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WHITE RAGE, BLACK AGENCY:
VIOLENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON RECONSTRUCTION ERA FLORIDA

by

ZACHARY BARNES

M.A. UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA, 2022

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

The Reconstruction era in Florida is often misunderstood. Historians generally focus on the Civil War and the post-Reconstruction era to emphasize how the South has changed, but the Reconstruction era remains in shadow. To rectify this gap, this research provides more information about the Reconstruction era in Florida, specifically the impact of violence. To achieve this, I primarily used the testimonies gathered from the Joint Select Committee's investigation of violence during the Reconstruction era and the testimonies given to the Federal Government after the 1876 Presidential Election. The testimonies in these documents allow me to demonstrate how conservative whites used violence to reestablish white supremacy after the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. This study affirms that the violence exhibited during the Reconstruction era significantly impacted People of Color and white Republicans and changed the course of Florida history. This study is critical because it connects the lawlessness of the territorial days of Florida before the Civil War to the organized and targeted violence of the Reconstruction era, which lived on well into the 20th century. While this study builds upon what modern scholars have dubbed one of the most progressive eras in history, it also exposes the reality of day-to-day life in Reconstruction era Florida, which was rife with bloodshed and disorder for People of Color and white Republicans.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Civil War and Reconstruction historian Eric Foner wrote an opinion piece in the *New York Times* entitled “Why Reconstruction Matters.” He argues that, more than most historical periods, how we think about Reconstruction makes Americans reflect on what kind of society we want to live in. Foner sees the relevance of Reconstruction because the same issues that affected the Reconstruction era continue to affect Americans today— issues such as citizenship, voting rights, the powers of national and state government, the relationship between economic and political democracy, and proper responses to violence and domestic terrorism.¹ Moreover, the policies created during the Reconstruction era became the foundation of the newly reunified United States, especially in the South. Despite this unification, for white southerners, Reconstruction was less about reuniting the nation and more about reestablishing white supremacy using extralegal violence and voter suppression. The actions taken by both conservative whites and the state government continued to impact Florida almost 150 years after Reconstruction ended.

This thesis builds upon Eric Foner’s stance on the importance of understanding the ramifications of the Reconstruction era. In this case, the focus will be on violence and its relationship to the struggle for white supremacy. Using Florida as a test case, it explores the extent to which the violence of the Reconstruction era reflects the violence of the antebellum era. Is violence during Reconstruction a new phenomenon in Florida? Next, this thesis assesses the

¹ Eric Foner, “Why Reconstruction Matters,” *The New York Times*, March 25, 2015.

nature of violence in Reconstruction Florida, including an analysis of the victims and the perpetrators. Finally, it will identify how this violence shaped the political landscape in post-Civil War Florida, including the extent to which Democratic whites denied newly freed Black men and women their political rights.

There is a clear connection to the lawless nature of Florida from its territorial days to the end of Reconstruction, and its impact is substantial. Through this timeline, I will demonstrate how white Floridians (primarily Democrats) transitioned from white-on-white violence to white-on-Black violence. This shift led to conservative whites' disenfranchisement of Black Floridians and white Republicans to maintain white supremacy in post-Emancipation society. Though the Reconstruction era created space for Black Americans to own property, vote, and hold office, it also represents a time of great terror for Black Floridians due to the violence they experienced. This thesis expands on what modern historians argued; that yes, People of Color made significant progress during the Reconstruction era, but within that period, foundational policies and violent acts critically limited the progress that freed people made in achieving full citizenship.

The era of Reconstruction is defined as the period between 1865 and 1877 when the Federal Government set the conditions for the former Confederate state's return to the Union. Initially, President Andrew Johnson led the reunion effort. His unification process included but was not limited to, giving amnesty and pardons to the former Confederate leaders; on the

condition that they pledged their loyalty to the Union and supported the Thirteenth Amendment.² This compromise led many former Confederate politicians back to their previous positions of political power, re-establishing the white supremacist status quo in the South. Even though these former Confederate leaders agreed to support the Thirteenth Amendment, the reality of Reconstruction legislation and violence proves that those in power constantly undermined and denied Freedmen and Freedwomen's equality.

Reconstruction was a widespread movement in the United States but heavily influenced the political, social, and economic operations of the South. The Southern whites in power aimed to maintain the hierarchy they established during the Antebellum period. After Emancipation, millions of newly freed Americans had to find work and homes and completely readjust their lives in a region that still contested their freedom. The loss of the South's central workforce and Northern involvement in the political and economic sectors heightened Southern resentment and paranoia of People of Color. To remain in control of the Black population, the South implemented legislation that essentially stripped the rights of the newly freed African Americans.³ These laws further fragmented the relationships between the Southern whites, Northerners, and Freedmen, which reached a political climax after the 1876 Presidential election. After the election, Congress investigated Louisiana, South Carolina, Alabama, and Florida for

² Andrew Johnson and William H. Seward, "President Johnson's Amnesty Proclamation. Restoration to Rights of Property except in Slaves. An Oath of Loyalty as a Condition Precedent. Legality of Confiscation Proceedings Recognized. Exception of Certain Offenders from this Amnesty. By These Special Applications for Pardon May be Made. Reorganization in North Carolina. Appointment of a Provisional Governor. A State Convention to be Chosen by Loyal Citizens. The Machinery of the Federal Government to be Put in Operation. AMNESTY PROCLAMATION," *The New York Times*, May 30, 1865.

³ Florida Constitution, 1865. Specifically, Article IV and XVI, which stipulate only white men can be representatives and senators. It also stipulated that People of Color cannot testify or sit on a jury, therefore maintaining a white versus color power structure while also eliminating representation on a federal or state level.

using nefarious tactics to sway the election towards the Southern Democratic candidate, Samuel J. Tilden. Samuel J. Tilden won the popular vote, and the Republican candidate, Rutherford B. Hayes, won the Electoral College vote. The result of the complicated election gave way to a congressional bargain in which the Southern Democrats conceded the election if the Federal Government ended Reconstruction and removed Union troops from the South. Republicans agreed, and the Reconstruction era met its demise in 1877.⁴

Even though Southern Democrats lost the election, they continued to enforce their white supremacist view on slavery and race with their scholarship on the Reconstruction era. There is a cliché quote many people use regarding history that states, “history is written by the winners,” this assertion is not the case for Reconstruction. Many Southern historians took the reins in analyzing the period, giving Reconstruction historiography a Confederate apologist’s point of view. This perspective resulted in an incredible amount of misinformation and false sympathy towards the South, which built into a larger narrative of a “lost cause.” These overwhelmingly Confederate-leaning publications gave the South a reputation of martyrdom and images of Southern “patriots” who were only defending their land against federal tyranny.

In many ways, the Reconstruction era remains in the shadow of the Civil War, especially in the South. Acknowledging the history of Reconstruction challenges our collective memory of the Civil War. The end of the Civil War represents the re-uniting of a torn nation and the long overdue Emancipation of millions of Americans. This cultivated memory has not only overwhelmed any recollection of the violence and corruption that encompassed the next twelve

⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1935), 670-708

years of American history but also reduced the impact and sacrifices made by People of Color during the Reconstruction era. In the final chapter of W.E.B. Du Bois's book *Black Reconstruction in America*, he states that "in propaganda against the Negro since Emancipation in this land, we face one of the most stupendous efforts the world ever saw to discredit human beings, an effort involving universities, history, science, social life, and religion."⁵ The timeline of Reconstruction historiography proves Du Bois's statement is true because there is a long history of devaluing black success in Reconstruction in favor of demonizing Northerners, Republicans, Union troops, and People of Color.

Eric Foner discusses the four stages of Reconstruction-era historiography in *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction*. They are the Dunning School, The Lost Cause, the resurgence of old sources, and post-Civil Rights scholarship.⁶ While research published on Florida may not have a specific piece of scholarship for each aspect of Foner's timeline, there are published historical accounts that mirrored the rest of the country.

Reconstruction historiography begins in one place: The Dunning School. William A. Dunning pioneered the Dunning School at Columbia University. Dunning and his active disciples satisfied white Americans by rushing to forget the reality of Reconstruction and focused on "ignorant blacks" and "carpetbaggers" who were taking advantage of poor

⁵ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 727.

⁶ Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), xx-xxvii.

Southerners.⁷ For Florida, that book was William Watson Davis' *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, released in 1913. Davis' massive tome contains valuable statistics, but also highlighted crimes of Black people against whites. It praised groups like the Regulators, which, in actuality, were a violent militia group hell-bent on attacking and instilling fear in Florida's black population.⁸ Davis laid the groundwork for many flawed views concerning Reconstruction, and it took decades for Florida historians to overthrow this scholarship.

The Dunning school is responsible for much of how the public understood the Reconstruction era. For example, it influenced D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, and the highest-grossing film of all time (adjusted for inflation), *Gone with the Wind*. The perspective of The Dunning School is that the Union occupation put Southerners through torture at the hands of Northern politics and black mobility. In their presentation of the Reconstruction era South, we see Klan members as heroes and establish the "happy slave" as a stock character that remained stereotypical in Hollywood for years.⁹

It is important to note that, in Florida, authors released Reconstruction era scholarship before Davis's infamous *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* was published. In 1888 John Wallace released *Carpetbag Rule in Florida: The Inside Workings of the Reconstruction of Civil*

⁷ Examples include: J. W. Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi* (New York: Columbia University Press); Walter L. Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1905); J. S. Reynolds, *Reconstruction in South Carolina, 1865-1877* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1905); J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina* (North Carolina: Raleigh North Carolina Press, 1906); C. W. Ramsdell, *Reconstruction in Texas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1910) W.W. Davis; *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1913); C. Mildred Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1915); Thomas Staples, *Reconstruction in Arkansas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923).

⁸ William Watson Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York: Columbia University, 1913).

⁹ Foner, *Forever Free*, xxii.

