

Reconstruction's End

a lecture by Rev. Colin Bossen for USW34: The Civil War: From Nat Turner to Birth of Nation, Delivered at Harvard College, April 11, 2016

That was “Black Betty,” as performed by the 1970s rock band Ram Jam. The song originated as an African American work-song in the early twentieth-century. Like the Rolling Stones “Brown Sugar” or “Miss You” it might be taken as a cipher representing white male desire for brown and black women’s bodies. The desire to control the bodies of people of color for economic gain and sexual pleasure is at the core of white supremacy. Caught within it is the myth that brown and black female bodies are always available for white male gratification: “Whoa Black Betty, bam-ba-lam / Go Black Betty, bam-ba-lam / Yo really get me high, bam-ba-lam / Yeah that’s no lie, bam-ba-lam / She’s always ready, bam-ba-lam.”

The defeat of the Confederacy brought the legal end of the control of black and brown bodies by Southern whites. No longer could children, women, and men be sold as chattel slaves on auction blocks. No longer could white masters rape black women with complete impunity. No longer were blacks excluded from the local, state, or federal polities. What came to be called Redemption was an effort by whites to reassert economic, political, and sexual control over black bodies.

“The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery.”¹ We have taken this phrase from W. E. B. Du Bois as something of a slogan for the course. In the arc of the sentence we have arrived at the final clause, “then moved back again toward slavery.” The collapse of Reconstruction did not render blacks in the same state as they had been in before the war. It left in place a white supremacist regime that was different in structure and scope to the system of chattel slavery that existed before the war. I will close my lecture this morning with some reflections on the enduring legacy of Henry Wilson, Vice President under Ulysses S. Grant, called the “Counter-Revolution” that followed Reconstruction.² Before we get there, let us focus on our central task for the day: the demise of Reconstruction.

Reconstruction ended with the Bargain of 1877. The bargain was a backroom deal brokered between the representatives of Republic candidate for President, Rutherford B. Hayes, and the Democratic candidate, Samuel J. Tilden. It stemmed from electoral crisis in which votes were

¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1998 [1935]), 30.

² Henry Wilson quoted in Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 223.

disputed and the outcome of the electoral college was far from clear. It resulted in Hayes gaining the Presidency. In exchange he agreed to have federal troops in Louisiana and South Carolina return to their barracks and thus grant the entirety of the South “home rule.”³

The Bargain of 1877 returned the South to the control of white Democrats for generations. Its long-term impact was almost immediately visible. Albion Turgee reflected on the situation in 1879, two years afterwards. Turgee was a carpetbagger originally from Ohio who served as a state judge in North Carolina during Reconstruction. In an interview he gave with the *New York Tribune* he remarked: “In all except the actual results of the physical struggle, I consider the South to have been the real victors in the war. I am filled with admiration and amazement at the masterly way in which they have brought about these results. The way in which they have neutralized the results of the war and reversed the verdict of Appomattox is the grandest thing in American politics.”⁴ [slide of Lee’s surrender]

The question at the heart of this morning’s lecture is this: How did the South turn in military defeat in 1865 to a political victory in 1877? History rarely yields simple answers. Yet, historians generally point to three factors that contributed to the reversal of “the verdict of Appomattox.” These are America’s enduring culture of white supremacy; the exhaustion of the abolitionist tradition; and economic shifts and disruptions. We will tend to each of these in turn. Along the way, I will layout a timeline for the counter-revolution that overturned Reconstruction. But before we turn to Reconstruction’s demise it is worth taking a few moments, again, to briefly outline its accomplishments.

The end of the Civil War brought the end of chattel slavery. With it, came the question of what would happen to the freedmen and freedwomen. What would their freedom mean? At least theoretically, Reconstruction granted blacks control over their own labor, control over their sexual reproduction, and the ability for black men to participate as full citizens in the local, state, and national politics. Each of these achievements profoundly threatened the Southern system white supremacy. White supremacy, again, might be summarized as the control of black bodies for the economic gain and sexual pleasure of whites. In white supremacy the primary mechanism of control is violence: both threatened and actuated.

Under Reconstruction, blacks gained what the free labor ideology of the Republicans had to offer. They had the right to work for wages. They could accumulate savings. They had the right to

³ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 244.

⁴ Albion Tourgee quoted in Richard Current, *Those Terrible Carpetbaggers: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 376 quoted in Budiansky, *The Bloody Shirt*, 9.

select their own employers. They had freedom of movement and in theory move up the economic ladder, eventually becoming employers themselves. To some extent, at least, they could also dictate the conditions of their labor. Professor Stauffer has already highlighted the ways in which the Black Codes of 1865-1866 immediately sought to undermine the ability of blacks to control their labor. Both he and Bob Mann also have recounted how free labor ideology for the most part failed to redistribute land.

