

## Chapter 9

### Politics and Race Relations in Reconstructed Louisiana

Reconstruction was the period following the Civil War when Congress readmitted the southern states to the Union. In Louisiana Reconstruction lasted from the capture of New Orleans in spring 1862 until federal troops left in spring 1877. Occupied by Union forces early in the Civil War, New Orleans was the first Confederate city to undergo the ordeal of Reconstruction. The Crescent City also served as a prime testing ground for race relations under the new order.

Louisiana was the only region deep within the Confederacy where Union authorities implemented Reconstruction policies during the Civil War. Experimental practices in Louisiana shaped presidential policy, influenced congressional legislation, and became heated points of debate.

#### While War Still Raged: A State Divided

Within occupied southern Louisiana citizens were torn in their loyalties, goals, and visions for the future. These divisions were present even before the war, as seen in the secession controversy. When parts of Louisiana returned to Union control, some residents championed conciliation, cooperation, and occasionally even partial citizenship rights for free blacks and freedmen. Other Louisianians just as strongly resisted any show of reconciliation. Seeking vindication for southern deaths and wounded honor, they opposed moderate policies and rejected any rights for blacks, free or ex-slave. They advocated white supremacy and the need for social control within a changed racial order.

White New Orleanians were especially stubborn in refusing to accept defeat and occupation. Because the city fell early and did not suffer from battle, they were not driven by desperation to want an end to the Civil War. They refused to give up hope for a southern victory and thus were reluctant to cooperate with federal forces.

The "Battle of the Handkerchiefs" reveals the hostility many white Louisianians felt toward Union occupation. When General Banks ordered Confederate prisoners of war shipped out of Louisiana in February 1863, hundreds of women gathered along the New Orleans levee to wave goodbye to their friends, relatives, and "protectors." This sea of waving white handkerchiefs signaled undying resolution. Banks and other occupation

leaders often found it more trying to quell popular subversion than to defeat Confederate armies.

### Lincoln's Strategy: Moderation and the "Ten Percent" Plan

President Lincoln thought his experiment in Reconstruction stood the best chance of success in Louisiana, and he and his successor, Andrew Johnson, worked hard to put these moderate policies in place with all possible speed. Called the "Ten Percent Plan," Lincoln's program for restoring seceded states to the Union was made public on 8 December 1863. Designed in part to calm southerners' fears and bring about a quick end to the war, this conciliatory plan moved to restore southern states to their antebellum status, minus the institution of slavery and without compensation to former slaveholders. Presidential Reconstruction under Lincoln and Johnson was much more moderate than the succeeding congressional plan, known as Radical Reconstruction, would be.

Although General Butler introduced Union policies to occupied Louisiana, Lincoln really launched his reconstruction experiment during the command of Butler's successor, General Nathaniel P. Banks. Banks offered full pardon and restoration of all rights, except the right to own slaves, to all Louisianians who took an oath of loyalty to the Union and pledged to accept an end to slavery. When the number of "loyal" Louisianians reached ten percent of the number of votes cast in the state in 1860, these persons could establish a new state government, which entailed a new state constitution and elections for state and national representatives.

Prior to calling a constitutional convention, Louisiana's restored voters elected Michael Hahn, a German-born New Orleans lawyer, as their new governor in February 1864. The moderate Hahn overwhelmingly defeated Radical candidate Benjamin F. Flanders and the conservative, pro-slavery Unionist candidate, J. Q. A. Fellows. General Banks's wife celebrated Hahn's victory by throwing a grand *bal masqué* at the French Opera House. Ironically, several noted Confederate sympathizers mingled among the masked guests.

Louisiana selected delegates to write a new constitution. Reform-minded professionals, small businessmen, artisans, civil servants, and a few farmers composed the constitutional assembly. The delegates were determined to break the power of the planters, which they associated with the backward antebellum regime, and to "modernize" the state. Although the Constitution of 1864 did not give African Americans voting power, it abolished slavery and overthrew Louisiana's old order of rule by planters and merchants. The first state charter to incorporate Lincoln's moderate approach, Louisiana's 1864 constitution was the leading test case for postwar policy.

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 did not apply to the thirteen Louisiana parishes under Union control, where slavery continued. After much debate, convention delegates agreed to abolish slavery without compensation for masters but not to give the vote to African-American men. The 1864 constitution, however, authorized the state legislature to extend voting rights to black men who fought for the Union, owned property, or were literate.

The constitution also enabled the legislature to establish a free public school system for all children aged six to eighteen, with no mention of race. Legislators elected under the Constitution of 1864 established schools for whites but not for blacks. The new constitution also provided for an income tax and for minimum-wage levels and nine-hour days for laborers on public works.

Those Louisianians who could vote ratified their new constitution on 5 September 1864 by 6,836 to 1,566. An increasingly radical United States Congress, however, refused to recognize the newly reorganized state government or to seat Louisiana officials in Congress. Meanwhile, Presidents Lincoln and Johnson, both moderates in their approach to Reconstruction, did recognize Louisiana's constitution and government.

### "To Give Meaning to Freedom": A New Racial Order in Louisiana

Goals of the African-American civil rights movement of the 1860s changed over time as advocates gradually increased their demands. They began by calling for voting and citizenship rights for black males who had been free before the Civil War, served in the military, or owned property. Initial goals did not include the abolition of slavery but eventually took on the cause of freedom for all African Americans. As the civil rights movement in Louisiana and the nation gained strength, African Americans and their white allies escalated their demands to include universal male suffrage and other civil rights.