Government in Florida After the Close of the Civil War. Wallace was a Black senator from Leon County, and his book heavily criticizes Republican leadership during the Reconstruction era. A staunch Democrat and former Governor of Florida, William D. Bloxham, mentored Wallace, and his influence was suspected when Wallace published *Carpetbag Rule*. It was advantageous for him to release this book right before the 1888 election to secure more votes for the Democratic Party. While this did not reach the popularity of Davis's *Civil War and Reconstruction*, it does highlight that conservative whites rushed to control the narrative surrounding the Reconstruction era.¹⁰

The Dunning School dominated Reconstruction academic works until a journalist, Claude G. Bowers, wrote *The Tragic Era: The Revolution After Lincoln*. Bowers' book received attention from the non-academic reading audience, which the Dunning school was never able to accomplish. Still, some academics of the time saw the warped perspective Bowers brought to the subject of Reconstruction. In the first paragraph of *The Journal of Negro History*'s review of *The Tragic Era*, they say, "The book is written by an historically untrained politician with a cause to advance or an axe to grind."¹¹ These assertions are correct when looking at the declarations made by Bowers. He demonizes Republicans for their support of Black citizens, ignores the Colfax Massacre in Louisiana, and supports race-based murders because Republicans held judicial

¹⁰ John Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida: The Inside Workings of the Reconstruction of Civil Government in Florida After the Close of the Civil War*, (Jacksonville: Da Costa Printing and Publishing House, 1888).

¹¹ "The Tragic Era," review of *The Tragic Era*, by Claude Bowers. *Journal of Negro History*, January, 1930, Vol. 15, No. 1, 117

power. Bowers succeeded with his nefarious intentions of publishing *The Tragic Era*, but historians attempted to fight against this racist rhetoric.¹²

W.E.B. Du Bois wrote one of the earliest and most influential pieces of Reconstruction historiography. Du Bois released *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* as a response to the material released by those who aligned with the Dunning School and the Lost Cause. Unfortunately, Du Bois's book did not reach a mainstream audience. Released in 1935, *Black Reconstruction* espouses an opposite view of the Reconstruction era that the Dunning School and the Lost Cause created. In Du Bois's perspective, the tragedy of Reconstruction was not that it happened but that it failed. This assertion is the theme of *Black Reconstruction* and his other work, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois focuses on the positive impact of the Freedman's Bureau, where William Watson Davis (and the state government) saw the institution as a nuisance.¹³ Du Bois observed the strides the newly emancipated made and highlighted the people who fought against the system to create an equal society. To this day, Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction* remains one of the most comprehensive and admired pieces of Reconstruction-era scholarship.

Even though Du Bois published *Black Reconstruction* in 1935, it did not find a large audience until the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Du Bois's newfound audiences built off his massive foundation and created a new era of scholarship that challenged the Dunning School and Lost Cause's notions. Foner states that "two generations of scholars have overturned

¹² Claude G. Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Riverside Press, 1929).

¹³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1935), W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1903) 9-24.

virtually every assumption of the traditional viewpoint, abandoning the racism at the base of that interpretation and presenting Reconstruction as an attempt to put into effect the principle of equal citizenship for all Americans.”¹⁴

William Watson Davis’ flawed presentation of Reconstruction remained the dominant statement on Reconstruction era Florida for decades. It was not upended until 1974 when Jerrell H. Shofner released *Nor is it Over Yet: Florida in the Era of Reconstruction 1863-1877*. Shofner disagrees with the claims made by Davis, contradicting his stance towards “carpetbaggers” and “scalawags,” which Davis accused of manipulating Black voters to vote Republican. Shofner dismissed many of the sources used by Davis and instead utilized the scholarship published during the Civil Rights movement.¹⁵ The application of these sources created a new authoritative text on the Reconstruction era in Florida, finally escaping the racist shadow Davis’ work cast over Florida.

Since Shofners’ groundbreaking text, Florida historians have narrowed their attention to more specific aspects of Reconstruction. Diving deeper into subjects like historical figures, violence, or labor movements provides a better understanding of the nuances of the Reconstruction era. For example, Daniel R. Weinfeld’s *Jackson County War: Reconstruction and Resistance in Post-Civil War Florida* examines the extreme violence perpetrated in one particularly violent county during Reconstruction.¹⁶ Paul Ortiz’s *Emancipation Betrayed: The*

¹⁴ Foner, *Forever Free*, xxii.

¹⁵ Jerrell H. Shofner, *Nor is it Over Yet: Florida in the Era of Reconstruction: 1863-1877* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1974), xvi.

¹⁶ T. Thomas Fortune, *After War Times: An African American Childhood in Reconstruction-era Florida*, ed. By Daniel R. Weinfeld (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014).

Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920 focuses on white violence and black organizing from Reconstruction and connects it to the bloody election of 1920.¹⁷ Daniel R. Weinfeld released his edited presentation of T. Thomas Fortune's 1927 serialized experience during Reconstruction in 2014, titled *After War Times: An African American Childhood In Reconstruction-era Florida*.¹⁸ These pieces of scholarship highlight important and highly detailed aspects of the Reconstruction era that scholars overlook when covering the period as a whole.

This thesis builds from Shofner and Du Bois' foundation of abandoning Dunning School and Lost Cause rhetoric and focuses on similar elements of violence that Ortiz, Weinfeld, and Fortune included in their pieces of scholarship. Like Weinfeld's *Jackson County War* and Ortiz's *Emancipation Betrayed*, this thesis focuses on a critical element of the Reconstruction era, violence. In addition, this analysis agrees with Ortiz's *Emancipation Betrayed* by connecting the impact of violence during Reconstruction and how it led to the Ocoee Massacre in 1920. Finally, similar to Weinfeld's edited collection of Fortune's experiences during Reconstruction in *After War Times*, this study utilizes older sources that detail first-hand accounts of violence during the Reconstruction era.

This thesis supports and expands these studies by suggesting continuity in Florida between the antebellum period and Reconstruction. The first chapter of this thesis provides the

¹⁷ Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005)

¹⁸ See Also: Peter D. Klingman, *Josiah Walls, Florida's Black Congressman of Reconstruction*. (Gainesville: The University Presses of Florida, 1976); Joe M. Richardson, *African Americans in the Reconstruction of Florida, 1865-1877*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008); *After Slavery: Race Labor and Citizenship in the Reconstruction South*, ed. By Bruce E. Baker and Brian Kelly (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013).

context for the Reconstruction era in Florida and establishes the violent nature of the state. This chapter connects the territorial days of Florida to the Reconstruction era by chronicling the lawlessness exhibited in this timeframe. In this period, it was generally white-on-white violence unrelated to politics. The first portion of the chapter emphasizes how little the nature of Florida changed between these two periods; the state was still violent and lawless, but the change will be in the nature and organization of the violence. The motivation for Reconstruction is political, and the victims are a subset of whites, Republicans, and Union supporters. In addition to these groups, conservative whites also targeted People of Color. However, in the Antebellum era, these people suffered the legalized violence of slavery but were generally not targeted outside this institution.

The second chapter is concerned with establishing the new culture of violence that permeated throughout the state of Florida. This chapter builds upon the violence seen in the territorial and Antebellum periods by utilizing the testimonies collected in 1872 by the Joint Select committee's investigation of violence in the "Late Insurrectionary States." This collection consists of thirteen volumes covering violence in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida. In these volumes, Senator John Scott and Representative Luke P. Poland lead the investigations into the atrocities perpetuated by white Southerners against People of Color and Republicans. In these testimonies, residents from various races, political parties, class levels, and occupations discuss their experience with violence in Florida during Reconstruction. This chapter analyzes how the violence shifts from outright lawlessness to racially targeted violence by white aggressors. This chapter ends with white conservatives

realizing that violence is an excellent tool for establishing political control through disenfranchisement.

The third chapter will cover the intersection between violence and disenfranchisement in Florida. The chapter begins with Louisiana, South Carolina, Alabama, and Florida citizens' violent reactions to black mobility and suffrage. Understanding how Congress investigated each state in the wake of the 1876 election provides essential context to the South. After this is established, the study moves toward the patterns exhibited by white Conservatives in Florida. To analyze this, this study will focus on the testimonies from the Federal Government's investigation of violence and fraud during the 1876 election. Election returns from Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, and South Carolina were disputed, and Congress investigated each state so they could officially call the election. Like the Congressional Inquiry that investigated the violence in various southern states, this document collects testimonies from those who experienced violence or intimidation during election seasons. Unlike the 1872 investigation, this committee focused on violence and its ties to disenfranchisement. Florida residents traveled to Jacksonville to present their experiences to various U.S. Representatives and Senators to better understand why there were conflicting reports on this election. This analysis will focus specifically on Alachua County and Jefferson County. These two counties were selected because Alachua contains the city center of Gainesville, giving it a more urban environment, while Jefferson County is almost entirely rural, therefore representing an agricultural society. Investigating these two counties informs how conservative whites used violence differently, depending on how their community is structured. This chapter concludes with the end of Reconstruction and the dim future ahead.

This thesis sides with Du Bois's belief that the tragedy of Reconstruction is not in its implementation but in its demise. The Reconstruction era gave People of Color the space to dispute the stereotypes levied against them by Southern whites. Black Floridians found jobs, land, and homes. They unionized, voted, built community centers, ran for office, and sometimes even won with massive obstacles blocking their path. Everything Southern whites said People of Color could not achieve, they did. The end of Reconstruction resulted in a return to normalcy for Southern whites. They remained in power without the Federal Government looking over their shoulder. They continued to rig elections and perform gruesome acts of violence against People of Color and their allies with little to no repercussions. After Reconstruction, Florida became the lynching capital of the U.S. and continued to implement and maintain structures that disenfranchised voters.¹⁹ Reconstruction could have altered Florida's path toward unity, but those in power rejected this opportunity and only strengthened the divide between Southern whites and People of Color.

¹⁹ Ray Downs, "Florida Lynched More Black People Per Capita Than Any Other State, According to Report," *Broward Palm Beach New Times*, February 12, 2015.

CHAPTER 1: THE SOUTH'S WILD WEST

In 1867, a well-respected Freedman named John Gilbert was travelling down a common highway in Jackson County, Florida. He proceeded towards town when a white man in an oxcart came from the opposite way. Gilbert, who was hauling a large amount of lumber at the time, could not give sufficient space for the white man in the empty one-ox cart to pass by. The two men halted at the impasse. Gilbert jumped off his cart and pushed some bushes aside, far enough for the other man to squeeze through. Suddenly, Hugh Parker, a stranger to Jackson County, walks up on foot and confronts Gilbert. Parker demanded to know why Gilbert did not turn off the road to let the man pass. Gilbert said that he did all he could with the load he carried. Parker replied, “if you ever do that again, I’ll kill you—I might as well do it now.” Parker then drew his service revolver and shot John Gilbert. He died fifteen minutes after the bullet sunk into his chest. A party of Black Floridians attempted to capture Parker, but he evaded them.²⁰

After the Civil War, actions like this took place across Florida. People of Color exercising even the most basic level of agency endured excessive hostility and violence. Florida’s government employed no real police force, so Hugh Parker quickly escaped. Even if law enforcement captured Hugh Parker, he committed his crime against a Black man, which a jury would most likely acquit. Other Black citizens called for justice, but those cries fell on deaf ears. The Federal Government’s ineffectual implementation of law officers contributed to the

²⁰ T. Thomas Fortune, *After War Times: An African American Childhood in Reconstruction-era Florida*, ed. By Daniel R. Weinfeld (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014), 82.

chaos, but the futile way the state government handled these situations worsened them.