Under Reconstruction, blacks gained the ability to control their sexual reproduction. Slave masters could no longer rip families apart and sell mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, grandfathers, or grandmothers off to other masters. The black family is one of the most important institutions to emerge from Reconstruction. By 1870 a significant majority of blacks lived in two-parent households.⁵ White men no longer had unlimited access to the bodies of black women to satisfy of their sexual pleasure. The access of white male elites to the bodies of black women had long been one of the cornerstones of white supremacy. Charles Sumner had exposed it in his speech “Crime Against Kansas.” Greatly offending Southern slave owners when he said of South Carolina Senator Andrew Butler, “he has chosen a mistress to whom he has made his vows, and who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him... I mean the harlot Slavery.”⁶

In his self-published 1884 memoir *Yazoo, or, On the Picket Line of Freedom in the South*, Albert T. Morgan recorded several disturbing vignettes about the place of the control of black women’s bodies in white supremacy. Morgan was a Union officer, carpetbagger, and abolitionist. Born in Wisconsin in 1842, he attended Oberlin College before beginning his military career in the Union army. After the fall of the Confederacy he and his brother moved to Yazoo, Mississippi to attempt to run a plantation on the system of free labor. While there he served as a delegate to the Mississippi constitutional convention of 1868 and as a Republican member of the Mississippi State Senate. In 1870 he also married a black school teacher named Carolyn Victoria Highgate.

In his travels through Yazoo, Morgan encountered a Southern Whig who shared with him stories of his electoral campaign for the State Senate prior to the war. Morgan writes, “It was made by him on horseback with two mules following behind, upon which he had packed ‘that gal, Sal, by G-d, sir,’ together with an ample supply of whisky and tobacco. ... Thus equipped he was able to offer the suffragans of Yazoo weightier arguments than his opponent on the Democratic ticket, for

⁵ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 38.

⁶ Charles Sumner, “The Crime Against Kansas: The Apologies for the Crime; The True Remedy,” speech in the Senate, May 19 and 20, 1856. With Appendix in *The Works of Charles Sumner, Vol. IV*, 125-342 (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1871), 144.

he could bid them ‘choose to their taste,’ from the greater variety of the ‘creature comforts’ which he ‘toted about’ with him. ‘By G-d, sir, that did the business for me, and I was the first Whig Senator ever sent to the legislature from this county.’”⁷ In other words, the politician had essentially bought his state senate seat by allowing white male voters to repeatedly rape a black woman.

Elsewhere Morgan describes a conversation he had with a “popular physician” shortly after the 1868 Reconstruction constitution was adopted. The constitution outlawed concubinage and opened the way for Morgan to sponsor a bill that legalized interracial marriage. In the course of Morgan’s conversation with him, the physician admitted that his principle objection to the new constitution was that it restricted white male access to black female bodies:

“‘Why, sir, that so-called constitution evelates every nigro wench in this State to the equality of ouah own daughters. The monstrous thing! Look atzit faw a moment! Ever since Washington’s time—and he understood it—the world wide fame of the fair ladies of the South faw beauty, faw refinement, and faw chasity has been ouah proudest boast. This vile thing you call a constitution robs us of that too.’

[Morgan interjected,] ‘My good sir, how do you make that out?’

‘Possibly you all are ignorant of the effects of the work you’ve been doing down there at Jackson. But that only illustrates another objection ou’ people have to anything you all may do. Such work ought never to be entrusted to strangers, faw the very good and sufficient reason that they can’t be expected to know the peculiarities of the people to be affected by it. Everybody who has resided in the South long enough to get acquainted with ou’ people and thar ways must know that the nigro women have always stood between ouah daughters and the superabundant sexual energy of ouah hot-blooded youth. And, by G-d, sir, youah so-called constitution tears down the restrictions that the fo’sight ouah statesmen faw mo’ than a century has placed upon the nigro race in ouah country. And, if you all ratify it and it is fo’ced on the people of the State, all the d—m nigro wenchies in the country will believe that they’re just as good as the finest lady in the land; and they’ll think themselves too good faw thar place, and ouah young men’ll be driven back upon the white ladies, and we’ll have prostitution like you all have it in the North, and as it is known in other countries. I tell you, sir, it’ll h—l generally ‘twixt ouah young men, and the nigros, too. The end of it all will sho’ly be the degradation of ouah own ladies to the level of ouah wenchies—the brutes!’”⁸

⁷ Albert T. Morgan, *Yazoo; Or, on the Picket Line of Freedom in the South: A Personal Narrative* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000 [1884]), 33-34.