#### A Testing Ground for Race Relations

Occupied by Union troops one year after the outbreak of Civil War, southern Louisiana was the setting for the earliest civil rights campaign of the Reconstruction era. In addition, the nation's most articulate and politicized free black community lived in Louisiana. It used its colonial and antebellum tradition as a distinct, large, propertied, and educated group to its advantage and influenced debate on the status of the ex-slave in postwar society.

#### The Freedmen's Bureau

The United States Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands—commonly called the Freedmen's Bureau—on 3 March 1865. Agents of the Freedmen's Bureau tried to solve many of the problems associated with the ending of slavery. Not convinced that former slaves were ready to enter society, the federal government, through the Freedmen's Bureau, provided assistance and protection as part of a transitional training program.

The bureau took over many relief efforts previously handled by the Union army and aided in the transition from slave to free labor in Louisiana. Charged with easing postwar problems of the emancipated slave, agents of the Freedmen's Bureau worked to solve labor disputes, prevent reenslavement of former slaves, protect freedpersons from

violence, operate schools for blacks, keep former slaves on plantations and actively employed by means of annual labor contracts, and distribute clothing, food, and fuel.

Marshall Harvey Twitchell, a Freedmen's Bureau agent in the upper Red River Valley, explained his mission:

**My duty was to inform both black and white of their changed relations from master and slave to employer and employee, giving them the additional information that it was the order of the government that old master and old slave should remain where they had been [and] work as usual in the harvesting of the crop, at which time I would fix the pay of the ex-slave in case he or his former master did not agree about the amount. I expected all to obey.**

As its official title indicated, the Freedmen's Bureau assisted refugees—loyal southern whites—as well as freedmen. For example, the Louisiana Bureau obtained rations for 1500 whites and 600 blacks in Assumption Parish when floods destroyed crops in 1866 and 1867. Congress deliberately expanded the Bureau's authority to include white refugees to counteract an impression of preferential treatment toward African Americans.

Most southerners viewed the Freedmen's Bureau as either friend or foe, but the bureau actually followed a middle road. Bureau agents served mainly as moderators rather than reformers and could do little to affect postwar social and economic relations. Restricted resources—especially manpower—and lack of initiative also hampered the bureau's efforts.

Louisiana's black leaders especially questioned the bureau's ability to protect their constituents. Visitors to Louisiana, such as the Italian traveler Giulio Adamoli, who was in New Orleans in 1867, even remarked on the Bureau's limitations:

**Zealous reformers from the North have established the Freedmen's Bureau for the laudable purpose of protecting the newly emancipated slaves and regulating their relations with their former masters. The Negroes are required to register at the Bureau, and planters apply to it for whatever laborers they need. The Bureau supplies the planter with Negro hands, collects their wages for them, and sees that the contracts made with them are carried out. Its other functions are to look after the Negroes who are not yet employed and to provide them with sufficient instruction to enable them to exercise the franchise. Theoretically, this is very fine. In practice, it is a failure.**

## The Black Press: Advocate for African-American Rights

Louisiana had the first black newspaper in the South—*L'Union*—and the first black daily in the nation—the *New Orleans Tribune*. Working along with other groups and institutions, the free black press strove to give voice to and unite the desires of Louisiana African Americans.

*L'Union* was founded on 27 September 1862 and circulated as a biweekly and triweekly. Published primarily in French, *L'Union* ran a few issues in English beginning July 1863. The paper suspended publication on 19 July 1864.

Dr. Louis Charles Roudanez was *L'Union's* primary financier and Paul Trévigne its editor. Both men were prominent leaders in Louisiana's civil rights movement. The wealthy son of Louis Roudanez, a French merchant, and Aimes Potens, a free woman of color, Roudanez earned medical degrees from the University of Paris and Dartmouth College and practiced medicine in New Orleans prior to the war. Trévigne was a teacher and ardent abolitionist.

*L'Union* primarily spoke for Louisiana's established community of free people of African descent, although also for slaves and newly freed blacks. In the pages of *L'Union* free black leaders campaigned for political equality with whites, as well as advocated the abolition of slavery. By mid-1864 the civil rights movement in Louisiana had become even more radical; it demanded equal rights for all African Americans, including the right to vote. These issues increasingly polarized Louisiana's citizenry. In such a charged atmosphere, *L'Union* found that it could exercise only limited influence on the debate and stopped publication.

Into this world stepped the *New Orleans Tribune*, the first black daily published in the United States. When *L'Union* folded, its owner, Louis Charles Roudanez, immediately purchased the old newspaper's equipment, rehired Trévigne as editor, and started a new paper.

Founded on 21 July 1864, two days after *L'Union* published its last issue, the *Tribune* started as a triweekly newspaper but began publishing daily on 4 October 1864. It ceased publication in April 1868, reappeared later that year, and published weekly from March 1869 until its demise early in 1870.

The *Tribune* served as a rejuvenated voice for both free and freed African Americans in Louisiana, reflecting the changing attitudes of civil rights leaders. Its writers and editors called for political, social, and economic equality for former slaves as well as for freeborn blacks. They recognized "the necessity of being united and acting as one body" (*New Orleans Tribune*, 8 January 1865).