Challenges like shorthanded law enforcement agencies, structurally weak jails, and imbalanced court systems served as obstacles for citizens seeking to punish violent outlaws. These problems were not new to Florida; they were just a continuation of the inability to enforce the law in Antebellum Florida.

This chapter will focus on Florida's culture of lawlessness to the Antebellum era. Looking at the territorial beginnings of Florida provides insight into how little the state changed after the Civil War. Understanding Florida's pre-Civil War history is vital to understanding how the state operated in the Reconstruction era. Historians commonly see this era as a period of significant change and progress for the United States. However, the Reconstruction era in Florida reflected a violent hellscape with citizens determined to re-enforce the white supremacist status quo that permeated Florida's history even before the Civil War.

It began in 1513 with the arrival of the Spanish Empire. Led by Ponce de Leon, the first voyage was largely uneventful, but Native Americans met his second with hostility. While the Native Americans prevented this second conquest from succeeding, it was too late. Over the years, the Spanish commissioned other expeditions to the Florida territory, where violence was a standard tool in taking control of the occupied areas. Word of these numerous attempts reached the shores of other nations who also wanted to take control of Florida away from Native Americans and, more importantly to them, rival European countries.²¹

²¹ Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida*, (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971), 19-29.

By the end of the 1600s, Spain found it extremely difficult to maintain its control of Florida. Contending with the harsh natural environment of Florida and fighting with the Indigenous population proved difficult; now, the colonies established by England and France in the Southern regions of North America added pressure to the Spanish empire. The French, English, and Native Americans attacked constantly and highlighted the weakened state of the Spanish Empire. To make matters worse for Spain, the British and French traders began exerting their influence within the Florida territory. By 1763, after 200 years of Spanish control, all they had to show for their efforts was Saint Augustine, St. Marks, and the struggling settlement of Pensacola. Outside these three settlements lived a “no man's land” largely inhabited by Seminoles and various French and English traders who held more sway than the Spanish in those areas. Around this time, Florida became a pawn in world politics rather than a settlement opportunity. Eventually, Spain ceded control of Florida to Britain in the first Treaty of Paris in 1763.²²

When the British took over, the minor achievements of the Spanish empire became more apparent. Long gone were the structures built by the Franciscans that bolstered their infrastructure. Spanish settlers either repurposed these buildings into military hospitals or less livable residences. Constant attacks also weakened the stability of these structures. A 1763 census shows 3,046 people lived in St. Augustine, with only about 300 houses. Pensacola was even more futile, boasting 100 huts, no cattle, and the only cultivated land resembled a few

²² Tebeau, *A History of Florida*, 19-43

neglected gardens. This scene proved to be an ill omen for the next century, proving that establishing an operational infrastructure within Florida would be difficult.²³

In a poor attempt to stabilize the territory, the British split Florida vertically down the middle, creating East Florida and West Florida. The British government selected two different governors with vastly different backgrounds and capacities for leadership. The British government placed James Grant as governor of East Florida. Grant found success in South Carolina and worked well in military and indigenous affairs, which carried over to his governorship of East Florida. In West Florida, however, Governor George Johnstone held control. Johnstone was known for fighting and dueling, making him ill-equipped to be a diplomatic leader in this already violent territory. After three years, the British government recalled Johnstone and temporarily replaced him with another man with a fighting reputation, Lieutenant Governor Montfort Browne. When Browne's replacement, Governor John Elliot, arrived to take over his position, he found Browne in a severe predicament. The community accused Browne of supplying his family and enslaved people from the storage reserved for Native Americans. Elliott instituted an investigation but committed suicide before officials could complete the probe. Browne resumed his position as governor after Elliot's death. This type of political turnover became common in Florida.²⁴

Under British rule, Florida remained unappealing to settlers. East Florida competed with other settlements like Savannah and Charleston, and West Florida competed with lands along the Mississippi River and New Orleans. Placing the capital in Pensacola proved disastrous since

²³ Ibid, 73-76

²⁴ Ibid, 76-78.

overland travel was nearly impossible and access by water was through Spain-controlled New Orleans. At the same time, Spain's grip on New Orleans became advantageous, and with a youthful governor named Bernardo de Gálvez at the helm, they possessed the strength to attempt to take control of Florida back from the British.²⁵

Gálvez, with the assistance of Native Americans and troops from Cuba, captured Natchez in West Florida and took all the settlements along the river on their way to Pensacola. Spain alerted Gálvez that they intended to declare war on Britain on June 21st, 1779. The British in East Florida remained unaware of the impending attack and operated as usual. East Florida primarily warded off raids from Georgia and saw a significant increase in refugees from other southern states. A 1783 census counted 5,000 white emigrants and 8,300 Black emigrants coming to East Florida in a short period. This region was woefully unprepared for this large influx of residents. East Florida only housed 2,000 white and 3,000 Black residents at the time and immediately witnessed housing, employment, and food crisis, making it difficult to survive in the new territory. Disappointment found those who came to Florida in June of 1784 when the British began evacuating and recommending that residents settle their affairs because the second era of Spain was about to commence in Florida.²⁶

The second Treaty of Paris returned Florida to Spain, but it was not the same empire that landed upon the shore in 1513. The Spanish Empire was weaker, and opposing forces were stronger during their second reign of Florida. Residents still supported English interests, and Spain could not suppress their influence within the territory. Native Americans, whites, and

²⁵ Ibid, 85-86.

²⁶ Ibid, 86-89.

runaway slaves proved to be wholly ungovernable, and after the American Revolution, violence along the Florida-Georgia border remained consistent. English loyalists from Georgia and South Carolina resented the transfer of power from the English to the Spanish (mostly because runaway slaves found safety in Florida) and used violence to weaken Spain's control. Essentially, Spain regained control of Florida in the same (if not worse) condition they first colonized it. The only significant difference in infrastructure was the plantations the British built outside the major settlements in Florida.²⁷

It became rapidly apparent that Spain could not develop and govern Florida adequately. The rising power of the United States almost guaranteed that Spain would soon lose control of the territory to them. Outside the state, the Napoleonic Wars kept Spain's attention in Europe, leaving their settlements in Florida to fall by the wayside. Little by little, the United States eroded Spain's control over Florida. Utilizing treaties, illegal occupations, and outright attacks, Florida weakened Spain to the point of exhaustion and finally employed settlers to secure the territory of Florida without a war. However, throughout the process of crippling Spain, the United States also crippled itself. In their conquest to take control of Florida from Spain, they also prevented any infrastructure or order Spain attempted to put into place. This left the United States with little prospects when taking control of the territory.

The United States gained official control of Florida in 1819, which now served as a refuge for runaway slaves, violent whites, hostile Native Americans, foreign adventurers, and pirates who Spain could not police.²⁸ Once the United States gained control of Florida, multiple

²⁷ Ibid, 89-91.

²⁸ Ibid, 103-117.

Wars would plague the territory for almost fifty years. After the failure of the Patriot War in 1812 (which attempted to create a rebellion in Spanish Florida), the United States continued to experience conflict within the territory. Beginning with the Seminole Wars and ending with the Civil War, political and societal stability became impossible in Florida.

Conflict with the Seminoles began almost immediately for the United States. The U.S. resented the Seminoles' assistance to runaway slaves, most notably with the "Negro Fort." When the British evacuated Florida, they left control of the fort to the Seminoles. As the Seminoles returned to their respective communities, the Black residents moved into the fort at the suggestion of British Officer Major Nichols. This settlement inspired the fear of a slave rebellion in the community of plantation owners. It also gave a possible destination for enslaved people wishing to escape bondage in the northern states. The U.S. attacked the "Negro Fort" from land and sea to stifle this possibility. The fatal blow came from a cannonball that hit the fort's gunpowder room. The explosion was enormous. An estimated 320 people resided in the fort, and 250 died instantly. It was the destruction of this stronghold that ignited the first Seminole War.²⁹

There were three Seminole Wars in Florida. The first one, led by Andrew Jackson, lasted from 1817 to 1818. The first Seminole War is characterized by the outright aggression of Jackson and other U.S. officials. The conflict started due to minor attacks from whites and Seminoles along the Florida-Georgia border after the destruction of the "Negro Fort." Jackson brought his troops to the colony of La Florida and pushed the Seminoles down south to the Suwannee River. Jackson did not need to pursue the Seminoles that far south, and the forceable

²⁹ John Missal, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict*, (Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 2004), 28-31.

occupations of both Pensacola and St. Marks reflect blatant antagonism over military strategy. This conflict aided the United States in gaining control of Florida from Spain and resulted in a victory for the United States, but the second Seminole War proved to be more destructive for both sides.³⁰

The Second Seminole War took place between 1835 and 1842. The U.S. engaged in this conflict to remove Native Americans from the territory. The Second Seminole War cost many Seminoles, U.S. soldiers, and unaffiliated Floridian's lives. Outside of casualties, the U.S. government forced at least 3,000 Seminoles out of their homes at gunpoint, placed them in detention centers, or ushered them onto ships out of Florida. This departure led many Seminoles to live on the run. The Second Seminole war also continued to hinder the growth of the territory. People lost their homes and livelihoods during the war, forcing them to rebuild. It took over twenty years for Florida to gain statehood status, and the Second Seminole War was a definite factor in its stagnation as a territory.³¹

The Third Seminole War, which lasted from 1855 to 1858, carried a similar objective to the Second Seminole War. The United States looked to remove the remaining Seminole tribes from the communities they established in the Everglades. The Third Seminole War was smaller than the Second; although the conflict lasted three years, little action took place. The conflict existed in small skirmishes, with both sides living in constant fear of each other. The Seminoles used guerrilla warfare to ward off attackers, rarely striking in open battle. By the spring of 1858,

³⁰ Missal, *The Seminole Wars*, 32-52.

