569.

Dear Sir:

At the solicitation of several others
I write to ask your permission to or-
ganize a Sabre Club, for our own amuse-
ment, in Norris Township, Edgefield
County.¹⁰

Various other arguments, equally as misleading, were advanced in justification of maintaining armed rifle companies. It was often claimed, for example, that the purpose was "chiefly social".¹¹ One member described his particular club as a "social organization" designed to "cultivate the virtues of friendship and manly exercise,"¹² while another person made the naive claim that the only purpose of the White League in his area was "for our amusement and to improve the horsemanship of the young men of this vicinity."¹³ In spite of these diverting protestations, the movement did have a definite aim; it was concisely stated by the editor of the Opelousas, Louisiana, Courier: "The object of the White League is to

¹⁰ J. Beatwright to Franklin J. Moses, Jr., August 6, 1874. Franklin J. Moses, Jr., Papers, South Carolina Historical Commission, Columbia, South Carolina. Cited hereafter as Moses Papers.

¹¹ R. S. Beckman to Daniel A. Chamberlain, June 24, 1874. South Carolina Military Affairs File.

¹² R. R. Hemphill to Daniel A. Chamberlain, June 13, 1875. South Carolina Military Affairs File.

¹³ R. L. Craft to Daniel A. Chamberlain, June 16, 1876. South Carolina Military Affairs File.

put the control of the state government into the hands of the white people of the state."¹⁴

Participation in the movement was not restricted to those of voting age, exclusively. Boys over the age of sixteen were specifically included in the list of eligibles in South Carolina¹⁵ and there is one case on record where a rifle company was formed by lads "between the ages of six and ten years."¹⁶ White women were very active not only in recruiting for the volunteer companies¹⁷ but also in furnishing them with military insignia and trappings. The Abbeville, South Carolina, club, for example, was presented with a flag by Miss Kate Parker, who made it with "her own hands."¹⁸

Meetings were held periodically, sometimes in connection with political affairs and at other times merely

¹⁴ Opelousas Courier, July 4, 1874. Quoted in Brewster, Sketches, p. 175.

¹⁵ Simkins and Woody, South Carolina, pp. 564-569.

¹⁶ Senate Miscellaneous Document no. 48, III, 44 Cong., 2 sess., p. 624.

¹⁷ Morgan, Yazoo, p. 455.

¹⁸ Senate Miscellaneous Document no. 48, III, 44 Cong., 2 sess., p. 624.

to go through their drills "according to Upton's Tactics."¹⁹ These meetings were called by means of a prearranged system of signals which made it possible for a company to be mustered within a couple of hours.²⁰ Normally, a cannon shot was the agreed signal but when such equipment was not available, leaguers improvised in the following manner:

They took a couple of anvils and put them together, one on top of the other, and filled the hole with powder and fired them off whenever they wanted to call the club together. It makes a noise very much like a cannon, and can be heard eight or ten miles.²¹

The extent and number of military companies is difficult to determine accurately, but as a generalization it can be said that they appeared in almost every county where Republicans were either in the majority or were actually in control of public offices.²² Governor Chamberlain estimated that there were at least two hundred and ninety rifle clubs in South Carolina at one time;²³ a source in Mississippi

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 109.

²⁰ Simkins, Ben Tillman, p. 58.

²¹ Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 88.

²² Ibid., p. xxv.

²³ Senate Miscellaneous Document no. 48, 44 Cong., 2 sess., p. 509.

stated that nearly one-half of the white population of voting age in that state was enrolled in the movement.²⁴

Military units thus organized were armed to the teeth. Radical governors received many letters similar to this one describing White Line activities:

Dear Govnor: We here give you notice
that the white people of this towne have
jest received, by express from New Orleans,
three boxes of guns and also some boxse
of pistols for the porpus of a riot in
this place, whils we have not got a gun
or do not want any disturbemenst...²⁵

These reports were not exaggerated, for available evidence supports the view that arms were plentiful among leaguers. The two thousand members of the New Orleans league furnish an interesting illustration. Two-thirds of them were armed with Belgian muskets purchased in New York, almost all of them had pistols, and in addition, the club possessed two cannon.²⁶ One outfit in Mississippi had cavalry, infantry, and artillery units well equipped with shotguns, needle guns,

²⁴ Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. xxv.