⁸ Albert T. Morgan, *Yazoo; Or, on the Picket Line of Freedom in the South: A Personal Narrative* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000 [1884]), 211-212.

The good doctor's problem was, in sum, that the new constitution protected black women from white men. No longer could "the superabundant sexual energy of ouah hot-blooded" be channeled through black bodies. The physician feared that this change would result in a loss of purity for "the white ladies."

Reconstruction did more than just free African Americans from the bonds of chattel slavery. It brought black men into full citizenship. Throughout most of the history of the United States, full citizenship has had at least five elements. Three of these were highlighted in Rev. John W. Hood's speech at the 1865 North Carolina Freedmen's Convention. He said, "we want three things,—first, the right to give evidence in the courts; second, the right to be represented in the jury-box; and third, the right to put votes in the ballot-box."⁹ Besides the equality under the law, the right to be tried by a jury of one's peers, and the right to both elect representatives and hold public office it is worth lifting-up two other elements of full citizenship. These are the ability to create autonomous institutions and the right to bear arms. The relationship between arms, military service, and citizenship is something that Professor Stauffer has discussed in previous lectures.

Less discussed has been the ability to create autonomous institutions. Some of the first steps towards freedom that former slaves took after the military defeat of the Confederacy were the creation of independent black churches and schools. Almost immediately after emancipation, blacks withdrew from historically biracial congregations throughout the South to form their own congregations. During the antebellum period blacks had at best an associate membership within churches. They sat in the back or in galleys and been excluded from congregational governance and Sunday schools. With the end of slavery, blacks created their own worshipping communities. By 1877 almost all Southern blacks left biracial congregations for their own independent churches. In 1860 there had been 42,000 black Methodists who worshipped in biracial congregations in South Carolina. By 1877 there were only 600.¹⁰

In many cases the first buildings built after armed conflict ended were black churches. Here is a picture of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Also called Mother Emanuel, the congregation was founded in 1816. In 1822 it was investigated by whites because one of its prominent members, Denmark Vesey planned a slave uprising. In 1834 the congregation was driven underground when independent black churches were outlawed in South Carolina. It began openly worshipping again in 1865. This building dates from 1892. The

⁹ John W. Hood quoted in *The South Since the War as Shown by Fourteen Weeks of Travel and Observation in Georgia in the Carolinas* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), 122 in *Course Reader*, 204.

¹⁰ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 41.

congregation is probably familiar to many of you. It was the site of a white supremacist terrorist attack in 2015. The attack killed nine people, a testament to the enduring links between violence and white supremacy.¹¹

As Professor Stauffer mentioned in his last lecture, along with churches, schools were quickly organized throughout the South. By 1869, according to the Freedmen's Bureau, there were close to 3,000 schools serving 150,000 black pupils.¹² Literacy rates rose slowly, but accordingly. In 1860 approximately 90 percent of blacks throughout the South were illiterate.¹³ In the 1880 the percentage had decreased to 70. Despite this limited success, Reconstruction-era Republicans established for the time the principle that the state was responsible for providing public education.¹⁴

Alongside the creation of autonomous institutions came black participation in governance. Blacks held offices at the local, state, and national levels. In 1875, two years before the end of Reconstruction, African American representation in Congress peaked at members, seven in the House and one in the Senate.¹⁵ [slide]

Taken the black control over black labor, sexual republication, and the ability for black men to participate as full citizens in local, state, and national politics presented a profound threat to white supremacy. White rage at the prospect of black freedom was widespread. A sense of the intensity of white rage can be found in the 1868 response of the Democratic party State Committee in South Carolina. In a pamphlet titled *The respectful remonstrance, on the behalf of the white people of South Carolina, against the constitution of the late Convention of that state*, Democratic party leaders wrote:

“...That Constitution was the work of Northern adventures, Southern renegades and ignorant negroes. Not one per centum of the white population of the State approves it, and not two per centum of the negroes who voted for its adoption know any more than a dog, horse, or cat, what his act of voting implied. That Constitution enfranchises every male negro over the age of twenty-one. The negro being in a large numerical majority, as compared with the whites, the effect is that the new Constitution establishes in this State negro supremacy, with all its train of countless evils. A superior race—a portion, Senators and Representatives, of the same proud race to which it is your pride to belong—is put under the rule of an inferior race—the abject slaves of yesterday, the flushed freedmen of to-day. And think you there can be any just, lasting reconstruction on this

¹¹ <http://www.emanuelamechurch.org/churchhistory.php>

¹² Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 65.

¹³ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 43.

¹⁴ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 157.