³¹ *Ibid*, 122, 203.

both the Seminoles and the United States looked to end the Third Seminole War; on May 8th, 1858, the United States declared war over.³²

Immediately after the Third Seminole War, Florida entered the Secession Crisis. The initial “secession movement” of 1851-1852 received little support within the state. Florida recently achieved statehood in 1845, and with the recent election of pro-unionism Representatives, immediate secession seemed unlikely. It was not until radical Southern Democrats began to dominate the political sphere that support for secession began to take root in Florida. The Kansas-Nebraska Act, along with John Brown’s raid, further agitated Florida’s conservative population and secession seemed viable.³³ The Southern Democrats in Florida continued to gain power, and by the Presidential Election of 1860, Florida’s senate contained thirteen Southern Democrats and eight Republicans. Compare that to the House, which held thirty-seven Southern Democrats and ten Republicans.³⁴ Secession appeared inevitable if Lincoln won the election.

The constant upheaval of governments and living through times of war severely impacted how Floridians dealt with conflict. From a historical perspective, it is easy to focus on the periods of acquisition, war, and political instability. Still, the impact these events had on the unaffiliated residents of the territory can fall through the cracks. During the Seminole Wars and Secession Crisis (1858-1861), the murder rate in Florida skyrocketed. From 1821 to 1861, the known homicides in Florida totaled 401, but historians James Denham and Randolph Roth

³² Ibid, 214-216.

³³ Ralph. A. Wooster, *The Secession Conventions of the South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 67

³⁴ Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 48. Note: in Davis’s text, Republicans are labeled “opposition”.

estimated a total of 607 during this period. They corroborated the official list of murders the state produced with murders mentioned in other records (like newspapers, memoirs, diaries, and letters) and combined them. Through their analysis, Denham and Roth found that murder rates rise in times of turmoil, and those who lived in Florida experienced plenty. Denham and Roth's research focused on the homicide rates in Florida before the Civil War. They concluded that Florida was a definite outlier in homicide statistics (even when compared to other slave states). Many factors contributed to the lawless nature of the state; honor, power, politics, and racism all played a part in maintaining a culture of violence in Florida, but its lack of a unified government exacerbated these issues.³⁵

Homicide rates rising in periods of unrest is not specific to Florida; all slave states experienced this issue. Revolutionary ideals compromised the vision held by the planter class, the most influential people in the South. Florida received anomalous status because it was always in turmoil or change. For example, the most significant violence spikes in the 19th century coincide with The Patriot Wars, Seminole Wars, and Secession Crisis. These all contributed to the instability already prevalent in the state.

Despite this uptick in violence everywhere, Florida existed as an anomaly. Looking at the statistics, Florida boasted three to four times more homicides outside times of crisis than other slave states. During times of crisis, however, homicides rose to eight to ten times more than in other slave states. The targets and perpetrators of these homicides are primarily white men. In terms of homicides involving Black residents, Florida was average for a slave state. This statistic

³⁵ James M. Denham and Randolph Roth, "Why Was Antebellum Florida Murderous? A Quantitative Analysis of Homicide in Florida 1821-1861," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* Vol. 86, No. 2 (Fall, 2007).

makes sense because, at this time, white residents saw Black Floridians as property, not people, and Southern whites barred them from taking place in society outside the plantation. The legalized violence of slavery worked effectively for racial control.

This specific is essential to understanding how violence evolved in Florida. During the Antebellum era, white men mainly killed other white men due to shallow disagreements or wrongdoings felt in the community. Honor, race, economic pressure, religious affiliation, and politics begin to motivate southern whites' violent attention. It is in this era where violence disguised as general lawlessness becomes a staple of lower-class culture in the South. The act of dueling, which often carried the weight of honor in upper class society, became reduced to spontaneous gunfire and brawling in the streets.³⁶ Violence in Florida began to be synonymous with lower class, white-on-white violence. It is important to note that at this time, slave society excluded Black people from these types of interactions, making them less likely to receive violence in these situations. Moreover, enslaved African Americans had no chance to regularly run into non-slave-owning white men.³⁷

Whites in Antebellum, Florida, fought for just about anything. They fought for honor, property, or even just the hell of it. The worst thing that could happen to a white man in Florida was to be bested by another man, especially in public. White Floridians murdered others because they felt embarrassed, angry, or even merely slighted by another resident, and the territorial government was not effective enough to punish or regulate these crimes. Florida's government

³⁶ Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th Century American South*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

³⁷ Denham and Roth, "Why Was Antebellum Florida Murderous? A Quantitative Analysis of Homicide in Florida 1821-1861".

never spent enough money on law enforcement or criminal holding spaces to capture or charge white offenders. This economic lapse meant there were not enough people or resources to catch criminals, convict murderers, or suppress criminal gangs. Even when law enforcement did catch criminals, the jails were too small or flimsy to hold them.³⁸

This failure made Floridians apathetic about the law. At least one-quarter of all homicide suspects jumped bail, escaped, or evaded capture. There was also no state prison, so judges and jurors could not sentence these criminals to long-term prison terms. There were also massive racial disparities among those who officials captured. Law enforcement officers hung only three of every hundred white murderers, and the rest suffered no more than 39 lashes, a year in jail, or a \$1000 fine (which officials routinely rescinded for those who could not pay). These punishments did not do enough to prevent homicides in Florida. Criminals lost their fear of the law, and average citizens abandoned their faith in it. Many Florida citizens resorted to taking the law into their own hands to settle disputes. They killed their neighbors for inaccurate fence placement or crop damage on their farmland. Conflicts involved petty arguments, such as losing cards, removal from a boarding house, being denied credit at a store, or being dismissed at a social occasion. White men in Florida believed in the notion of “kill or be killed” if these situations arose. These seemingly small interactions devolved into a cycle of killings and revenge killings that afflicted residents across the entire state.³⁹

³⁸ Denham and Roth, “Why Was Antebellum Florida Murderous? A Quantitative Analysis of Homicide in Florida 1821-1861”.

³⁹ Denham and Roth, “Why Was Antebellum Florida Murderous? A Quantitative Analysis of Homicide in Florida 1821-1861”.

Denham and Roth provide four tenants of how states prevent high homicide rates. The first three are political and closely related. The first is a stable government that can impose law and order. The second is a legitimate government recognized by most of its constituents. The third is solidarity among members of a society, a sense of patriotism or “fellow feeling” that extends beyond the bounds of family and neighborhood. The fourth requirement, which operates somewhat independently of the other three, is a legitimate social hierarchy. Florida failed to meet these requirements during the Antebellum era, resulting in extremely high homicide rates.⁴⁰

Florida fails the first requirement by not funding law enforcement officials or holding cells for criminals. This societal lapse left law agents impotent and citizens vulnerable. When governments are unstable, elites are at odds with each other, and laws cannot be enforced, as is standard on contested frontiers and during revolutions, civil wars, and military occupations. Competition among groups and individuals can spin out of control and lead to catastrophic homicide rates. Florida failed the second requirement because citizens felt that their political representatives held more stake in Washington, D.C. than in Florida, creating resentment among criminals and average residents alike. Florida fails the third qualification due to the citizen’s paranoia of being “bested.” This insecurity and constant political strife created further rifts inside Florida society because of the pressure to “pick a side.” No harmony existed among the citizens in Florida because of the persistent conflict both socially and politically. Every slave state fails the fourth requirement since the institution of slavery is devoid of a legitimate hierarchy. Florida

⁴⁰ Denham and Roth, “Why Was Antebellum Florida Murderous? A Quantitative Analysis of Homicide in Florida 1821-1861”.

failed all these requirements making Antebellum era Florida an extremely violent place to live, and with secession looming on the horizon, things only looked worse.

Secession was almost guaranteed in Florida if Lincoln won the 1860 election. The Union Democrat John C. Breckenridge dominated Lincoln in Florida, winning the state by over 3,000 votes.⁴¹ It proved to be fruitless, though. Lincoln won the election, and Florida seceded on January 10th, 1861, just over three months after the election concluded. After Florida seceded from the Union, it joined the Confederacy on February 28th, 1861. Florida joined the Confederacy to begin its role in the Civil War. Still, internal factors prevented the state from holding a pivotal role during the conflict.

Ironically, Florida appeared to be in a much better situation than many other Southern states at the end of the Civil War. Aside from the battle of Olustee and a few skirmishes in the state's northern regions, the war never really reached the Sunshine State. Because of this, Florida lawmakers and public servants did not need to focus on rebuilding destroyed buildings, bridges, or roads as many other Southern states did. Floridians did not create much state infrastructure before the Civil War and did not lose what it built during the war. However, despite the lack of physical damage, the Civil War destroyed Florida's society. Without the need to rebuild the state, white Florida citizens focused on what they considered the actual destruction, white Floridian's status as white men in a post-Emancipation society.

Emancipation completely altered Florida as a society. It destroyed slavery. It destroyed the political system. It destroyed the civil government. It destroyed the social relations based on

⁴¹ Ibid, 68

white supremacy. Sending emancipated Black citizens back to the plantations and keeping them out of politics became a top priority for Florida lawmakers. After the Emancipation Proclamation, it became clear that the end of slavery was inevitable, and conservative whites sought any opportunity to prevent this massive societal shift from impacting their white supremacist way of life. The solution came in the form of Presidential Reconstruction.

Presidential Reconstruction represents the plan Andrew Johnson implemented in the waning years of the Civil War. Essentially, Johnson left control of the Reconstruction era to the Southern states allowing them to have “slavery by another name.”⁴² The official announcement for Presidential Reconstruction came in two proclamations on May 29th, 1865. The first granted amnesty and pardons to those who participated in the rebellion and took an oath to swear loyalty to the Union and support Emancipation. Along with this proclamation, Johnson restored all property rights (except enslaved people) to those who supported the Confederacy and took the oath of loyalty. The final aspect of the first proclamation required fourteen classes of Southerners (most notably Confederate officials and owners of taxable property over \$20,000) to apply individually for Presidential pardons or risk their voice being removed from Reconstruction policies. This piece of his first proclamation gave Johnson “an aura of sternness.” Still, others believed that Johnson’s plan for individual pardons did not punish the aristocracy but forced them to endorse his terms for Reconstruction.⁴³

In Johnson's second proclamation, he placed William W. Holden as provisional governor of North Carolina. Johnson assigned Holden the responsibility of calling a convention and

⁴² Eric Foner, *Reconstruction*, 183

⁴³ *Ibid*, 183

amending the state's pre-war constitution to create a "Republican form of government" that entitled North Carolina's rights within the Union. After its implementation in North Carolina, this same stipulation was extended to the rest of the former Confederate states. Johnson barred Confederates who did not receive a pardon from voting for delegates, but others who met the qualifications before secession (white men) gained their right to vote.⁴⁴

Through these proclamations, Johnson gave these southern states free reign when determining state laws. With this freedom, southern governments implemented legislation that stripped the rights of newly emancipated Black residents and pushed them back into other forms of slavery. These laws became known as Black Codes. Each Black Code carried the same purpose: re-enslave formerly enslaved people of the South through the power of bureaucracy. White Southerners knew that if Black Americans exercised their rights to own property, vote, or get elected, they could upset the white supremacist hierarchy that Florida citizens strive to re-attain after Emancipation.