To attract newly freed slaves as readers and supporters, the *Tribune* published in both French and English, the latter mainly read, spoken, and understood by freedpersons. Its stated goal was to be the "spokesman and guide for the masses of African descent." Managing editor Jean-Charles Houzeau, who replaced Trévigne in November 1864, was one of the leading forces behind the *Tribune's* push to extend civil rights to freedmen and freeborn alike. In his own words: "Rather than speaking in the name and interest of a small group, the *Tribune*, I thought, should defend the masses of the proscribed race [blacks] and unite this oppressed population completely around its standard." Because of

his long association with the civil rights movement, many Louisianians thought that Houzeau, a white journalist from Belgium, was of African-American ancestry. Houzeau never let them think otherwise: he wanted to live the black experience, discrimination and all.

Throughout its history the *Tribune* was the mouthpiece for Louisiana radicalism. It started as the official organ of the Friends of Universal Suffrage, a political group that promoted extending the vote to all African Americans and evolved into the Republican Committee. In 1867 the federal government designated the *Tribune* an official paper of the United States, one of only two in the state. Its major responsibility as an official newspaper was to publish the authentic texts of laws, administrative announcements, and judicial decisions.

### Getting Out the Vote: Enfranchising African-American Men

The persistent efforts of African Americans and their white allies in Louisiana forced the issue of voting rights for blacks into the national arena. In 1864 they sent a delegation to Washington to petition for enfranchisement. When riots broke out in 1866 during a recall of the convention to rewrite the state constitution, those who wanted to enfranchise black males called attention to the need for suffrage extension on a national scale, realized in the First Reconstruction Act of 1867.

Most Louisiana African Americans valued the right to vote above all other rights. Without political power, they could not hope to protect their property or their lives. Freeborn blacks were the first to demand voting rights. Their efforts culminated in several meetings held at Economy Hall in New Orleans. Almost 700 free African Americans and numerous white radicals attended the first of these mass meetings in November 1863. At this assembly and subsequent ones in January 1864, participants delineated conservative goals. Free blacks and their radical white allies called for enfranchisement of the former free black population and permission to vote in the 1864 elections for state officials and delegates to the constitutional convention.

The reluctance of state authorities, especially the newly elected governor, Michael Hahn, to extend suffrage to free blacks hardened their resolve. They appealed directly to federal officials and sent a delegation to Washington in March 1864. Their representatives were Jean Baptiste Roudanez, an engineer and brother of *L'Union's* owner Louis Charles Roudanez, and E. Arnold Bertonneau, a New Orleans wine merchant. Over 1,000 free men of African descent, including 27 veterans of the Battle of New Orleans, signed the petition Roudanez and Bertonneau presented to Radical Republicans and President Lincoln.

The petition demanded "that all the citizens of Louisiana of African descent, born free before the rebellion, may be, by proper orders, directed to be inscribed in the registers, and admitted to the rights and privileges of electors." Radical leaders persuaded Roudanez and Bertonneau to include voting rights for former slaves as well as freeborn blacks before they presented the petition to President Lincoln.

Lincoln sympathized with Louisiana's free black population. He claimed, however, that he could do little but put in writing his support for provisions in the 1864 Louisiana

constitution that permitted the enfranchisement of certain groups of free black men. Even with Lincoln's approval of the extension of voting rights, the Louisiana legislature did not act.

Recognizing their mutual dependence, freeborn and newly freed blacks came together at the Convention of Colored Men in January of 1865. Calling for the organization and unity of all persons of African descent, the convention's 107 delegates voted to petition commanding military authorities to integrate streetcars and rejected extending voting rights to only a small group of black men. Their failure to issue a strong statement in favor of suffrage for all blacks, however, indicated that divisions still prevailed.

### **One Step Back : Louisiana Black Code of 1865**

Not only did African Americans fail to gain civil and political rights, they also experienced increased regulation over their private lives, particularly in the form of labor contracts. To control the behavior and actions of former slaves in the "free" postwar society, Louisiana and other southern states enacted Black Codes, modeled on restrictions in force under slavery.

Although the Louisiana Black Code of 1865 extended some civil rights to freedpersons, its primary purpose was to force blacks to enter into labor contracts with planters, enforce these agreements and plantation discipline, discourage planters from competing against each other for black workers, and punish as vagrants those blacks who refused to contract their labor. To make African-American women and children work in the fields, Louisiana, along with Texas, ordered that labor contracts include all members of a family.

The severity of Louisiana's and other states' Black Codes convinced many northerners that only with more radical forms of reconstruction would southern society change to accommodate ex-slaves as citizens and free workers. In response, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which defined the rights that all citizens were to enjoy equally without regard to race: to protect person and property, make contracts, and bring lawsuits. This federal legislation prevailed over all state laws and revealed the Republican Party's acceptance of what it had once considered Radical policy.

### **Riot of 1866 (The Mechanics' Institute Massacre)**

Radical Republicans in Louisiana, both black and white, reacted to passage of the Black Codes and the legislature's refusal to enfranchise black men by recalling delegates who had written the Constitution of 1864. In addition to voting rights, African Americans sought such civil rights as serving on juries and holding political office. Twenty-five delegates, along with some two hundred supporters, met for their first day of deliberations on 30 July 1866 in New Orleans at the Mechanics' Institute, then used as the statehouse.

That afternoon a group of white citizens, aided by New Orleans police and firemen, attacked the delegates and their black supporters. These white assailants, many of them Confederate veterans, opposed the convention's goals and new Reconstruction policies.

Federal troops at Jackson Barracks were called in to stop the violence, but by the time they arrived the mayhem had run its course. Official reports from the massacre listed 37 persons (34 blacks and 3 white Radicals) killed and 146 wounded. Contemporary witnesses, however, believed the numbers to be much higher. One of those killed was the Reverend J. W. Horton, who stood in the doorway of the Mechanics' Institute and implored oncoming rioters to spare the lives of those inside. Waving a white handkerchief, Horton cried, "We surrender, we are peaceable, don't fire, take us prisoners, but don't fire." His plea went unheeded. He was shot in the right arm, and received fractures to his hand and skull. He died of his wounds six days later.