²⁵ W. K. Jones to Adelbert Ames, September 10, 1875. Quoted in Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 19.

²⁶ Brewster, Sketches, p. 172.

and a six pound cannon loaded with scrap iron.²⁷ A. T. Morgan, Yazoo City's leading Radical, described that city's military organization as he had observed it from a place of hiding following the riot of September 1, 1875:

They were as well armed and under as perfect discipline, apparently, as any troops in our late armies were. Including the cavalry company from the county, there were not less than three hundred armed white men in the town. Their weapons were Winchester rifles, needle guns, double-barrel shotguns and pistols.²⁸

Several methods were employed to secure necessary arms for the rifle companies. So successful were these measures that Democratic spokesmen were able to boast publicly that the clubs were "fully armed, equipped and drilled."²⁹ Most of these arms were obtained by purchase and funds for this purpose were raised in various ways. Although there is no actual proof of the charge that money was contributed by the national Democratic organization,³⁰ there is considerable evidence that funds were privately subscribed in

²⁷ John Meek to Adelbert Ames, November 2, 1875. Ames Papers.

²⁸ Morgan, Yazoo, p. 474.

²⁹ Wharton, Negro In Mississippi, p. 187.

³⁰ John R. Lynch, Facts of Reconstruction, (New York, 1913), p. 141. Cited hereafter as Lynch, Facts of Reconstruction.

the North.³¹ Local subscriptions also paid for a share of the arms. Older men who were not expected to bear arms were requested to outfit younger men. In South Carolina, each rifle company captain was instructed

to see that his men are well armed and provided with at least thirty rounds of ammunition. The captain of the young men is to provide a Baggage wagon, in which three days rations for the horses and three days rations for the men are to be stored...in order that they may be prepared at a moments notice to move to any point in the county when ordered by the chairman of the executive committee.³²

Still another method of obtaining guns was to steal them from Negro militia units. Because this happened so frequently, Radical governors were constantly being warned to use every precaution when shipping arms. In spite of all such care, however, seizures were fairly common. In Mississippi, for example, guns which were stolen from militiamen were later seen in use by White Liners as they drilled.³³ Similar cases which occurred in South Carolina have already

³¹ Walter L. Fleming, Civil War and Reconstruction, In Alabama, (New York, 1905), p. 791. Cited hereafter as Fleming, Alabama.

³² Martin W. Gary's plan for the South Carolina campaign of 1876. Quoted in Simkins and Woody, South Carolina, pp. 564-569.

³³ Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 97.

been described.³⁴ These seizures and thefts apparently assumed sizable proportions, for one adjutant general officially proclaimed as potentially dangerous the fact that "a large number of the arms of the state are in the hands of independent organisations...not under the control of the law that governs the militia."³⁵

Since the political objective of the White Liners was in due time achieved, it is interesting to note the tactics which were employed to make possible their success. Their strategy had two fundamental aims; one was to intimidate Republicans indiscriminately and the other was to destroy Negro militia forces.

The policy of general intimidation of Republicans had many facets. Parades and other public demonstrations of force were common occurrences and were attended by leaguers in full military regalia.³⁶ In the field of political action, several maneuvers were employed, but the general policy was outlined in this instruction:

³⁴ See Chapter VIII.

³⁵ Report of the Adjutant General of the State of South Carolina, 1874, p. 6.

³⁶ Smedes, A Southern Planter, p. 230. Garner, Mississippi, p. 374. Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 279.