Florida amended their constitution on October 25, 1865, and immediately implemented Black Codes to hinder the mobility of Black Residents. These new laws clearly state that no one can be elected to the Senate or House of Representatives unless he is a white man to curb any attempt at Black representation in the Florida government.⁴⁵ The amendments also attacked any Person of Color's ability to testify in court (unless it directly involved a person of color). No Person of Color could not serve on a jury, even if it affected a Person of Color.⁴⁶ After

⁴⁴ *ibid*, 183

⁴⁵ Florida Constitution, art. 4, sec. 4,5, 1865.

⁴⁶ Florida Constitution, art. 16, sec. 2,3, 1865.

demolishing the political rights of Black citizens, they implemented laws to prevent them from organizing or challenging those who held power. These codes state that any form of perceived insurrection, whether it be a speech or in writing, could be met with the death penalty. Southern whites did their best to prevent Black Floridians from mobilizing at any level, creating severe punishments to intimidate the Black population from making any significant change. By systematically attacking any avenue for progress, many Black Floridians were forced back onto the plantations through sharecropping and labor contracts.

Legislators created vagrancy laws with the direct purpose of putting southern Black Americans back on plantations, and the institution of sharecropping placed them in debt to the landowners. Labor contracts came out of the vagrancy laws in the Black Codes. The code stipulates “That every able-bodied person who was no visible means of living and shall not be employed at some labor to support himself or herself, or shall be leading an idle, immoral or profligate course of life, shall be deemed to be a vagrant.”⁴⁷ The punishment for vagrancy ranged from being put in a pillory, whipped, or placed under contract for up to 12 months on a plantation. Whites only used these punishments against People of Color, which the Florida Constitution stipulates as a person with at least one-eighth “negro blood.”⁴⁸ Many planters adopted the “sharecropping” option to prevent People of Color from leaving plantations.

Sharecropping projected opportunity, but the reality of the situation created a lifelong debt that no one could pull themselves out of. Essentially, plantation owners loaned out land and various equipment to Black residents at an outrageous price, forcing the Black resident to work

⁴⁷ Florida Constitution, Ch. 1467, sec. 1, 1865.

⁴⁸ Florida Constitution. Ch. 1468, sec. 3, 1865.

off their debt. These planters always came up with multiple excuses for how the sharecroppers failed to meet specific standards, indebting them to the planter for the foreseeable future. These dark and twisted policies went hand-in-hand with vagrancy laws.⁴⁹

Southern whites believed that Presidential Reconstruction was a well-intentioned response to Emancipation. Several the laws reflected policies instituted by the army, the Freedman's Bureau, and policies implemented in the North; but, when stripped of the context of how governments enforced them, these policies reflect more nefarious intentions. Vagrancy laws, for example, came from the North. Northern courts viewed those without work as unfortunates rather than criminals; only utilizing these vagrancy laws to discipline sex workers or petty thieves. However, in the South, Southern lawmakers used this policy to force freed people back onto plantations.⁵⁰

The Black Codes made any actual progress in an emancipated society extremely difficult. They stripped away People of Color's right to representation, justice, and labor. Black Floridians were slowly pushed back into slavery by influential planters and racist politicians. Congressional Reconstruction also known as "Radical Reconstruction" became the solution to fight against these "Black Codes." Congress responded to the Black Codes with the Civil Rights Bill of 1866. The bill, signed into law on April 9th, stated that "all persons born in the United States" (except for American Indians) were "hereby declared to be citizens of the United States." The legislation granted all citizens the "full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property." The House overrode President Andrew Johnson's veto to get this bill

⁴⁹ Shofner, *Nor is it Over Yet*, 124-125.

⁵⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 208

passed.⁵¹ President Johnson was not the only one who opposed the bill; *The Florida Peninsula* published an article on May 12th detailing the language of the Civil Rights Bill. In this article, they pose the question: “Have we any grounds of hope?” and answer: “For one, we confess, we see none, none at all.”⁵²

To help enforce the Civil Rights Bill, the Federal Government dispatched Union troops across the South. If you took many Southerners (and some historians) at their word, they would create an image of near-fascist occupation in the state. The role of these soldiers was to aid in spreading the message that slavery was abolished, overturn local laws and court cases, and work with freed people on creating a new form of government in the states. The Federal Government dispatched these troops across the South. Black troops, white troops, and cavalry riders attempted to use their influence to help southern citizens. The number of soldiers differed across the South depending on the severity of violence, strangely enough, though Florida saw one of the smallest occupations of the Reconstruction era.⁵³

The early months of Reconstruction saw the most significant amount of Union troops. The bulk of these troops was stationed across the panhandle and continued east, across the state’s northern regions. The Federal Government stationed some soldiers in pockets in the interior and along the west coast, but they never exceeded more than 100 troops in these locations. Another issue is that, besides some collections in 1865 and 1866, no cavalry troops held positions within

⁵¹ “The Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871,” U.S. Senate: The Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871, June 5, 2020, <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/EnforcementActs.htm>.

⁵² “The Civil Rights Bill,” *The Florida Peninsula*, May, 12th, 1866.

⁵³ Gregory P. Downs and Scott Nesbit, *Mapping Occupation: Force, Freedom, and the Army in Reconstruction*, <http://mappingoccupation.org>, published March 2015, accessed June, 2021.

the state. Florida is a massive land mass, and without access to horses, union troops could not travel to the lesser populated locations of the state and protect those citizens. They found themselves left to their own devices, which continued the cycle of killings (reminiscent of those explained by Denham and Roth of the Antebellum era).⁵⁴

The memory of these Southerners and Southern historians' points to a significant occupation. Still, the reality seems to be that this frustration came from just the idea of any intervention by the Federal Government. White Southerners held a deep seeded hatred for these troops, and Floridians did not experience timidity when exercising these feelings. For example: In 1866, former Provost Marshal Captain Johnson looked to buy land in Gainesville. Johnson was unpopular with the locals during his time in charge, and the residents wanted to show him that there were more desirable places to settle other than Gainesville. To make this point, the Sherriff, Clerk of the Probate Court, Judge of the Probate, and about three others, beat Captain Johnson so bad he nearly died. These men were not just a posse but a group of well-respected, powerful men who almost killed another man due to his former position in the town. After the incident, Captain Johnson decided not to buy land there.⁵⁵

This experience points to the more significant issue in Florida: those in power within the state did not have to abide by the government's laws. Without acknowledging a larger governmental body, the presence of Union troops serves as a moot point. Even white men without immense power could commit heinous crimes and walk away unscathed. Alachua resident J.D. Childs recalls, "A few weeks ago, a desperate character rode into a store and shot a

⁵⁴ Downs and Nesbit, *Mapping Occupation: Force, Freedom, and the Army in Reconstruction*.

⁵⁵ "Difficulty in Gainesville," *The Daily Evening Telegraph-Philadelphia*, February 1, 1866.

colored man deliberately and killed him; no arrest was made. In all the cases where colored men are killed, it is very seldom that an arrest is made, and if one is made, the proceedings are very slim.”⁵⁶ This testimony points to a pervasive trend in the state of Florida, that those who commit crimes against People of Color walked away unscathed.

⁵⁶ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 292.

CHAPTER 2: WHITE RAGE

On a Friday evening in Live Oak, Florida, 1869, Doc Roundtree was enjoying a quiet night with his family; without warning, fifteen white men descended upon his house and started banging on his door. The mob drew Doc Roundtree to answer the door and suddenly dragged him outside “hand and foot” and “flung” some of his children outdoors. The posse began to whip Doc Roundtree, his wife, and three of their children. When Roundtree asks why they attacked him, one of the men says, “didn't [you] know they didn't allow damned n*****s to live on land of their own?” and gave Doc Roundtree orders to go work for his “master,” John Sellers in the morning. Doc Roundtree had never worked for John Sellers, but through this statement, these men John attempted to reinstate the power dynamic they had over Black men before Reconstruction. John Sellers (the only man in the posse who tried to conceal his face with smudging) arranged this surprise attack on Doc Roundtree for two reasons. The first being that Doc Roundtree lived on land granted to him by the Federal Government, and the second was that Doc Roundtree refused to let his children work for John Sellers. Both of Sellers’ excuses for attacking Doc Roundtree were part of a seismic shift occurring in Florida during the Reconstruction-era. White rage in the face of Black mobility prompted this violence.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 279-280.

The excuses that John Sellers used to justify his attack on Doc Roundtree touched extremely fragile elements of whiteness for white men in Florida and perpetuated the fear white men held concerning black agency. The first aspect is that Roundtree was a Black man that lived on land granted to him by the Federal Government. As seen in the last chapter, Floridians did not have respect for government intervention of any kind, and white conservatives saw granted land as a blatant affront to the anti-federal government principle White Democrats held. The fact that a Black man could even own property next to a white man was unacceptable. The second aspect of the attack exacerbated this fear. Doc Roundtree refused to let his children work for John Sellers. It served as a reminder that People of Color acquired agency with their labor. Doc Roundtree became a living example of everything white Democrats feared, and they chose to “teach him a lesson” through violence. The level of agency Doc Roundtree exhibited was unheard of during the Antebellum period. John Sellers did not appreciate Roundtree denying something to which he felt he was entitled. One of the men proves the evidence of this statement when he says that Roundtree needs to work for his “master.” John Sellers used violence to prove to himself and the community that he would not accept the newly earned rights of Black men in Florida.