Dr. Anthony P. Dostie, a white dentist, was also killed during the riot. A Unionist and true Radical Republican, he came to New Orleans sometime before the Civil War. He openly and loudly opposed secession and the Confederacy and was an outspoken advocate of African-American enfranchisement and civil rights. An extremely controversial figure, Dostie was a particular object of the mob's rage. He was shot in the spine and received a swordthrust in his stomach during the uprising.

Jean-Charles Houzeau, the editor of the *New Orleans Tribune*, witnessed the massacre:

**At about one o'clock in the afternoon during a recess in the meeting [of the constitutional convention], the city hall bell [rang]. . . . At that sound, squads of policemen armed with revolvers, companies of voluntary firemen also armed with pistols and axes, and auxiliaries organized from secret proslavery societies, set off from different points in the city. . . .**

**From the front door I watched for a moment this odious massacre, a sort of ambush into which unarmed victims continually fell. Those wounded who still had some strength dragged themselves under the columns whose drenched tiles had become a large pool of blood. . . .**

**The massacre lasted until after three o'clock. The room where the convention had met and where many men had remained was broken into behind blazing weapons. There the Protestant minister, Horton, was shot down as he waved a white flag; Captain Loup was slashed to ribbons by hunting knives; Dr. Dostie was mortally wounded, then dragged through the gutters, and finally thrown on a trash heap, around which the assassins danced and shouted hurrahs for Jefferson Davis. More than one hundred and thirty people lost their lives—all, of course belonged to the unarmed crowd: not one single person died on the other side. . . .**

**The night was spent removing the bodies and transporting the wounded. But the troops were few and could not guard more than a**

**few points; the colored population and its white friends still lived, alas, under the threat of an all too natural terror.**

When news of the massacre reached the North, moderate Republicans united with radicals to wrest control of Reconstruction from President Andrew Johnson. With public opinion behind them, Republicans in Congress passed the Reconstruction Acts of 1867. Republicans also won overwhelming victories in the 1868 congressional and presidential elections.

### Radical Reconstruction in Louisiana

Contrary to legend, Radical Reconstruction in Louisiana was not characterized by the corrupt rule of either a black majority or so-called "carpetbaggers." It was, however, an intense, sometimes violent, contest between those who favored Radical Republican policies and those who fought for white supremacy as the philosophy that would guide public policy in Louisiana.

On paper, supporters of civil rights for all men regardless of race appeared to emerge victorious. In reality, their struggle failed. Civil rights legislation passed and applied in Louisiana placed the burden of proof on the injured parties. Without much federal, state, or local protection, African Americans and their white allies found that they had very little power to enforce laws that attempted to erase the color line.

African Americans did not hold a majority of government positions in Louisiana in the 1860s and 1870s. An equal number of white and black delegates wrote the Constitution of 1868, considered one of the best of its time. Also, fewer blacks than whites served in the state legislature and in many other government bodies during the Reconstruction era.

The government agencies in which African Americans did participate were often less corrupt than those in antebellum or post-Reconstruction administrations. The state treasurer's office, headed from 1868 until 1878 by Republican Antoine Dubuclet, a free man of color from Iberville Parish, provides one revealing example. A bipartisan investigation, initiated by Democratic opponents, found Dubuclet's tenure free of corruption. Dubuclet's white successor, Democrat E. A. Burke, on the other hand, allegedly robbed Louisiana of more than one and a half million dollars during his ten-year term. Burke came to Louisiana seeking his fortune in 1870. As a result of his misconduct, Burke fled the country and lived as a fugitive from justice in Europe and Honduras until his death in 1928.

"Carpetbaggers"—black and white northerners who moved to the South after the Civil War—were never in the majority in the 1867–1868 Louisiana constitutional convention or subsequent Reconstruction legislatures. White supremacist opponents of Radical Reconstruction developed and perpetuated the tale of the greedy, corrupt northern "stranger" who stripped Louisiana of its resources. They looked favorably upon white

Northerners, like Burke, who joined the Democratic party and upheld white supremacy, but denounced as carpetbaggers those who aligned with Republicans and defended the rights of African Americans

Most carpetbaggers were former soldiers from middle-class families who went south seeking a livelihood, not political office. Carpetbaggers who did participate in politics usually did not seize power, but rather were elected by black and white voters or appointed by Radical Republican officeholders.

### **"A State Constitution Magnificent for Its Liberal Principles": The Louisiana Constitution of 1868**

The Constitution of 1868 was one of the best in Louisiana history and at the time one of the most forward-looking constitutions in the United States. It extended voting and other civil rights to black males, established an integrated, free public school system, and guaranteed blacks equal access to public accommodations. The 1868 constitution was also the first Louisiana constitution to provide a formal bill of rights.

In April 1868 Louisiana voters ratified the constitution 51,737 to 39,076, with the backing of a solid black voting block. At the same time voters elected new legislators and other state officials.

#### **Louisiana Constitutional Convention**

The convention met at the Mechanics' Institute in New Orleans in November 1867. Among the forty-nine black delegates were few former slaves; most had been free before the Civil War. The forty-nine white delegates were split almost two to one between Radical and Unionist factions of the Republican Party. More conservative than Radical delegates, the Unionists supported legal and political, but not social, equality for blacks and whites, and they opposed desegregation.