¹⁵ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 228.

basis? We do not mean to threaten resistance by arms. But the white people of our State will never quietly submit to negro rule. We may have to pass under the yoke you have authorized, but we will keep up this contest until we have regained the heritage of political control handed down to us by an honored ancestry. This is a duty we owe to the land that is ours, to the graves that it contains, and to the race of which and we are like members—the proud Caucasian race, whose sovereignty on earth God has ordained...¹⁶

White supremacists channeled their white rage through the primary tool that they had always used to prop-up white supremacy: violence. Violence against blacks and against their white allies, both Northern Republicans and Southern Unionists, continued and increased in intensity as the conflict between the Union and Confederate Armies ended. White supremacist(ism) was widespread and well-organized from the opening days of Reconstruction. In the autumn of 1865 freedmen were routinely assaulted in Edgefield county, South Carolina. As one freedman told a Union general, “It is almost a daily occurrence for black men to be hunted down with dogs and shot like wild beasts.” A band of a hundred former Confederate soldiers roamed the county whipping and killing blacks who were brave enough to leave their former masters.¹⁷ In Texas between 1865 and 1868 at least 1,000 blacks were murdered by whites for reasons as petty as refusing to remove their hats. The majority of murders, however, occurred when blacks tried to assert their freedom. Blacks were murdered for leaving plantations, attempting to buy or rent land, disputing the terms of their employment, refusing work orders, and resisting whippings.¹⁸

Violence against blacks and their white allies went through three overlapping phases. The first phase was the briefest and is attested to by the episode in Edgefield County. White supremacists attacked blacks who tried to assert their new found freedom. This phase spanned roughly 1865 to 1866. The second phase was the phase of the Ku Klux Klan. It ran from approximately 1866 to 1872 and targeted the white and black political leaders of Reconstruction. The third, final, and most successful phase was the white line phase. Stretching from about 1872 to past the end of Reconstruction, it succeeded in doing what the other phases had not, re-establishing white supremacy in the South.

¹⁶ *The respectful remonstrance, on the behalf of the white people of South Carolina, against the constitution of the late Convention of that state, now submitted to Congress for ratification* (Columbia, SC: Phoenix Books and Job Power Press, 1868), 12 quoted in Stephen Budiansky, *The Bloody Shirt: Terror After Appomattox* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2008), 61.

¹⁷ Budiansky, *The Blood Shirt*, 56.

¹⁸ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 53.

All three phases of violence were possible because of a massive demobilization and change in priorities on the part of the Union Army. In May 1865 the Union Army comprised one million. By the autumn of 1866 it had only 38,000 soldiers.¹⁹ Many of them were not even stationed in the South. With the Confederacy's military defeat behind it, army leaders shifted their attention to the West and the national project of seizing land and resources from the continent's indigenous peoples. Towards the end of 1867 the number of soldiers stationed in the South was down to 20,000. It was only 6,000 in the autumn of 1876.²⁰ As Reconstruction ran its course, the United States fought wars with the Apache, Cheyenne, Comanche, Navajo, Paiute, Shoshone, Sioux, Ute and other indigenous nations in the West. Many Union officers saw their focus shift from what had become a war to end slavery to the conquest of indigenous lands. The infamous Colonel George Armstrong Custer, for instance, had been present at Robert E. Lee's surrender to Ulysses S. Grant before being sent West. He ultimately perished in the Battle of Little Big Horn.

As Union soldiers left the South, organized violence against blacks and their white allies began to increase. The career Ku Klux Klan offered the most infamous phase of this violence. The Klan began as a social club in Pulaski, Tennessee in late 1865 or early 1866. The organization's original members were former Confederate soldiers and its name attested to the initial fraternal aspirations. Like other fraternities, the name Ku Klux Klan is supposed to be a Greek reference. Ku Klux was a corruption of *kuklos*, the Greek word for circle.²¹ The Klan expanded in late 1866 and in 1867 began to turn to small acts of terror when former Confederate generals and politicians joined and took over the organization's leadership roles.²²

A secret organization with elaborate rituals, the Klan adopted costumes that were designed to both hide the Klansmen identity and inspire fear. It also created its own particular language to describe its nominal organizational structure. The head of the Klan was called the Grand Wizard. The first and likely, only, Reconstruction-era Grand Wizard was Nathan Bedford Forrest.²³

Forrest was well-suited to lead a white supremacist terrorist organization. Prior to the war Forrest had been both a plantation owner and a slave trader. During the war he had been a Confederate cavalry general who earned a reputation for racism and brutality when he oversaw the Fort Pillow massacre of 1864. The massacre, you might recall, involved the brutal murder of a large

¹⁹ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 67.