While it is true that Sellers used both of these reasons to justify the attack on the Roundtree family, if these two specific instances did not incite John Sellers to attack Doc Roundtree and his family, something else certainly would have. The bottom line is this: John Sellers, and his posse in Live Oak, resented any mobility or power People of Color were receiving in Florida, and they were willing to use violence to get their point across. Before the attack, this same party of men attempted to charge Doc Roundtree with stealing a goat after

purchasing it legally. After the whipping incident, Doc Roundtree turned these men in. They were all arrested, and the County Judge let them off for \$5 each. About a year later, one of the men who attacked Roundtree went after him again. However, Roundtree survived this second attack; the assailant shot him in the foot. This attack was the final straw; Doc Roundtree moved to another town to protect himself and his family.⁵⁸

This chapter will focus on how lawlessness shifted in Florida from targeting average white citizens to People of Color and, eventually, their allies. A pattern emerges in the testimonies of the Joint Select Committee on violence. These patterns include a new level of organization that characterized this violence. This testimony documented an even more dangerous world for People of Color because conservative whites targeted them for their political affiliation. White Republicans supported Black Floridians' right to vote, which placed a target on their back. This shift in violence established a precedent where Democrats openly attacked Republicans in the interest of disenfranchising them. This struggle came to a head during the 1876 Presidential election, the beginning of the Reconstruction era's end.

The Joint Select Committee was a group of representatives investigating the violence level within the former Confederate states in 1871 and 1872. This committee investigated Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. Those who testified came from many different backgrounds. They were politicians, farmers, lawyers, doctors, and

⁵⁸ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 279-281.

even the head of the KKK, Nathan Bedford Forrest, testified. These testimonies demonstrate how violent the Reconstruction-era became.

The attack on Doc Roundtree shows the new era of violence in Reconstruction-era Florida. These attacks did not resemble the white-on-white violence where drunken brawls got out of hand or petty squabbles ended in murder. The attack on Doc Roundtree and his family demonstrates that violence was less white on white and more white on Black violence. This new era of violence, mainly whippings, lynchings, and shootings, was now being perpetrated by groups, mobs, and possies rather than individuals. This shift indicates a new level of organization to these acts of violence. This organized violence aimed to intimidate free people and ensure subservience to the wealthy planter class.

While Doc Roundtree lived to testify against these men, others were not as lucky. In the first five years of Reconstruction, there were 153 murders in Jackson County, 20 in Madison County, 16 in Columbia County, 10 in Suwannee County, 9 in Hamilton County, 7 in Taylor County, and 4 in Lafayette County.⁵⁹ Looking at these statistics, it is evident that Jackson County is an outlier in terms of murder during Reconstruction. Representative J.C. Gibbs stated that the number could be even higher. After he reported these numbers, another representative named Mr. McMillan said he held an account of 183 murders in Jackson County. Jackson County was unquestionably the most violent county in Florida regarding reported violence. More testimonies described the nature of violence in the county, and more people brought the statistics of violent crimes. The other counties did not have the same level of representation and relied on other

⁵⁹ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 222.

Republicans across the state to communicate with each other to compile these statistics. Just because the numbers are lower in other counties compared to Jackson County does not mean that these counties were not dangerous. There were still many instances of violent crimes within the borders of these counties. The bodies continued to pile up, and the Federal Government needed to take necessary action quickly to help protect Black men and their families in Florida.

In 1871, one of Florida's few Black political representatives, J.C. Gibbs, saw the increased violence against Black men (and Republicans) and wanted to give the Federal Government an idea of how violent things were becoming within the state. J.C. Gibbs tasked L.G. Dennis (resident of Alachua County and sitting State Senator) to collect the data on the number of murdered "loyal men" in his Alachua. Through this correspondence, L.G. Dennis provides a terrific example of how conservative whites were implementing this new methodology of white-on-Black violence.⁶⁰

First, it is essential to discuss that collecting this information was not an easy task for L.G. Dennis. Since there was not a person in Alachua who effectively recorded these crimes, many of these attacks went unlisted. Part of the reason is that public officials did not erect proper positions or structures to record this information. Florida's law enforcement infrastructure remained substandard after the Civil War making record-keeping difficult. Another primary reason collecting this data was difficult, few of the men who commit murderous acts were tried or convicted. This injustice made an official court record of these crimes essentially non-existent.

⁶⁰ In this period White-on-Black violence also refers to white residents and Republicans who supported People of Color.

Therefore, this information gap left L.G. Dennis to rely on his memory and the memory of other Republicans, which is not an ideal method of collecting data.⁶¹

Dennis maintained in the five years since Reconstruction began, Florida residents murdered at least nineteen Black men and Republicans in Alachua County. It is worth pointing out that this list does not include the “very many assaults with intent to murder” which have occurred often in the county. These nineteen killings ranged from places as desolate as Florida’s highways to densely populated areas like Republican meetings. There seemed little need for privacy for those who killed a Black man or a white Republican in Alachua. Ironically, Dennis’ contends that even with nineteen murders, residents highlight Alachua for its “quietude” compared to other counties. As seen in the above statistics, within the first five years of Reconstruction, Alachua was the third most murderous county in Florida, yet Floridians describe it as “quiet.” Nineteen murders were still considered low during the Reconstruction era in Florida.⁶²

Dennis’ letter supports the press's role in Alachua exacerbating violence. Dennis argues, “the press has not only encouraged this sentiment [of anger towards the Federal Government but has invariably attempted to excuse crimes when committed against loyal men by misrepresenting facts and endeavoring to make it appear as the result of some personal difficulty in which the loyal man was the aggressor.” The press’ ability to spin attacks making the aggressor the victim,

⁶¹ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 268-270.

⁶² United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 268-270.

reflects another element of organization in the lawlessness exhibited in Florida that was not as present in the Antebellum era.⁶³

The attack on the Roundtree family and the correspondence between J.C. Gibbs and L.G. Dennis encapsulates the shift in violence during the Reconstruction-era in Florida. These men were attempting to re-establish those white men as a whole (specifically white Democrats) and maintain power in Florida. The goal was no longer to “best” another white man but to “best” the Black population in Florida and drive off their white Republican allies. White Democrats could attack Black men and their families with the assistance of Florida’s broken justice system and press and not face any real consequences. These institutions allowed white Democrats to enforce a false narrative that Black men and Republicans were instigating these violent acts and that white Democrats acted out of self-defense.

One of the largest contributing factors to this new era of violence in Florida comes from the rise of Democratic Clubs. Democratic Clubs organization to the lawlessness manifesting in Florida. Frank Myers, a citizen of Alachua and Hernando County, testified in front of the Joint Select on the organization of Democratic Clubs. Frank Myers joined the Democratic Club in Alachua in 1868. Once in the Democratic Club, members invited Myers to join their “secret-service club,” which they started to establish at this time. In the words of Frank Myers, the secret-service club’s objective was this: “In case it became necessary, as they feared it would, to use force or violence to prevent certain parties from exerting too great of influence with the

⁶³ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 268-270.

colored population in that county, to be prepared to do it effectually and secretly.”⁶⁴ Myers’s description of the purpose of the secret-service club looks eerily similar to how the Ku Klux Klan and its imitators operated across the South.⁶⁵

The constitution of the Young Men’s Democratic Club contains twenty-eight sections, mostly detailing standard organizational specifics (who reports to who etc.). It does not mention preventing other parties from exercising their right to vote. On the surface, it does the opposite. One of the responsibilities of these club members listed everyone in their assigned sector. They got the name, place of residence, current employment location, height, complexion, where they are registered, and the political biases of every white man and Person of Color in their jurisdiction.⁶⁶ They also located, mingled, and “learn[ed] the face” of every Person of Color in their area to inform them of the tenets of the Democratic Party and educate them on their duty as citizens.⁶⁷ Once they collected all these statistics, they ran it up the flag pole to the “chiefs” and created a master list. This process intends to make a guide for anyone in the secret service club to find potential insurrectionists or anyone else who went against the Democrats.

This detail is what makes section twenty-two of the charter so important. The section states: “In further elections, each leader of tens shall be furnished a roll of the voters of the county, shall attend the polls under the direction of their respective chiefs, and shall keep with

⁶⁴ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office), 157.

⁶⁵ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 157.

⁶⁶ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 157.

⁶⁷ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 157.

them a sufficient number of their men to challenge, identify detect, and prevent fraudulent votes from being polled, and shall render what other surface and assistance that may be demanded by the circumstances or the order of the central chief.”⁶⁸ This section establishes these men as enforcers at polling places. Under the guise of education and inclusion (the charter also aims to create separate Democratic Clubs for People of Color, section twenty-six), the Democratic Club now holds a list of each possible political enemy in their area, where they live, and what they look like. They had the opportunity for intimidation and threats of violence against those who they believed possibly voted Republican. Frank Myers’ testimony details the organization of the Democratic Club and how they disenfranchised the citizens of Florida.

The actions taken by secret service clubs, the KKK, and smaller organizations with similar goals created an oxymoron in Florida: organized lawlessness. While these men took lawless actions, they conducted them with a precise and organized approach. Of course, crimes of passion occurred in the heat of the moment, but an abundance of incidents that hurt many Floridians was well-planned and thought out. The entire process of creating clubs and gathering all the necessary information to disenfranchise voters made sure that those who could now vote were now unable to exercise that right. Black Codes and Democratic Clubs worked hand-in-hand to contain any progress made by Black residents during Reconstruction.

The presence of Democratic Clubs served as enforcers of white supremacy and aimed to return to the Antebellum social order. Southern slave societies built ridged structures of how

⁶⁸ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 158.

white and Black people should interact. Emancipation and suffrage meant Black people began living outside these parameters, jeopardizing this framework. During Reconstruction, Black men transitioned from having no rights during slavery to becoming free men. White Democrats resented this change and used violence to limit their civil, social, and political freedoms. In this defiance, White Democrats enforced White Supremacy to restrict their mobility and excuse violence toward them. It initiated a form of frontier justice within Reconstruction-era Florida.

Establishing white supremacy and reestablishing antebellum racial orders in Florida meant that a Person of Color could not own land that a white man wanted, hold a job a white man wanted, reject a job a white man offered, or be respectful enough in a conversation with a white man. Anything that would give a white man an excuse to challenge black mobility. Analyzing the Joint Select Committee, Florida's testimonies reveal two clear patterns of how the violence manifested during the Reconstruction era. These patterns present themselves by looking at the time of day the crime occurred. During the daytime, violence against People of Color and their allies was more spontaneous and predominantly involved only one attacker. Attacking someone out in the open left the opportunity for possible witnesses, which could make a better case in convicting someone of a violent crime, even though juries often acquitted many of these perpetrators of their crimes. On the other hand, Nighttime attacks were more planned and usually involved a mob or posse assisting in the assault. While the patterns establish a difference in how white conservatives carried out violence, both instances usually stemmed from the same type of infraction: challenging the white supremacist status quo.