Every Democrat must feel honor bound to control the vote of at least one Negro, by intimidation, purchase, keeping him away, or as each individual may determine how he may best accomplish it.³⁷

Almost all Republican meetings were attended by White Liners,³⁸ who always threatened and often succeeded in breaking up the gatherings.³⁹ In some cases, particular Negroes were singled out for pre-election visits and were subjected to extremely harsh treatment.⁴⁰ Rifle companies were also active on election day, sometimes resorting to force and fraud to carry the day.⁴¹ As we shall see, these measures of intimidation proved quite successful.

The White Leagues also struck forceful blows directly at the Negro militia. Many of the race riots which took place between whites and the militia were the result of deliberate planning. A member of a South Carolina rifle company confessed

³⁷ Campaign instruction published by M. W. Gary of South Carolina in 1876. Quoted in Simkins and Woody, South Carolina, pp. 564-569.

³⁸ Lynch, Facts of Reconstruction, p. 141.

³⁹ Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 837.

⁴⁰ H. W. Warren, Reminiscences of a Mississippi Carpet-Bagger, (Worcester, 1914), p. 71. Cited hereafter as Warren, Reminiscences.

⁴¹ J. Meek to Adelbert Ames, November 2, 1875. Ames Papers.



IS THIS A REPUBLICAN FORM OF GOVERNMENT? IS THIS PROTECTING LIFE, LIBERTY, OR PROPERTY? IS THIS THE EQUAL PROTECTION OF THE LAW?
 MR. LAMAR (*Democrat, Mississippi*). "In the words of the inspired Poet, 'Thy Gentleness has made thee Great.'" [Did Mr. LAMAR mean the Colored Race?]

VIII. Anti-White Line Cartoon

that "it had been the settled purpose of the leading white men...to seize the first opportunity that the Negroes might offer them to provoke a riot and teach the negroes a lesson."⁴²

Clashes took place in Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina; the last important one which erupted in Hamburg, South Carolina, in early July, 1876, furnishes an interesting study in the technique of deliberately creating a race riot.

On July 4, 1876, the Negro militia company at Hamburg, under command of Doc Adams, while marching "company front" down the main street of town attempted to force two whites in a buggy off the thoroughfare. An argument ensued, but the whites were eventually allowed to pass.⁴³ On the following day, the white men swore out a warrant for the arrest of Adams, and trial was set for July 8. On that day, General M. C. Butler and his Sweetwater Sabre Club from Edgefield appeared in court, and one member of the group admitted that the purpose of the visit was "to provoke a row, and if one did not offer, we were to make one."⁴⁴ Adams'

⁴² B. R. Tillman, The Struggles of '76, (n.p., n.d.) p. 17. Pamphlet in possession of writer. Cited hereafter as Tillman, Struggles of '76.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

failure to appear furnished the necessary pretext. General Butler journeyed across the state line to Augusta, where he managed to borrow a cannon, returned hastily to Hamburg, and assumed command of his troops. Adams and his militiamen had, in the meantime, gathered in the Sibley building which served as their armory. The Butler forces advanced upon the armory and demanded the surrender of all guns in storage there. When the militia captain refused to comply with this demand, fighting broke out. In the first volley, one of the whites was killed; but when the Butler forces opened fire with their cannon, the Negroes in the building fled in haste. Thirty or forty militiamen were subsequently captured and placed under guard in the "Ring", an encampment near the railroad tracks. In the excitement which followed, several Negroes were murdered; five of the prisoners in the "Ring" were shot down in cold blood within full view of their comrades.⁴⁵ Since the avowed purpose of their "visit to Hamburg" was "to strike terror",⁴⁶ the Sweetwater Sabre Club

⁴⁵ Accounts of the Hamburg affair can be found in the following works: Senate Miscellaneous Document no. 48, I, 44 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 33-34. Tillman, Struggles of '76, p. 15. Allen, Reminiscences, pp. 312-325. Reynolds, South Carolina, pp. 344-347. Anderson (South Carolina) Intelligencer, July 13, 1876.