Louisiana's Constitution of 1868 attempted to create a society based on egalitarian principles. It incorporated provisions of the First Reconstruction Act of 1867 by extending the right to vote and hold public office to African-American men. All officeholders had to swear an oath accepting the political and civil equality of all men. The Black Codes of 1865 were eradicated, as were property qualifications for holding office. Writers of the constitution also disfranchised former Confederates.

African-American delegates played a crucial role in passage of Articles 135 and 13 of the new constitution. Article 135 established at least one free public school in each parish, with children six to eighteen years of age eligible to attend regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Article 13 guaranteed to all persons "equal rights and privileges upon any conveyance of a public character; and all places of business or of public resort." Delegates defined a place of public character as any business that required a state, parish, or city license to operate.

The year before the constitution, New Orleans had outlawed the "star car" system, which relegated African Americans to streetcars marked with a star. In protest, blacks

boarded unmarked cars and made drivers halt transportation until one of the parties backed down. Their actions forced General Sheridan, military governor of the Fifth District, to paint over the stars and integrate the streetcars. Louisiana legislators strengthened Article 13 with passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1869, which allowed injured parties to sue owners of public facilities who refused to abide by Article 13.

In real terms Article 13 and the Civil Rights Act did little to end racial discrimination in public places. Although blacks tested antidiscrimination legislation in the courts and authorities occasionally enforced its provisions, the color line was rarely challenged in Louisiana. Most African Americans could not afford to ride trains and steamboats, attend the opera, or drink at exclusive clubs, nor could they pay the costs associated with suing offending institutions.

### Primary Black Leaders

In general, African-American leaders in Louisiana during Reconstruction were very different from the people they sought to represent. Most were free before the Civil War, born in Louisiana, financially secure, and literate. They were skilled workers, businessmen, or professionals, and had owned property, including slaves, prior to the war. *Tribune* editor Jean-Charles Houzeau described them as “a core of men of African race, who in their intelligence, sense of rectitude, commercial talents, and acquired wealth, held a peculiar place, a unique place, in the southern states. Here was a sort of elite; here was the vanguard of the African population of the United States.”

### John Willis Ménard

John Willis Ménard was the first African American in the United States to speak from the floor of Congress. Son of the first lieutenant governor of Illinois, Ménard settled in New Orleans in 1865, one of the many African-American carpetbaggers to come to Louisiana. Although voters in the second congressional district of Louisiana elected Ménard to the United States House of Representatives in 1868, Congress contested the election. Still hesitant to accept black representatives, they allowed Ménard to plead his case but in the end refused to seat him.

### Charles E. Nash

Charles E. Nash was the only African American to represent Louisiana in the United States Congress during the Reconstruction period. He served the sixth district in the Forty-fourth Congress, from 1874 to 1876. A native of New Orleans, Nash was a bricklayer and a former sergeant in the Union army.

### Oscar J. Dunn

Oscar J. Dunn was the first black lieutenant governor of Louisiana, elected in 1868 and serving until his death in December 1871. Dunn was born in New Orleans, learned

the plasterer's trade, and rose from private to captain in the Union's First Louisiana Regiment of black troops.

### **Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback**

P. B. S. Pinchback finished Dunn's term as lieutenant governor of Louisiana from 1871 to 1872. He served as acting governor of the state during the thirty-five-day period when the state legislature impeached and convicted Governor Henry Clay Warmoth. Voters elected Pinchback to the United States House of Representatives in 1872, but his opponent contested the vote and won. In 1873 Pinchback was elected again, this time to the United States Senate, and once more he lost when the vote was challenged.

Born in Georgia, Pinchback worked as a ship's steward prior to the Civil War. He commanded a Union company in the Second Louisiana Native Guards and organized a company for the Corps d'Afrique. A delegate to the state constitutional convention in 1867 and 1868 and to the national Republican convention, Pinchback was elected to the Louisiana senate in 1868. Following Reconstruction, Pinchback earned a law degree at Straight University, a black university in New Orleans, and accepted a presidential appointment as surveyor of customs in New Orleans.

### **Antoine Dubuclet**

Antoine Dubuclet served Louisiana as state treasurer from 1868 to 1878, the only African American in the reconstructed South to hold that office for more than one term. Although he could not rescue Louisiana from bankruptcy, he kept the deficit from rising higher. Republicans and Democrats alike respected his abilities and honesty.

Dubuclet was born free in Iberville Parish, married twice, and had twelve children, nine of whom were educated in France. A sugar planter, Dubuclet was the wealthiest free black in Louisiana prior to the Civil War. In 1864 his estate was valued at \$94,700 and included more than 100 slaves.

Dubuclet's sister, Josephine Decuir, also worked to advance the civil rights of Louisiana blacks. In 1872 she sued a steamboat owner who refused to give her a stateroom in the "ladies' cabin," reserved for the exclusive use of white women. This and other cases tested Article 13 of the 1868 constitution and the Louisiana Civil Rights Act of 1869. Although a state court upheld Article 13, the United States Supreme Court eventually overturned the lower court's decision and declared the provision unconstitutional.

### **C. C. Antoine**

The third black lieutenant governor of Louisiana was C. C. Antoine, who served from 1872 to 1876. In 1876 he ran for reelection with Republican gubernatorial candidate Stephen B. Packard but stepped down when federal troops withdrew from Louisiana and the Democratic administration took over. Antoine held other political offices during Reconstruction, including state senator from Caddo Parish, from 1868 to 1872, and Caddo Parish school board member, 1875.