²⁰ Allen Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), xxxiv.

²¹ Trelease, *White Terror*, 4.

²² Trelease, *White Terror*, 13.

²³ Trelease, *White Terror*, 19.

number of black Union soldiers who surrendered after the fort they were defending fell to Confederate forces.²⁴

In early 1868, the Klan experienced rapid growth. It went from being a primarily local organization in Tennessee to one that stretched throughout the former Confederate states.²⁵ It was probably united more by a set of common tactics, targets, and objectives than by any sort of unified command. Klan members would set out after dark to a community far enough away that they would not be recognized by their victims. Their targets were selected by local allies and subjected to a range of brutalities. Black Union Army veterans and White Republicans were whipped, shot, or lynched for offenses like voting for the Republican Party. Often the attacks were preceded by warning notices, such as this one from Georgia.²⁶ In other cases, the Klan threatened African Americans or whites telling them that they would be killed if they voted Republican or continued to operate a school. Wherever they operated, and whenever they could, they searched for and seized guns held by blacks. In many places the strength of the Klan was such that rather than operating solely at night, they would stage massive marches through Southern communities in full regalia. In some cases these marches were weekly occurrences.²⁷

All told, about 10 percent of black officeholders were the victims of attacks or threats. And at least 35 black public officials were murdered by the Klan or its imitators such as the Knights of the White Camelia. Andrew J. Flowers was a justice of the peace in Tennessee. He offers one of the few accounts of these attacks from a black perspective. He recounted that he was whipped by the Klan “because I had the impudence to run against a white man for office, and beat him... They said that they... did not intend any nigger to hold office in the United States.”²⁸ In another of these rare testimonies, Alabama freedman George Moore reported that Klansmen came to his home, beat him, “ravished a young girl who was visiting my wife” and wounded a neighbor. “The cause of this treatment, they said, was that we voted the radical ticket.”²⁹

By the election of 1868, it was clear that the Klan was essentially the terrorist arm of the Democratic Party. *Harper's Weekly* regularly reported on the group's activities. In one article a reporter wrote, “A rebel colonel from Georgia, at a [Democratic Party] meeting in New York,

²⁴ Trelease, *White Terror*, 19.

²⁵ Trelease, *White Terror*, 27.

²⁶ Trelease, *White Terror*, 29.

²⁷ Trelease, *White Terror*, 35.

²⁸ Quoted in Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction*, illustrations edited and with commentary by Joshua Brown (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 134.

²⁹ Quoted in Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 185.

shouted that if ‘Northern Democrats will take care of the bayonet, the Southern Democrats would be responsible for the result of the ballot in November,’ meaning that the Ku-Klux Klan would take care of loyal voters.”³⁰

Violence surrounding the election was predictably widespread. In Arkansas alone there were more than 200 murders in the three months leading up to the November 3 election.³¹ President Johnson blocked the release of federal arms to the state’s militia. Fourteen counties, primarily Republican strongholds, were unable to vote and the Republicans won the state with a bare majority of 3,000 votes.³² Immediately following the election, Arkansas’s governor, Powell Clayton, declared martial law in ten counties.³³ Essentially following the national pattern of Congressional Reconstruction, Clayton then divided the state into four military districts.³⁴ He marched a newly armed state’s militia through Klan strongholds, seized numerous arms, arrested dozens of Klansmen, and ultimately executed three of them after military trials.³⁵

Ulysses S. Grant had a clear picture of the situation by the time he assumed office in early 1869. He observed that the Klan was committed “by force and terror, to prevent all political action not in accord with the views of the members, to deprived colored citizens of the rights to bear arms and of the right of a free ballot, to suppress the schools in which colored children were taught, and to reduce the colored people to a condition closely allied to that of slavery.”³⁶ Shortly after taking office Grant sent federal troops to suppress Klan activity in South Carolina.³⁷

The initial efforts of President Grant, Governor Clayton, and other Republican leaders was not enough to suppress the Klan. In 1870 Klan violence largely continued to increase. The Klan was essentially eliminated in Arkansas but thrived in South Carolina. In Laurens County, South Carolina, a racial conflict in Laurensville turned into a “negro chase.” Bands of whites drove approximately 150 freedmen from their homes and murdered 13 people.³⁸ Jackson, Florida as many as 150 people were killed.³⁹ In Meridian, Mississippi, as many as 30 blacks were murdered by armed whites.⁴⁰ Albion Tourgee counted 12 murders by Klansmen in North Carolina county alone.⁴¹

³⁰ Quoted in J. Michael Martinez, *Carpetbaggers, Cavalry, and the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 24

³¹ Trelease, *White Terror*, 154.