⁴⁶ Tillman, Struggles of '76, p. 24.

was able to return home secure in the knowledge that their mission had definitely been accomplished. And in spite of the fulminations of the Northern press, which launched a frenzied denunciation of "Sitting Bull Butler and His Edgefield Sioux",⁴⁷ the perpetrators of this slaughter were never punished.

These deliberate acts of violence were often times carried out with the aid and cooperation of other companies, either from neighboring counties or nearby states. During the Vicksburg troubles of 1874, a steamer was sent upriver to Yazoo City to transport arms loaned by White Liners there.⁴⁸ Out of state aid was quite common, as well. During the campaign of 1875 in Mississippi, whites from Alabama made frequent excursions across the line to aid their neighbors. G. K. Chase, sent to Mississippi by the attorney general of the United States, reported to his superior that "an invasion from Alabama is imminent",⁴⁹ and a Mobile newspaper urged that "Democratic and Conservative young men organize bands of minute men in every county" for the purpose of aiding

⁴⁷ Cited in Reynolds, South Carolina, p. 347.

⁴⁸ Morgan, Yazoo, p. 440.

⁴⁹ George K. Chase to Attorney General Edwards Pierrepont, October 27, 1875. Ames Papers.

their neighbors.⁵⁰ Governor Ames received a complaint from a Negro leader in Macon, Mississippi, that "the Alabama white people was out here on the 25th of August AD 1875 killing up black people."⁵¹ A white company from Helena, Arkansas, joined with the Conservative forces during the Friar's Point affair in Mississippi,⁵² and some fifty or sixty Georgia whites under the leadership of a man named Dunn traveled from Augusta to Hamburg in order to "help relieve" the state of South Carolina.⁵³ One hundred and sixty armed whites from Louisiana crossed the Mississippi River to participate in the Vicksburg riot,⁵⁴ and the following telegram from Trinity, Texas, to the whites in Vicksburg indicated that additional support from more distant areas could be counted upon:

To President Board of Supervisors:

Do you want any men? Can raise good crowd within twenty four hours to kill out your negroes.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Excerpt from Mobile (Alabama) Register. Quoted in Morgan, Yazoo, p. 479.

⁵¹ E. C. Walker to Adelbert Ames, August 26, 1875. Ames Papers.

⁵² New York Herald, October 6, 1875.

⁵³ Senate Miscellaneous Document no. 48, I, 44 Cong., 2 sess., p. 675.

⁵⁴ House of Representatives Report no. 263, 43 Cong., 2 sess., p. ix.

⁵⁵ Telegram from J. G. Gates and A. H. Mason, December 12, 1874. Quoted in ibid.

Conditions which were created by White Line activity caused much uneasiness to loyal Republicans. Appeals to their leaders were numerous. Governor Ames, for example received many appeals similar in tone to this one from his colored supporters: "We ask you for our protection or helpe some way or erther, knowing that you are our govnor and the only help for us."⁵⁶ Even President Grant received messages telling of deplorable conditions and requesting help:

Honored Sir: This letter is from a Poer freedman I write to Let you no about times down this way the rebels are outrageous In our city they have about fifteen Hundred Riffles scattered about in difrent houses and they sit up every night to watch them and they say the first chance they get they are going to kill the Dam leaders of the Republican party and all the dam Yankeis and niggers and that is just what they are doing...⁵⁷

Several attempts were made to curtail or destroy the growing White Line movement. Governors, in their extremity, resorted to issuing proclamations against rifle clubs demanding their disbandment. Ames took this step during

⁵⁶ W. K. Jones to Adelbert Ames, September 10, 1875. Quoted in Senate Report no. 527, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 19.