Although born in New Orleans, Antoine moved to Shreveport following the Civil War. During the war he organized and served as captain of a company in the Louisiana Corps d'Afrique. Antoine was a barber, grocery store owner, and planter.

### Thomy Lafon

Thomy Lafon, an active Republican party member, provided important financial contributions to the civil rights movement. A New Orleans native, Lafon built a fortune as a merchant and real estate investor. When he died in 1893, he left much of his \$413,000 estate to charitable, educational, and cultural institutions that served African Americans.

### Some Black Delegates to the 1867–1868 Constitutional Convention

**Dennis Burrel.** A blacksmith and former slave of a sugar planter, Burrel represented St. John the Baptist Parish in the 1867–1868 constitutional convention and served in the state house of representatives.

**Robert I. Cromwell.** A delegate from the second district (New Orleans), thirty-seven-year-old Cromwell was a medical doctor and native of Virginia who had come to New Orleans from Wisconsin in 1864. Severely beaten and robbed by a policeman during the 1866 riot, this black carpetbagger brought charges against the offending officer, who was jailed for his misconduct.

**Pierre G. Deslonde.** Deslonde served as a constitutional delegate and later as Louisiana secretary of state from 1872 to 1876. Of African and French parentage, Deslonde was a wealthy Iberville Parish sugar planter.

**Thomas and Robert Isabelle.** The Isabelle brothers were born free and served as officers in the Union army. Thomas managed a sewing-machine store on Baronne Street in New Orleans, and Robert worked as a dyer and part-time clerk.

**Charles LeRoy.** LeRoy represented Natchitoches Parish at the convention and later served as the Natchitoches postmaster.

**William Meadows.** An ex-slave farmer from Claiborne Parish, Meadows was murdered in 1869 by white opponents in his own backyard, in full view of his family.

**Solomon Moses.** Moses was a forty-one-year-old builder and later a Custom House official.

**Robert Poindexter.** Poindexter represented Assumption Parish as first a constitutional delegate and then a state senator.

**Curtis Pollard.** A Baptist preacher and farmer, Pollard represented Madison Parish at the convention and served as a state senator for eight years. In response to terrorist activity directed against him, Pollard migrated to Kansas in the late 1870s.

**David Wilson.** A native of Kentucky, Wilson operated a barbershop in New Orleans at 152 Calliope Street.

### Primary White Leaders

#### Henry Clay Warmoth

Henry Clay Warmoth, a white carpetbagger from Illinois, served as the first Reconstruction governor of Louisiana, 1868 to 1872. A mere twenty-five years old in 1868, Warmoth tried to please all Louisianians, failed to take a firm stand on important issues, and alienated most of the population. During his term Warmoth became increasingly conservative; he vetoed civil rights legislation, refused to enforce desegregation of public schools, and appointed Democrats to Custom House offices, a stronghold of Radical Republicans. In the 1872 election Warmoth went so far as to ally himself with the Democrats to prevent victory by the Radicals, popularly known as the Custom House Ring because they controlled lucrative positions in the regulation of commerce.

Both Democrats and Republicans claimed victory in the 1872 elections; a federal returning board decided in favor of the Republicans. Radical Republicans in the Louisiana legislature immediately moved to impeach Warmoth. They convicted him in December 1872, leaving Lieutenant Governor Pinchback to act as governor during the last thirty-five days of Warmoth's term.

Unlike most carpetbaggers, Warmoth spent the rest of his life in Louisiana. In addition to practicing law and acquiring a sugar plantation, Warmoth served as a Louisiana state representative from 1877 to 1879 and as a member of the constitutional convention of 1879. He died in New Orleans in 1931.

#### Thomas J. Durant

A lawyer who had lived in New Orleans since the 1830s, Thomas Jefferson Durant was one of the few Louisianians who supported Lincoln's candidacy in 1860. During the occupation period and Presidential Reconstruction Durant emerged as the leading spokesperson for the Radical faction. He actively campaigned for black voting rights and helped organize the Friends of Universal Suffrage and the Radical Republican Club.

#### William Pitt Kellogg

The state's leading Radical Republican, William Pitt Kellogg served as its second (and last) Reconstruction governor, from 1873 to 1877, a period of intense political turmoil. Kellogg initially tried to appease Democrats, but when this failed, he actively courted blacks and white Republicans. During his administration Kellogg and the

Republican legislature enacted additional civil rights legislation, reduced state expenditures and tax rates, allocated money to charities, and tried to eradicate corruption and bribery.

Prior to his term as governor, Kellogg was collector of the port of New Orleans and a United States senator. He returned to the Senate in 1877, serving until 1883, and then was elected to the United States House of Representatives, from 1883 to 1885.

### James Madison Wells

Louisiana voters elected James Madison Wells lieutenant governor on the Michael Hahn ticket in 1864. When the state legislature chose Hahn as Louisiana representative to the United States Congress, Wells took over as governor. He then ran successfully for governor in the November 1865 election. Wells was what was known as a "scalawag," a native-born white who supported the Republican party. Following the Reconstruction era, Wells retired to his plantation in Rapides Parish.

### Opponents of Reconstruction: White Supremacy Groups

Several terrorist organizations sprang up in Louisiana during the Reconstruction era. They primarily aimed to intimidate Republican voters and officeholders of both races, obstruct implementation of Radical Republican policies, and restore Louisiana to rule by native whites. The main instruments of white terror in Louisiana were the Knights of the White Camellia and a later group, the White League. The earliest white supremacy organization in the South, the Ku Klux Klan, formed in Tennessee in 1866, but evidence of the Klan's activity in Louisiana is scanty.