³² Trelease, *White Terror*, 158.

³³ Trelease, *White Terror*, 159.

³⁴ Trelease, *White Terror*, 161.

³⁵ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 189.

³⁶ Ulysses S. Grant quoted in Martinez, *Carpetbaggers, Cavalry, and the Ku Klux Klan*, 24.

³⁷ Martinez, *Carpetbaggers, Cavalry, and the Ku Klux Klan*, 25.

³⁸ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 185.

³⁹ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 186.

In response Congress passed a series of Enforcement Acts in 1870 and 1871. These acts prohibited state officials to discriminate against voters on the basis of race. They authorized the President to appoint election supervisors who could bring to federal court cases of election fraud, bribery or intimidation of voters.⁴²

The Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871 was the most far reaching of these measures. It turned actions designed to deny individuals certain of their rights into federal crimes. It was now possible to prosecute those who sought to deny citizens their right to vote, hold office, or serve on a jury in federal court.⁴³

The enforcement of the Klan Act was successful at suppressing the Klan but only moderately successful at ending white supremacist violence. Throughout 1871 thousands Klansmen were indicted. Many of the organization's leaders were tried, often before predominately black juries, and sentenced to prison. By 1872 violence had decreased throughout the South and Klan itself was largely destroyed.⁴⁴

Not surprisingly, the 1872 election was the most peaceful of the Reconstruction era. Grant's opponent for President, Horace Greeley, only carried three of the states of the former Confederacy: Georgia, Tennessee, and Virginia. Republicans elected the majority of Congressmen in Tennessee and Virginia and governors in Alabama and North Carolina.⁴⁵ Blacks constituted a majority in the South Carolina House of Representatives and elected the state Speaker of the House⁴⁶.

All was not entirely well. The election returned Alexander Stephens, Vice President of the Confederacy, to Congress as a Representative for Georgia.⁴⁷ Perhaps more significantly, the 1872 election produced rival claimants to the Louisiana governor's mansion. The Democrat John McEnry refused to concede defeat to the Republican William Pitt Kellogg despite only receiving 43% of the vote. The intercession of federal troops was required to install Kellogg as Governor. The situation was mirrored throughout localities in the state.

In Colfax, the county seat of Grant Parish, blacks feared that white Democrats would seize control of the government. They formed a militia and built modest fortifications. Armed whites surrounded them for three weeks. On Easter Sunday, April 13, 1873, whites began

⁴⁰ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 185.

⁴¹ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 186.

⁴² Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 195.

⁴³ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 195.

⁴⁴ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 197.

⁴⁵ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 215.

⁴⁶ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 151.

⁴⁷ Foner, *Short History of Reconstruction*, 89.

their assault. In possession of both a cannon and a makeshift calvary, the whites soon forced the majority of armed blacks to retreat to the county courthouse. The courthouse was set afire and the blacks were shot down as they fled the blaze. The African American journalist T. Morris Chester described the scene: “The escaping men were overtaken, mustered in crowds, made to stand around, and, while in every attitude of humiliation and supplication, were shot down and their bodies mangled and hacked to hasten their death or to satiate the hellish malice of their heartless murderers, even after they were dead.”⁴⁸ All told about fifty blacks died. Only two whites were killed.⁴⁹

Despite the outcome of the election of 1872, and the Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871, the early 1870s marked the beginning of the end of Reconstruction. Northern Republicans began to shift their attentions elsewhere. As Professor Stauffer mentioned in the last lecture, the political leaders of Congressional Reconstruction, Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens both died. The passage of the Fifteenth Amendment convinced many weary abolitionists that their struggle to end slavery had come to an end. In March of 1870 the American Anti-Slavery Society, the major abolitionist organization, voted to disband.⁵⁰ In 1874 the New England Freedmen’s Aid Society followed its example.⁵¹

Other Northerners transferred their attention from the Reconstruction of the South to the accumulation of wealth. The decade after the end of the Civil War saw a massive expansion in American industry. In 1873, the nation’s industrial production was 75% higher than it had been in 1865. Approximately 35,000 miles of railroad were laid between 1865 and 1873. This rapid industrial expansion created opportunities for previously unimagined levels of wealth.⁵² A new class of industrialists arose and many of them had very close ties to the Republican Party. Historian Eric Foner provides a startling overview of the connections between the party’s leadership and the emerging corporate leaders: “Sen. Lyman Trumbull... accepted an annual retainer from the Illinois Central Railroad. ...The Central Pacific rewarded Sen. William M. Stewart of Nevada with 50,000 acres of land for his services on the Committee of the Pacific Railroad. Banker Jay Cooke, the ‘financier of the Civil War’ and leading individual contributor to Grant’s presidential campaigns, took a mortgage on Speaker of the House James G. Blaine’s Washington home, sold a valuable piece

⁴⁸ T. Morris Chester quoted in Nicholas Lemann, *Redemption: The Last Battle of the Civil War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 19.