⁵⁷ Senate Miscellaneous Document no. 48, III, 44 Cong., 2 sess., p. 99.

the campaign of 1875 in Mississippi,⁵⁸ and Governor Chamberlain followed suit in South Carolina.⁵⁹ These proclamations were never effective. South Carolinians merely ignored Chamberlain's words, while Mississippians were openly defiant:

Ames emerged from his hole the other day and staid out long enough to say to the companies... 'disband'. But at the present writing they are not disbanding worth a cent, nor do they have any idea of doing such a thing.⁶⁰

White Line violence in South Carolina reached such alarming proportions that U. S. Grant was forced to enter the picture and issue a presidential proclamation directing the rifle companies to disperse within three days.⁶¹ The terms of the proclamation were obeyed in letter though not in spirit. The companies officially disbanded, to be sure, but they reorganized immediately under false pretenses and under such innocuous titles as the First Baptist Church

⁵⁸ Garner, Mississippi, p. 378.

⁵⁹ Anderson (South Carolina) Intelligencer, October 12, 1876.

⁶⁰ Excerpt from Yazoo City Herald. Quoted in Morgan, Yazoo, p. 470.

⁶¹ Proclamation issued October 17, 1876. Copy in Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia, 1876, p. 721.

Sewing Circle, the Hampton and Tilden Musical Club, and the Allendale Mounted Baseball Club whose roster of players contained the impressive total of one hundred and fifty names.⁶² By these devious actions, measures aimed at destroying the companies were effectively nullified.

The White Line movement was eminently successful in accomplishing its aim of political restoration through force. Radical politicians in particular and Republican voters in general were in agreement with these sentiments expressed by one of their number: "We have been slumbering on a volcano.... It is no longer with them the number of votes but the number of guns."⁶³ Political action of rifle companies was directly responsible for Democratic victory in Mississippi and South Carolina; and although final triumph did not come in Louisiana until 1877, the White Leagues contributed their part by maintaining considerable pressure on local Republicans.

Equally successful was their policy aimed at smashing remaining Negro militia units. The appearance of these armed military counter forces caused many militia units to voluntarily disband. Some were harassed, annoyed, and

⁶² Simkins and Woody, South Carolina, p. 509.

⁶³ John Meek to Adelbert Ames, November 2, 1875. Ames Papers.

intimidated into ineffectiveness, while others were physically destroyed. From the ranks of the White Line movement came the men who engaged Negro militia forces in those bloody affairs the most notorious of which were Vicksburg, Clinton, and Hamburg, where the whites instituted a policy of disbandment through extermination.

CONCLUSION

Judged by its professed aims, the Negro militia movement was a dismal failure. By 1877, it was apparent for all to see that the last of the Radical state governments were doomed and that individual militia units had either been destroyed, disbanded, or rendered militarily ineffective. This situation resulted directly from the program of violence inaugurated by a hostile element of the white population which remained implacable in opposition to the militia. It follows, therefore, that in order to understand the failure of the militia movement, one must also understand certain aspects of the campaign of violence which made that failure inevitable. More specifically, one is forced to answer two questions. Why were the whites able to prevail by armed force over the Negro militia? What were the real reasons which caused the whites to turn to such extreme measures?

The ultimate victory of the whites in the struggle was not due to their own aggressive actions entirely. These had their effect, to be sure; but it is unlikely that such

policies as retaliation against individual militiamen or even creation of White Line rifle companies would, in themselves, have been sufficient to guarantee victory had they not been accompanied by a basic error in strategy on the part of Radical leaders which seriously weakened the militia movement from within. This error was the failure to ever really employ the militia forces to the full extent of their power, and the fault rests squarely on the shoulders of incumbent Radical governors. Even in exceptional cases where executives favored maximum utility of their troops, they received much advice to the contrary. Governor Clayton of Arkansas was warned by no less a person than his own adjutant general against using Negro troops "except in case of extreme necessity."¹ A good deal of the reluctance to employ Negro soldiers stemmed directly from lack of confidence in their military prowess,² but this was by no means the sole reason. Governor Brownlow, for instance, expressed his displeasure at both the freedom with which Negro militiamen used their guns and

¹ Keyes Danforth to Powell Clayton, December 12, 1868. Quoted in Clayton, Aftermath, p. 119.