Both the Knights of the White Camellia and the White League were formed with the immediate goal of keeping white and black Republicans away from polling places, the former in the 1868 election and the latter in the 1874 election. The Knights developed as a new force in Louisiana politics from 1868 to 1874. Their successor, the White League, gained influence in the lower Red River Valley and spread to New Orleans and the rest of the state by the summer of 1874.

Whites, many of them Democrats, joined these terrorist organizations when they began losing power to Radical Republicans, both white and black, in Reconstruction Louisiana. The election of dual Democrat and Republican governments in 1872 and federal use of force to install and maintain Radical candidates persuaded many native white supremacists to join para-military groups like the White League.

In the words of Edward King, a writer for *Scribner's Monthly* who visited Louisiana in 1874: "The Louisiana white people were in such terror of the negro government that they would rather accept any other despotism. A military dictator would be far preferable to them; they would go anywhere to escape the ignominy to which they were at present subjected."

### Acts of Violence against Individuals

Violent acts aimed at blacks and their white supporters soared in the postwar years. One North Carolina visitor to Louisiana in 1865 reported that white locals governed "by the pistol and the rifle." Henry Adams, a Louisiana ex-slave, testified before

Congress that he "saw white men whipping colored men just the same as they did before the war" and that "over two thousand colored people" were murdered near Shreveport in 1865 alone.

Black leaders within Louisiana were primary targets of such violent acts. A mob killed Joseph L'Official in 1870 on the night that he was elected to the state legislature from East Baton Rouge Parish. Another mob murdered Franklin St. Clair, a Monroe schoolteacher and candidate for state representative, while he was returning from a speaking engagement in April 1868. St. Clair's white killer, J. T. Payne, went free. Black State Senator Alexander François was killed while he was serving in the legislature.

### Riots

During the Reconstruction era riots erupted throughout the state, in St. Bernard, St. Landry, Bossier, and St. Mary Parishes, New Orleans, and elsewhere. Republican forces rarely controlled areas outside of New Orleans. In rural areas near-anarchy or guerrilla warfare often prevailed. Some of the most violent activity took place in north Louisiana with the Colfax Riot of April 1873 and the Coushatta Massacre of August 1874.

The Colfax Riot was the bloodiest single instance of racial violence in the Reconstruction era in all the United States. It revealed the lengths to which some opponents of Reconstruction would go to regain their accustomed authority and the mighty forces against which African Americans had to struggle, seemingly hopelessly, to gain equality. According to John G. Lewis, a black educator and legislator in Louisiana, blacks tried to defend their rights, with the result that "on Easter Sunday of 1873, when the sun went down that night, it went down on the corpses of two hundred and eighty negroes." Other reports listed 105 African Americans and 2 whites murdered.

Disputes over the 1872 election results had produced dual governments in Louisiana, one Republican, the other Democrat, from the governor on down. Fearful that local Democrats would seize power, former slaves under the command of black Civil War veterans and militia officers took over Colfax, the seat of Grant Parish. After a three-week defense, these black and white Republicans succumbed to a white Democrat assault. A massacre followed, including the slaughter of about fifty African Americans who had laid down their arms and surrendered.

White League influence spread to northwest Louisiana in the summer of 1873. Its brutal actions targeted whites as well as blacks, especially those whites who courted black votes. One such episode was directed against white Republican leaders in Coushatta, the family of carpetbag politician Marshall Harvey Twitchell. Twitchell had moved to Bienville Parish after the Civil War, where he became a prominent cotton planter and businessman. In 1871 he was elected the youngest member of the state senate, representing Bienville Parish in the Reconstruction legislature, where he played a key role in the creation of Red River Parish.

In August 1874, while Twitchell was in New Orleans, White Leaguers arrested and executed Twitchell's brother, two of his brothers-in-law, and three other white Republicans. Twitchell returned to Coushatta from New Orleans with two companies of federal troops, his goal to restore Republican rule in the parish. Democratic leaders

continued to control local politics, however. In 1876 they assassinated Twitchell's third brother-in-law, and tried to kill Twitchell, who lost both his arms in the fray.

### **First Battle of the Cabildo, 1873**

The First Battle of the Cabildo fought on 5 March 1873 pitted Democrats supporting John McEnery against the Metropolitan Police of New Orleans, an integrated militia that protected the Republican administration under Governor Kellogg. In the 1872 election McEnery had run against Kellogg for governor. Both candidates claimed victory and established dual police forces and legislatures.

The Metropolitan Police put down the McEnery militia's coup attempt, directed at Metropolitan headquarters in the Cabildo on 5 March. The next day they dispersed the McEnery legislature, which met in Odd Fellows' Hall. Kellogg and the Republicans were restored to power, although their tenure was unstable for the remainder of Reconstruction.

### **Battle of Liberty Place**

On 14 September 1874 the Metropolitan Police once again clashed with Democratic militia forces, now organized as the Crescent City White League, in what is known as the Battle of Liberty Place. This time the Metropolitan Police lost, and federal troops had to be called in to restore Governor Kellogg to office. They helped maintain Kellogg in power, at least in New Orleans, until the end of Reconstruction two years later.

### **Metropolitan Police**

Made up of black and white recruits, the Metropolitan Police acted as a Republican militia during Radical Reconstruction in Louisiana. General James Longstreet and Superintendent A. S. Badger commanded a force of 500 Metropolitan Police, 100 additional armed police, and some 3,000 black militia at the Battle of Liberty Place. They faced about 8,400 White Leaguers and other dissidents.