Along with the time of day in which these violent attacks occurred, many attacks were often based on the county and the patience of the perpetrator. For example, in Jackson County,

violence was more common, and juries rarely punished those responsible for violent offenses. This distinction means that it was easier for daylight attacks to occur because witnesses did not matter when these perpetrators went on trial. For example, in 1869, in Madison County, a white man shot a Black man in broad daylight among many witnesses. The white man said he shot the man in self-defense. There was a warrant for the shooter's arrest; he was captured, tried by an all-white jury, and acquitted.⁶⁹ Instances like these occurred around the state. In west Jackson County, an unknown assailant shot a Black man who worked for the ferry that assisted those wanting to cross the Apalachicola River when he was stepping off the ferry. The attack occurred in broad daylight, around noon, and no official arrested the man for the crime. Three more Black men were shot the same way in the exact location for the next three or four days without any law enforcement involvement.⁷⁰ Occasionally, white conservatives shot men who were mistaken for other men. In Jackson County, men pursued a Black Sherriff named Calvin Rodgers. They wanted to kill him for the position he held. An unidentified man shot an innocent Black man of a similar build where Calvin Rodgers frequented. Since he was Black, no one followed up on the situation.⁷¹ All three of these examples demonstrate the immediacy with which violence occurred in Reconstruction era Florida. Planning was not always necessary because aggressive whites could kill with impunity.

⁶⁹ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 119.

⁷⁰ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 77.

⁷¹ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 99.

While daytime attacks continued to occur often during Reconstruction, the testimonies given to the Joint Select Committee predominantly detailed attacks occurring in the evening. Conservative whites chose evening attacks for a few reasons; the first is that the cover of night and a lack of witnesses made the initial ambush and escape easier. Even though juries commonly acquitted white men of their crimes, these attackers preferred to skate by unmolested. The second is that nighttime attacks almost guaranteed that the victim would be with their family. This situation provided white conservatives with potential hostages to assault verbally, physically, or sexually to demonstrate power or create leverage. Nighttime attacks that occurred in the home also meant that the target would be less likely to run away for fear the posse would hurt their family in retaliation. The strong presence of Democratic Clubs also made evening attacks smoother. Institutions like Democratic Clubs, Regulators, and Klan members helped provide these men with structure and numbers, which assisted these attackers in “teaching lessons” to Black citizens across the state. Essentially, these clubs provided the opportunity to round up a posse and granted protection to the perpetrators during the attack and assisted in providing alibis once they finished. While these clubs assisted in providing organization and numbers, they were not required when planning to commit a nighttime attack. A multitude of testimonies reveal that many of the attackers just corralled their neighbors and family members to terrorize Black families.

In these nighttime attacks, conservative whites targeted women in the same scenarios as their partners. For example, after an argument about stolen hogs, a white hired hand whipped a

Black man's wife and daughter for the perceived infraction.⁷² Another Black man and his wife were severely injured in a nighttime attack because the man would not give up his land to a white man after he purchased it.⁷³ White men targeted Black women with attacks that did not include physical violence. Conservative whites used their existence to slander influential people. A Democrat killed prominent Republican General Dickenson, but many blamed Homer Bryant, a Black Republican, stating that Dickenson "had been too intimate with a colored woman," which made Bryant kill him.⁷⁴ This tactic was common for Democrats. J.C. Gibbs says, "I have noticed that as a general thing when a man is politically obnoxious and is [killed] or anything of that kind, immediately they say there is a woman in it."⁷⁵ These were efforts by the KKK and their affiliates to justify the death of their enemies. The press did its best to assist in this perception. Democrats were looking for anything to help prevent the rise of the Republican party, and tainting the memory of those who Democrats killed made it easier to rationalize the death of a prominent Republican politician.

Outside of the day, specific locations were more dangerous than others. One of the more hazardous places to be as a Person of Color or open Republican would be on Florida's highways. The lack of witnesses and an expressway to another town provided a notoriously threatening location for those passing through (like John Gilbert). These highway attacks also made it

⁷² United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 127.

⁷³ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 54-55, 59-60.

⁷⁴ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 303.

⁷⁵ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 222.

extremely difficult to move out from hostile cities or visit other areas of the state. The fear of being attacked created an environment where staying put or moving put Black families in harm's way.⁷⁶

While not as common as random acts of violence, planned, politically motivated attacks also occurred on highways. James Yearty, a white member of the Florida Legislature, was killed on the road merely because, according to J.C. Gibbs, he “ought to have been killed.” He was a Republican in Jackson County, which, outside of being black, was just about the worst thing you could be in that part of Florida. Jackson County Resident M.L. Sterns stated that “the murders where men have been killed have been universally republicans, excepting in cases of personal difficulty. Take the outrages where there is no assignable cause for them, and they are always inflicted upon republicans.”⁷⁷ This statement is representative of the opportunistic violence that took place during the daytime. These actions become more common when conservative whites praise dangerous men for their efforts. Witnesses saw Luke Lot kill Mr. Yearty, and after the murder, Lot was openly living in Jackson County without fear of capture. There were no legal repercussions levied against him for murdering an innocent man. Luke Lot was “fitted out with arms and equipment and rides a very fine horse around the county.” There were also “continual expressions throughout Middle Florida by men who approve of these things to this extent: They say they would give [Lot] the best horse on their plantations, if he needed it, to aid him in his

⁷⁶ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 267.

⁷⁷ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 84.

operations.”⁷⁸ This environment created an “open secret” of violence for Florida. Many residents knew that these killings were happening and who was responsible for them. Still, those who upheld the law were either overwhelmed, apathetic, or supported the violence levied against Black men and Republicans. These protections resulted in a severe lack of justice for the victims and their families.

These attacks on highways were challenging to find suspects to incriminate. There were few witnesses, and those around were often in the attacker's position or feared retribution from the attacker and their supporters. These attacks were easier for Florida law enforcement officers to ignore because there was such little evidence to incriminate the perpetrator. Even if they acquired enough evidence to accuse someone, those who furnished the evidence risked their lives by bringing it to court. Twenty men beat a black carpenter named R.W. Cone for what they thought was bringing in evidence against a white man. Cone stated that he did not bring in proof but was just on the jury in that particular case. The posse indicated that “the jury was as bad or worse than being in evidence because the jury took negro evidence right straight along in the whole court in preference to white men's evidence.”⁷⁹ This testimony shows that while challenging the white supremacist status quo was often the provocation for violence, in the end, it rarely mattered. The attack exemplifies Reconstruction-era violence as an extension of the violence seen in the Antebellum period. The reasons for the violence were circumstantial, and the specifics of provocation often had little to do with the subsequent acts of intimidation or

⁷⁸ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 83.

⁷⁹ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 65.

violence. Like before the Civil War, Reconstruction-era violence seemingly resembled violence for violence's sake. Still, it adds a layer of purpose for White Democrats since it attempted to re-establish the Antebellum social structure in post-Emancipation society.

To maintain the racial order, White Democrats also needed to sabotage the Federal Government's attempts to protect Black citizens. For example, The U.S. government sent arms by rail to Florida to help the state's official militias and the Union troops stationed there. These arms never made it to their intended owners. In Mariana, an unknown group of men took many guns off the train. It is unknown if the men stopped the train or if the rail workers were in on the scheme, but they destroyed some weaponry and carried off many others. Many believe these guns ended up in the hands of men who used violence to uphold white supremacy.⁸⁰

A Black man named Richard Smith was a laborer who employed about eight women, children, and men to work with him on cotton farms. After the day's work, the laborers slept in the cotton-house, which they had permission from the owner to do. At about midnight, a party of four to six men broke into the cotton-house. They struck a match so that everyone could see their masks on. Witnesses also noticed that this party carried weapons that corresponded with some guns taken from a train on the railroad. Conservative whites used these weapons to inflict terror on Black citizens. The posse shot Richard Smith and left him on the doorstep of the owner's house. Officials arrested one of the men who shot Richard Smith, and the only reason people could think of why this happened was that Smith was a Republican.⁸¹ Secret Democratic Clubs

⁸⁰ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 167.

⁸¹ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 120.

assisted in arming these violent men while pushing their political agenda of taking out Republican voters.

Aggressive Democrats attacked White Republican allies in similar ways to People of Color. Open attacks and nighttime raids were the main procedures for attacking these people. For example, A man named Allison was descended upon by a posse for allegedly taking something that did not belong to him. The posse called him out of his house, and the party of armed men killed him. While some attest that Allison had stolen something, we will never know since these men decided to circumvent traditional justice in favor of frontier justice. The main reason they attacked Allison was that he identified as a Republican. The way these men instituted their form of justice points towards a political killing rather than vigilante justice since it follows the pattern of nighttime attacks levied against Republicans across that state.⁸²

Political affiliation was not the only target white Democrats placed on a white man's back in Florida; a person's military affiliation could also land them in the sights of white Democrats. Former Union soldiers or supporters deviated from the white supremacist status quo and enraged White Democrats in Florida. Even the memory of Union soldiers provoked White Democrats. In Marianna, Florida, a few young women desecrated the graves of Union soldiers.⁸³ The reverence held for Confederate soldiers did not apply to Union men under white supremacy in Florida. Like Republicans, Union men represented unwelcome guests in Florida, and their demise would assist in establishing complete control of the state. This was the main goal of the

⁸² United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 116.

⁸³ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 282.

Democratic Clubs, which sprouted across the state.⁸⁴ Therefore, if conservative whites killed a Union supporter or Republican, there was little need to investigate the motive since their allegiances served as enough evidence.

Contrary to popular belief, Union men were not just Northerners. There were many Southerners who followed the Union cause. The murder of Dr. Kreminger is a perfect example of this. Dr. Kreminger and his wife Rebecca lived in South Carolina before they moved to Florida in 1865. Dr. Kreminger served in the Union army during the Civil War. While there were not many Union soldiers from that region, the environment was much different for those who joined the Union cause in Florida. Rebecca Kreminger remembers that “[South Carolinians] were not like they are [in Florida]; they did not wish to kill every man that was not like them. A Union man's family there was not mistreated because he had gone to the other side as they do here in Florida.”⁸⁵ This statement by Rebecca Kreminger shows that Floridians were highly combative towards Union men compared to other Southern states. This difference is strange when comparing South Carolina and Florida. Armies fought more Civil War battles in South Carolina than in Florida, and there was a more prominent Union presence in the state after the war. However, those who lived in South Carolina were still less hostile than the citizens in Florida.⁸⁶ This testimony suggests that battles nor Union occupation radicalized Floridians during Reconstruction. Undying loyalty to white supremacy radicalized them. This attitude is an

⁸⁴ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 147.