² J. C. Delavigne, "The Troubles In the South", The Southern Magazine, IX (1875), 517.

their general attitude toward whites.³ The main deterrent, however, was fear. Haunted by the spectre of race war, governors temporized and satisfied themselves with half-measures.⁴ In Alabama, numerous applications from "colored fellow citizens from Mobile, Selma, and Montgomery" requesting permission to organize militia companies were turned down by the adjutant general on explicit orders from Governor Lewis.⁵ Ames hesitated a long while before finally calling up his Negro troops in Mississippi, and the delay was, by his own admission, prompted by fear that arming the militia would cause the state "to drift into a war of races."⁶ When an outbreak of violence occurred in Jackson County, Florida, in late 1869, many demands were made on Governor Reed to send a loyal militia force there to quell the disturbance. Reed, fearful of the consequences of such action, squashed the demands by agreeing to raise a Negro regiment for the purpose provided the leading Radical agitator, named Purman, would

³ Coulter, Parson Brownlow, p. 290.

⁴ One Negro historian flatly states that "the Reconstruction governors were afraid to use these militia forces lest they start a race war...." W. E. B. DuBois, Black Reconstruction, (New York, 1935), p. 690.

⁵ Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Alabama, 1873, p. 3.

⁶ Adelbert Ames to A. T. Morgan, August 14, 1874. Ames Papers.

command it. His offer was speedily declined.⁷ This reluctance to mount an all-out offensive not only sapped the strength from the militia movement but also proved that Radical leaders were either ignorant of or unwilling to subscribe to the political theorem which realistically points out that "Social Revolutions are not accomplished by force, unless that force is overwhelming, merciless, and continued over a long period."⁸

Another source of weakness in the Negro militia movement resulted from the fact that they were, in a very real sense, abandoned by the national Republican administration. This abandonment was reflected in such actions as Grant's refusal to intervene in Texas and Mississippi at crucial periods of the struggle in those states. One should not be too harsh, however, in passing judgment on this apparent defection because it came about as a natural result of circumstances rather than as a deliberate plot to desert the Negro in his extremity. The cooling off of the Grant administration was essentially a reaction to the pressure of a changing Northern public opinion. It is true that when Governor E. J. Davis of Texas appealed to the president for

⁷ Davis, Florida, p. 577.

⁸ Wharton, Negro In Mississippi, p. 198.

troops, his request was refused and he was piously advised "to yield to the verdict of the people."⁹ It is no less true that at the same time, Grant was being plagued by an unfavorable reaction in public opinion which not only raised questions concerning Southern policy in general but also levied the charge of Caesarism against the President personally. When Ames asked for Federal troops during the campaign of 1875 in Mississippi, he was refused them with the terse but true comment that "the whole public are tired of the annual autumnal outbreaks in the South."¹⁰ Ames later remarked with some bitterness that "this flippant utterance...was the way the executive branch of the national government announced that it had decided that the reconstruction acts of Congress were a failure."¹¹ A further indication that the Northern people had grown weary of the Reconstruction experiment can be seen in the fierce reaction which followed on the heels of General Sheridan's famous "banditti" message sent from New Orleans early in 1875. Several Northern state legislatures

⁹ Clarence R. Wharton, Texas Under Many Flags, (New York, 1930), p. 205. New York Herald, January 13, 1874.

¹⁰ Cited in Wharton, Negro In Mississippi, p. 194.

¹¹ Adelbert Ames to E. B. Andrews, May 24, 1895. Garner Papers.



COLORED PARTY. "Why whars yer Farder and Mudder?"
 YOUNG AMERICA. "Oh, They're down stairs. I've an idea I'm an orphan

censured the action, and numerous protest meetings were held in Northern cities.¹²

As Northern public opinion continued to apply restraining pressures on the Grant administration, Southern whites began less and less to fear intervention by the Federal government and grew bolder in their use of violence at the very time when militia forces were becoming increasingly more vulnerable due to internal weakness. It is important to emphasize, at this point, that the eventual success of White Line tactics was greatly enhanced by the simultaneous debilitation of Negro militia forces which resulted from lack of gubernatorial confidence and withdrawal of presidential support.