One of the leaders of Republican police forces in New Orleans was James Lewis, a black man from Mississippi who rose from sergeant to captain of the Metropolitan Police and finally to city council commissioner of police and public improvements. From humble beginnings as a boat steward, Lewis gained prominence in Louisiana during Reconstruction and beyond. He organized free Freedman's Bureau state schools for African Americans, served as state surveyor general, became grand master of the Louisiana Free Masons, and commanded the Grand Army of the Republic in Louisiana and Mississippi.

### **The Action**

White Leaguers and Metropolitans waged a hard-fought battle at the foot of Canal Street on the afternoon of 14 September. Angry whites had gathered at the Clay Statue on Canal Street that morning to protest Republican rule, and the meeting escalated into an armed revolt. The Metropolitan Police established a diagonal line of defense from the third precinct headquarters in the Cabildo to Canal Street. While many Republican

officials took refuge in the Custom House, the St. Louis Hotel served as the Republican State House and a stronghold of the Metropolitan police. Metropolitans, fearful of another White League attack, surrendered the hotel without a fight on the morning following the battle. The Cabildo, used as a courthouse during the Reconstruction period, also housed the state's arsenal. On the day of the battle, the Cabildo remained in the hands of the Metropolitan Police. During the night all but six Metropolitans deserted their posts, a severely wounded Metropolitan Police captain, Joseph H. Lawlor, surrendered the building to victorious White Leaguers the following morning.

The Crescent City White League, under the command of General Fred N. Ogden, quickly defeated the Metropolitans and forced them to retreat into the Cabildo and the Custom House. Casualties included eleven killed and sixty wounded Metropolitans and sixteen killed and forty-five wounded of the White League.

Federal troops arrived in New Orleans on the evening of 16 September, to put down the White League rebellion and reinstate the deposed Kellogg government.

### Continuing Presence of the White League

The White League remained powerful in New Orleans and Louisiana throughout the remainder of Reconstruction and into the post-Reconstruction era. Its activities helped restore white supremacist rule in Louisiana in 1877. Once Democrats were returned to power, they paid homage to the "heroes" of the Battle of Liberty Place with presentation swords, poems, songs, and statues.

### Return to Home Rule: The Election of 1876 and the Compromise of 1877

Louisiana was one of three remaining states, the others being South Carolina and Florida, still under federal military rule in 1875 and 1876. Following the 1872 election, Republicans and Democrats in Louisiana both claimed victory and established dual governments. A Republican returning board ultimately decided against Democrat John F. McEnery and in favor of the Radical ticket of Kellogg and Antoine, thus continuing Reconstruction in Louisiana for four more years.

Kellogg's Republicans, the so-called "Custom House Gang," constantly had to call in federal troops to maintain their hold on the political system. With the disputed election of 1876 and Compromise of 1877, the Republican Party finally gave up in Louisiana and the South and returned the state to Democratic home rule.

### Gubernatorial Campaign of 1876

Republican Stephen B. Packard faced Democrat Francis T. Nicholls in the 1876 race for Louisiana governor. Just as in 1872, both candidates claimed a majority of the votes and established separate governments. In January 1877 representatives in the two legislatures met separately: the Packard legislature in the State House and the Nicholls legislature first in St. Patrick's Hall and then in Odd Fellows' Hall, all in New Orleans.

### Second Battle of the Cabildo, 9 January 1877

Tensions between Radicals and white supremacists climaxed as the dual governments wrestled for control of the state. On 9 January 1877, the morning after his inauguration, Democrat Nicholls sent 3,000 men under the command of Frederick N. Ogden to take the Cabildo, seat of the Louisiana state supreme court and a precinct of the Metropolitan Police. Ogden's troops were made up of White Leaguers who had fought at Liberty Place in 1874 and Washington Artillery members. Heavily outmanned, federal and Metropolitan Police forces offered no resistance. The state supreme court justices gave up their courtroom, and Nicholls appointed a new judiciary.

### Disputed Presidential Election: Tilden v. Hayes

Political happenings in Washington, however, decided whether the Packard or Nicholls government would triumph. On the national level the two major parties disagreed over which presidential candidate, Democrat Samuel J. Tilden or Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, had truly won the election of 1876. A compromise worked out in February 1877 provided that disputed votes went to Hayes and in exchange Hayes permitted southern Democrats, also known as Redeemers, to take over governments in the three remaining militarily occupied states, Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana.

Once the federal government agreed to pull its troops out of Louisiana, the Nicholls administration took over. Packard's Republican supporters, holed up in the State House, maintained a shadow government until the end of April 1877. Delegates, primarily Democrats, wrote a new constitution that voters ratified in 1879. Louisiana returned to home rule, with white supremacist Democrats controlling most state, parish, and municipal institutions.

\* \* \*

### Conclusion

Although the promise of change pervaded Louisiana during the era of Reconstruction, few lasting transformations took hold. African Americans were now legally free—a major advance for democracy and humanitarianism—and for a while at least, black men could vote. Suffrage, however, only had symbolic value if citizens could not earn enough to provide basic necessities for their families and had to send their children to substandard, underfunded schools. Few Louisiana blacks and even many whites could purchase their own plot of land, with such economic arrangements as tenant farming, sharecropping, and debt peonage reducing them to continued dependency. As a result, many of the civil rights battles fought in the 1860s and 1870s had to be waged again one hundred years later.

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