⁴⁹ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 189.

⁵⁰ Foner, *Short History of Reconstruction*, 193.

⁵¹ Foner, *Short History of Reconstruction*, 223.

⁵² Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 200.

of Duluth land to Ohio Gov. Rutherford B. Hayes at ‘a great bargain,’ and employed as lobbyist... out-of-office politicos...”⁵³

The close relationship between Republican Party leaders and industrialists proved a massive boon for corporations. At the same time the federal government was failing to provide freedmen with land, it was giving massive amounts to corporations. Between 1868 and 1872 corporations were awarded more than 100 million acres of land. This prompted one former slave, Anthony Wayne, to ask, “whilst Congress appropriated land by the million acres to pet railroad schemes... did they not aid poor Anthony and his people starving and in rags?”⁵⁴

The economic expansion ended abruptly in the autumn of 1873. That September the financial problems of the Northern Pacific Railroad sparked a financial panic and spread throughout the credit system. Banks failed. The stock market temporarily suspended trading. Factories started to layoff workers.⁵⁵ The prices of tobacco, sugar, rice and cotton, the major Southern cash crops, all fell dramatically.⁵⁶ Unemployment became widespread. In 1874 as many as a quarter of New York City’s labor force was out of work.⁵⁷ Labor unrest began to grow. There were railroad strikes, miners’ strikes and strikes in the textile industry.

In the 1874 election, voters responded as they do during times of significant economic crisis. They voted, in wide margins, against the party in power. Republicans lost the House. After 1872 elections they held 199 seats to the Democrats 89. The 1874 elections placed the Democrats in the majority with 183 seats and the Republicans in the minority with 106.⁵⁸

The results for Reconstruction were probably predictable. Emboldened by the Republican electoral defeat, white supremacists in Louisiana formed the White League. Openly devoted to restoring white supremacy, it continued the work of the Klan. Only this time, White League members, or white liners as they were alternatively called, did not bother with the robes and hoods. The White League’s purpose was most explicitly political but its membership was most likely almost identical to that of the Klan. An editorial in White League newspaper, appropriately called the *Caucasian*, testified to their intention of reestablishing Democratic party control of Louisiana by force. “[W]e, having grown weary of tame submission to this most desolating war of the negro upon us, propose to take a bold stand to assert the dignity of our manhood, to say in tones of thunder

⁵³ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 202.

⁵⁴ Anthony Wayne quoted in Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 202.

⁵⁵ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 218.

⁵⁶ Foner, *Short History of Reconstruction*, 227.

⁵⁷ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 219.

⁵⁸ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 221.

and with the voice of angry elements STOP! THUS FAR SHALT THOU GO, AND NO FURTHER!” The Caucasian’s editors were three former Confederate soldiers.⁵⁹

In Mississippi, an organization similar to the White League appeared. It called itself the White Line. Its members authored and implemented the Mississippi Plan, which Professor Stauffer covered last week. It had five points: Kill every white radical leader. Establish a well organized military. Make no threats; kill instead. Control the polling booths. Whites from other states will help.

The impact on 1875 election was dramatic. The Democrats and White Liners launched a campaign of terror to regain control of the governor’s mansion. Prior to the election, Mississippi Governor Adelbert Ames requested that President Grant send federal troops to the state to protect blacks and white Republicans. Under pressure from Ohio Republicans, Grant denied the request. They feared that if Grant sent federal troops to Mississippi war weary Northerners would vote for the Democrats in Ohio. Deciding that it was better to lose Mississippi than Ohio, Grant kept federal troops out of the southern state.⁶⁰

Governor Ames wrote a letter to his wife Blanche describing the situation this way: “Dear Blanche: The canvass is at an end, and tomorrow the voting will take place. The reports which come to me almost hourly are sickening. Violence, threats of murder, and consequent intimidation are co-extensive with the limits of the state. Republican leaders in many localities are hidden in the swamps or have sought refuge beyond the borders of their own counties. The government of the U. S. does not interfere, and will not, unless to prevent actual bloodshed.”⁶¹ When election came the Democrats regained control of the state.