Since destruction of the militia was accomplished by means of a carefully planned and well-executed campaign of violence, it is necessary to inquire into the reasons why Southern whites resorted to such extreme measures. Unquestionably, the cost of the program generated a great deal of resentment. A few figures will be sufficient to illustrate this point. In Texas, Limestone and Freestone counties were assessed thirty-six thousand dollars to pay costs of

¹² Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, pp. 304-305.

martial law proclaimed within their boundaries.¹³ The short but fierce "Kirk-Holden War" cost North Carolinians almost seventy-five thousand dollars; militia participation in only one election in Tennessee cost over ninety-three thousand dollars.¹⁵ In addition to the incredible expenses incident to the maintenance of the metropolitan police in New Orleans,¹⁶ the Louisiana legislature appropriated an additional hundred thousand dollars for support of the state militia.¹⁷ Arkansas spent the astronomical sum of three hundred and thirty thousand dollars during the martial law period of 1868-1869,¹⁸ and another two hundred thousand dollars as a result of the Brooks-Baxter War.¹⁹ An investigating committee of the South Carolina legislature fixed the cost of enrolling and arming the militia of that state at three hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars.²⁰

¹³ Herbert, Solid South, pp. 376-377.

¹⁴ Hamilton, North Carolina, p. 531.

¹⁵ Coulter, Parson Brownlow, p. 339.

¹⁶ Herbert, Solid South, p. 400.

¹⁷ Bowers, The Tragic Era, p. 365. Lonn, Louisiana After 1868, p. 65.

¹⁸ Staples, Arkansas, pp. 304-305.

¹⁹ Testimony of James R. Berry, State Auditor. House of Representatives Report no. 2, 43 Cong., 2 sess., p. 505.

²⁰ Reynolds, South Carolina, p. 177.

Not only were appropriated funds used to pay troops and purchase the wherewithal to make war; this money also invariably became involved in the too prevalent corruption of the period. Payroll padding was so common a practice that Governor Moses admitted under oath that not one-fourth of the persons listed on the South Carolina rolls at one period rendered any military service.²¹

Through militia claims commissions, vast sums of money passed into the pockets of persons whose only qualification for such collections were the good fortune to be recognized as avid supporters of the incumbent administration and the willingness to swear to a falsehood. In Arkansas, such a commission was created by the legislature as a result of Governor Clayton's urging.²² During the single year which it functioned, it disbursed over one hundred and twenty thousand dollars of Arkansas taxpayers' money.²³ It is interesting to note that the commissioner, himself, collected on at least two claims.²⁴

²¹ Report of the Joint Investigating Committee On Public Frauds In South Carolina, 1877-78, (Columbia, 1878), p. 677.

²² Clayton, Aftermath, pp. 165-166.

²³ Staples, Arkansas, p. 303.

²⁴ Ibid.

Governor Scott used fifty thousand dollars of militia money to bribe three South Carolina legislators in order to escape impeachment,²⁵ and his adjutant general, Franklin J. Moses, Jr., purportedly made the greatest single financial killing of his entire career from militia funds, no mean accomplishment in view of the career concerned.²⁶ So spectacular were the maneuverings of this official that a few of his antics bear repeating. On one occasion, he was sent north by Governor Scott to purchase rifles for the state. By the simple business technique known as the "kick-back", he received a fat sum from the supplier.²⁷ His biggest deal, however, involved guns which had been furnished South Carolina by the Federal government. Although these guns were in good working order, Moses negotiated a contract amounting to one hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars for their alteration to breech-loading rifles.²⁸ The alteration price per gun

²⁵ Reynolds, South Carolina, p. 173.