The chief beneficiary of Grant’s decision not to send troops into Mississippi was Rutherford B. Hayes. Hayes won election to the Ohio governor’s mansion. The next year he was nominated by the Republican Party to serve as its Presidential candidate. His opponent was the Democratic Governor of New York, Samuel J. Tilden. In the lead-up to the election a campaign of terror reminiscent of? swept the South. On July 8, 1876, violence broke out in the South Carolina of Hamburg??. Five blacks were murdered in cold blood, after they had surrendered to a group of armed whites.⁶² Elsewhere in the state former slave Jerry Thornton Moore, a Republican Party

⁵⁹ Quoted in Nicholas Lemann, *Redemption: The Last Battle of the Civil War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 24.

⁶⁰ Lemman, *Redemption*, 136-137.

⁶¹ Course Reader

⁶² Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 240.

activist, was told by his white landlord that Democrats would carry the election “if we have to wade in blood knee-deep.”⁶³

The results of that autumn’s Presidential election were disputed. Tilden won most of the former Confederate states, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Indiana. Early in the morning someone in the Republican party headquarters realized that if Hayes carried the three Southern states Republicans still controlled he would win the election by one electoral vote. Telegrams were sent to Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina and the states’ officials declared victories for Hayes.⁶⁴ The country was thrown in an electoral crisis with Democrats challenging the results.

An Electoral Commission was established and divided equally between the parties. The addition of five Supreme Court justices brought the body to fifteen members. By series of 8-7 votes, the disputed electoral college votes were awarded to Hayes.⁶⁵ Tilden’s supporters threatened to block the final count of electoral vote by the House. Representatives of the two candidates hashed out a deal, the exact terms of which are unknown. Whatever they were, they definitely included Hayes recognizing the Democrat-White Line candidates for Governor in Louisiana and South Carolina. These men had both been elected through campaigns of intimidation and violence. If Hayes carried their states it is doubtful that they actually won their governorships. Nonetheless, Hayes agreed to send the federal troops that were preventing them from assuming office back to their barracks. In doing so, he abandoned Reconstruction.⁶⁶

Over the next decades blacks lost much of the freedom they had gained during the Reconstruction years. By 1900 they had almost entirely excluded from voting or holding office throughout the South. When Congressman George H. White of North Carolina left office in 1901 he was the last black to serve in Congress until the late 1920s. Mississippi’s interracial marriage (law?) was overturned and many white men continued to treat their black female servants as sexual playthings. Systems of penal labor were put in place that in many cases were indistinguishable from slavery.

Nonetheless, blacks never returned entirely to slavery and the gains they made during Reconstruction laid the groundwork for the twentieth-century civil rights movement. Autonomous black institutions, particularly the black churches, provided both resources and leadership development opportunities for countless heroes like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Fannie Lou Hamer.

⁶³ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 241.

⁶⁴ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 242.

⁶⁵ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 243-244.

⁶⁶ Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 244-245.

To summarize and then conclude, historians generally agree that the abandonment of Reconstruction was the result of the endurance of white supremacy, war weariness in the North, shifting priorities amongst the Republican Party and the passing of abolitionist leaders from national politics. To offer my own gloss, I might blame the millennialist habit of thought. Millennialist abolitionists believed that slavery could be ended suddenly and abruptly. Human history could be divide in two. On one side slavery, on the other freedom. The human heart, alas, does not work that way. White supremacists remained white supremacists after emancipation and sought through whatever means they could muster to reassert control over black bodies.⁶⁷

And so a coda to conclude about the legacy of the abandonment of Reconstruction today. Well, two codas really. First, to say that white supremacy is still very much with us and the task of the abolitionists to build a just and equitable society remains undone. If you doubt me or other contemporary justice activists I ask you to consider the following statistics. The average wealth of a white family in this country is close to fifteen times that of the average African American family⁶⁸. Unemployment and poverty rates for African Americans are twice those of whites⁶⁹. African Americans are incarcerated at six times the rates of whites⁷⁰. African Americans, on average, live four years less than whites⁷¹.

Second, strategies of voter disenfranchisement designed to exclude blacks from voting continue to be part of American politics. Just this morning, the New York Times published an article on how today's Republicans, who are yesterday's Democrats, have perverted the federal Election Assistance Commission. They have turned it from an agency devoted to make it easier for people to vote into one making voting more difficult. Who knows what impact this will have on the upcoming election?⁷²

⁶⁷ This gloss draws significant inspiration from John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁶⁸ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/12/racial-wealth-gaps-great-recession/>

⁶⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/08/28/these-seven-charts-show-the-black-white-economic-gap-hasnt-budged-in-50-years/>

⁷⁰ <http://www.naacp.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>

⁷¹ <http://www.businessinsider.com/huge-racial-gap-in-life-expectancy-2014-1>

⁷² <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/11/opinion/republicans-hijack-an-election-agency.html?action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=opinion-c-col-left-region®ion=opinion-c-col-left-region&WT.nav=opinion-c-col-left-region&r=0>