²⁶ R. H. Woody, "Franklin J. Moses, Jr., Scalawag Governor of South Carolina, 1872-74", The North Carolina Historical Review, 1 (April, 1933), 119.

²⁷ Report of the Joint Investigating Committee On Public Frauds In South Carolina, 1877-78, p. 672.

²⁸ Proceedings of the Tax Payer's Convention of South Carolina, 1874, p. 95.

was greater than the cost price of a new gun from the very company making the alterations.²⁹ Not only was an estimated seventy-five thousand dollars swindled in this particular deal,³⁰ but according to an employee in the adjutant general's office, the guns were actually less serviceable after the costly alterations than they had been before.³¹

The office of adjutant general, through which militia forces were commanded, became little more than a sine-cure in which one could use the handsome salary that accompanied the post as a reward to the politically faithful. Nepotism was not uncommon in connection with appointments. Parson Brownlow, for example, found his son to be admirably fitted for the job; he subsequently elevated a nephew, Sam Hunt, to the office.³² Governor Davis likewise filled the vacancy in Texas with a near relation, F. L. Britton.³³

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Testimony of John B. Dennis. Report of the Joint Investigating Committee On Public Frauds In South Carolina, 1877-78, p. 680.

³² Coulter, Parson Brownlow, p. 267.

³³ Clarence P. Denman, "The Office of Adjutant-General in Texas, 1835-81", Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XXVIII (1924), 302-323.

In addition to the resentment resulting from costs and frauds related to the militia movement, considerable bitterness was created as a result of militia activities. Although this phase of their history has been discussed in a previous chapter,³⁴ it should be reiterated here that the Negro militia was unwisely handled.³⁵ Their continued activity in politics, their depredations, and their minor social offenses undoubtedly increased the ill-feeling of the whites and must be considered as one factor leading to their decision to organize in opposition.

To the casual observer, the catalogue of offenses committed by militiamen plus the costs and frauds involved might seem sufficient to explain the failure of the militia movement. Any such conclusion, however, would be misleading in its oversimplification. One must be very careful in any analysis of factors explaining Southern attitudes and reactions to distinguish between actual wrongs and implied wrongs. In this particular case, the actual wrongs, the petty annoyances and depredations of the militia, merely

³⁴ See Chapter III.

³⁵ Alruthus A. Taylor, The Negro In South Carolina During Reconstruction, (Washington, 1924), p. 190. Cited hereafter as Taylor, Negro In South Carolina.

served to aggravate a situation that from the very beginning had been intolerable to many Southern whites because of the social wrong implied. The South during Reconstruction was not yet ready to acquiesce in the pious sentiments of the Congressman who declared that on that "last great day when the horn shall sound" the questions would not be "whether he was a black sheep or a white sheep, but whether it is good mutton."³⁶ For even had the militia refrained from committing a single act antagonistic to the whites, they would still in all probability have been destroyed. A Negro historian cuts right through to the heart of the matter with the following statement:

The very fact that the Negro wore a uniform and thereby enjoyed certain rights was an affront to most southern whites.³⁷

This racial affront was at the very core of the white man's hatred of the Negro militia. From racial bitterness it is but a short step to racial conflict; consequently, that strain of violence which runs with such persistence

³⁶ Congressional Record, IV, 44 Cong., 1 sess., p. 4707. Speech of Representative Samuel S. Cox of New York, July 18, 1876.

³⁷ E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro In the United States, (New York, 1944), p. 145. Another Negro historian confirms this belief by stating: "the very sight of the Negro in military uniform enraged the native whites...." Taylor, Negro In South Carolina.

through the course of Southern history was once again thrown into bold relief.

In retrospect, it appears fairly obvious that the Radicals, from the very beginning of their militia experiment, had faced a paradox. Confronted with the stern realities of political self-preservation, they had found it imperative to create a protective force which, due to peculiar local conditions, developed into a Negro militia. It is ironic that the organization of this protective force, because of its racial implications, actually aided in the destruction of the very thing it was created to protect.

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