⁸⁵ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 180.

⁸⁶ Downs and Nesbit, *Mapping Occupation: Force, Freedom, and the Army in Reconstruction*.

extension of the violence seen during the Antebellum period, with more specific targets, in this case, former Union men.

Florida Secretary of State, J.C. Gibbs, testified that the unknown assailant killed Kreminger because of his affiliation with the Union Army. He also believed that Southern Democrats threatened Dr. Kreminger long before the murder occurred, creating another “open secret” for violence in Florida. The man who shot Dr. Kreminger was J.C. Poncher, a known Democrat, and another Democrat, Captain Edwards, knew that this attack might happen. Rebecca said, “the week before the unknown man who killed Doctor Kreminger, he had to carry his children over the water in a boat to school every morning and bring them back in the evening. Poncher was seen in the morning at the water with his double-barrel gun and a repeater. He stayed at Captain Edwards's house and was there five evenings and mornings in one week. A young man told Rebecca’s son-in-law that Poncher was there and inquired where Doctor Kreminger dropped off his children, when he carried them over, and if he carried them by himself. He then told this man not to tell anybody that he had seen him in the area asking about Doctor Kreminger. That made Rebecca think that Edwards must have known Poncher's intention.”⁸⁷

Poncher later stated in court that he was “urged” to kill Dr. Kreminger by Edwards and that he would not have killed him if Edwards did not push him to do so. While there was a warrant against Poncher, he evaded capture. The Sherriff had been chasing after Poncher, but he had firm Democrat friends where he was hiding in Suwannee County, and he said he would not

⁸⁷ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 223, 178.

be arrested alive. Like Luke Lot, he was not only able to live freely after the murder of a prominent Republican but was openly praised and rewarded by powerful Democrats of the state for doing so.

Aside from People of Color, Republicans, and Union supporters, Northerners without direct Union affiliation were also subject to violence and intimidation. There was an open disdain for Northerners across the South, not just in Florida. Southerners would commonly label these new residents as “carpetbaggers.” Democrats saw a “carpetbagger” as a political opportunist and instigator. Many Southerners believed these men were predominantly Republican and aimed to disrupt the Southerner's way of life. In Florida, they were unwelcome. Some men who testified to the joint select committee moved to Florida after the war and expressed that they were not well received in the state. For example, the Sherriff, David Montgomery, and elected official Mr. Eagan were the only two Northern men in Madison County left by 1871. Montgomery stated, “It does not make any difference how long a man has been here from the North; if he is a Republican, he is a carpetbagger. I know they have made their threats to kill Mr. Eagan and myself and get us out of the way, if possible, before the next election.”⁸⁸

This statement from David Montgomery demonstrates that Democrats openly disdained Republicans because they knew that elections were the best way to guarantee the rights of Black men. They felt that these men were not only disrupting white supremacy, which did not include giving rights to People of Color, but they also were a representation of the men their family and

⁸⁸ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 134

friends fought not too long ago. Democrats were utilizing violence and intimidation to injure people and eradicate Black voices on a political level. There, of course, was the element of continuing to see Northerners as enemies since the Civil War was still on people's minds.

To protect Florida's citizens and curb the violence prevalent across the state, the Federal Government, People of Color, and their allies began forming organizations. The most recognizable of these organizations was the Freedman's Bureau. They were also known as the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. Congress established Freedman's Bureau in the War Department on March 3, 1865. The Freedmen's Bureau activities in Florida generally resembled those conducted in other states. The Bureau issued rations to formerly enslaved people and white refugees, supervised labor contracts between planters and formerly enslaved people, administered justice, worked with benevolent societies in establishing schools, and assisted formerly enslaved people in locating land. The most notable contribution from the Florida chapter of the Freedman's Bureau was that more formerly enslaved Black people secured homesteads than any other Southern public-land state. This statistic reflects how Doc Roundtree secured the land he owned in Live Oak. While many planters refused or swindled People of Color out of their land, the Freedman's Bureau aided some families in getting their land and crops.

Unfortunately, many jobs were only available in the state's agricultural sectors, forcing these families into sharecropping or other labor contracts. These were exploitative by nature. Labor contracts generally stipulate the hours and days of work, types of rations planters provided, and the amount of wage or crop planters paid them. Nearly half of the freedmen on plantations in Florida worked for a third of the crop plus rations. Those who worked for wages

also received rations paid \$12 per month for men, \$9 for women, and \$5 for children. While well-intentioned, the Freedman's Bureau served as a cog in the larger plantation complex. This aided Floridians and the rest of the South in continuing slave-like policies for years to come.⁸⁹

Since the Freedman's Bureau could only provide so much assistance and protection, Black residents knew they needed to take other measures to ensure the security of Florida's most susceptible citizens. This understanding is where clubs like the Loyal League and Union League grew in importance. Eric Foner states that "by the end of 1867, it seemed that virtually every Black voter in the South had enrolled in the Union League or some equivalent local political organization. Although the league's national leaders urged that they hold meetings in a 'commodious and pleasant room,' this often proved impossible; branches convened in Black churches, schools, and homes, and also, when necessary, in the woods or fields."⁹⁰ These leagues' primary function was to educate the citizens across the South politically. They read Republican newspapers, debated, and nominated candidates for office. Like many of the institutions that followed Emancipation, Union and Loyal Leagues provided a safe outlet for men of color to learn and express themselves in an environment where they felt safe.

However, much of the information about this league is told from the perspective of those outside the organization. The League was known for showing up in large groups to polling places, which terrified the white population for two reasons. The first was obvious: these large

⁸⁹ United States, National Archives and Records Administration, Records of the Assistant Commissioner and subordinate field offices for the state of Florida, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872. (Washington, DC : National Archives and Records Administration, 2002.) 1-4.

⁹⁰ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877*, (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1989), 283.

groups of Black men would most likely be voting on the Republican ticket. Second, these white men feared large groups taking up arms against the county's men. Democrats falsely saw the Loyal League as a reflection of Democratic Clubs. Democrats believed these men had the same intentions as they did, resulting in them thinking that the Loyal League wanted to eradicate or control the Democratic population. White Democrats who gave testimonies also said that sexual assaults and discharging of firearms rose when the Loyal league was present. This assertion reflects the lies and propaganda the press used to paint Black men as dangerous.⁹¹

The Loyal League speakers would have at their events further exacerbated this fear. Democrats stated that these would incite the crowd with “carpetbagger” speeches.⁹² People outside these groups testified about their organizations (like the Union League and the Lincoln Brotherhood), but actual members did not discuss the details of these affiliations.

The lack of testimonies from actual members of these groups corresponds with the environment they existed in. Conservative whites targeted Republicans across the state just for being affiliated with the party. There was an immense risk in joining these organizations, which acknowledged the rights and existence of People of Color and aimed to make their lives easier. It is also understandable why those outside these clubs discussed their organizations in cryptic secrecy or outright slander. Those involved in the Democratic Party remained vigilant to any mobilization of Black voters. The idea of a secret organization existing to aid their mobility was cause for alarm in the Democratic eyes. While admirable, the efforts of the groups who aimed to

⁹¹ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 46.

⁹² United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 298.

protect People of Color and their allies were facing extreme odds in the face of the Democratic Planter class. This group of men had the most potent control over Florida and continued to use violence to maintain that power within the state. Secrecy became a way for Republican groups to protect themselves while attempting to mobilize voters to create change.

Throughout Reconstruction, white men who supported the Democratic party used violence to reaffirm their control over the Black population. With the support of white Republicans, Federal and State assistance, and political clubs, People of Color found a semblance of support outside their community. This assistance and their actions helped them survive and find power through the ballot box for a few years. Once white Democrats understood that this would be how Black men gained control within Florida, the violence evolved from maintaining social power to maintaining political power. White Democrats continued to use the same tactics of slander, intimidation, and outright murder but focused their attention on influential republicans and Black voters. Conservative whites used these tactics during mid-term and presidential elections, but most egregiously in the Presidential election of 1876. The violence and corruption in Florida were so severe that they forced the Federal Government to intervene and investigate the election's legitimacy. This investigation is similar to what the Joint Select Committee gathered testimonies on in Florida in 1872. Both government documents highlight that Florida's citizens were unwilling to accept the voting rights and power that People of Color were receiving in Florida. They felt that the only way to combat this would be by using violence and intimidation to disenfranchise Black voters.

CHAPTER 3: THE RIGHT TO VOTE

In the February of 1869, The Jackson County clerk of court, Dr. Finlayson, and his friend W.J. Purman headed home from a public concert. On their walk, a notorious Klan member named Thomas Barnes waited for them. Barnes took out his weapon and fired upon them. Barnes killed Dr. Finlayson and shot W.J. Purman through the neck, leaving him wounded. The death of Dr. Finlayson prompted a wave of violence that became overwhelming in Jackson County. Multiple murders followed, and a dozen more citizens received injuries over the next few days. The Sherriff, Thomas M. West, began to fear for his protection due to the violently unstable nature of Jackson County.

This fear became a reality when a group of Democrats severely beat him because he identified as a Republican Sheriff. Due to this savage attack, West turned in his official resignation to Governor Reed. In his resignation letter, Thomas M. West stated that he could no longer be sheriff and execute the legal process in that county without any safety for himself or his constituents. Mere days after Sheriff West's resignation, an unknown assassin shot and killed Dr. Finlayson's replacement, John Q. Dickenson. Dickenson died about ten steps from where Thomas Barnes killed his predecessor, Dr. Finlayson. Dickenson was one of the most prominent and active Republicans in West Florida and his death served as a victory for the Democratic party. After the resignation of the sheriff and the murder of both clerks of courts, the citizens of

the Democratic party of Jackson County met and dictated to the governor that he must appoint specific democrats to these now-open positions. The governor made these appointments without issue.⁹³

As seen by this example, the motive and targets of violent acts shifted in Florida during Reconstruction. Many of Florida's white citizens resented the mobility and agency Emancipation granted to Black Floridians, and Democratic whites used violence to suppress this change. The story of Dr. Finlayson and John Q. Dickenson is a perfect example of the new plan for white Democrats: They wanted to circumvent the voting powers People of Color recently obtained in favor of maintaining Democratic Power which supported the white supremacist social order. In a society without legal repercussions for perpetrators of race and political-based violence, Democratic whites openly killed those who upset the status quo and used their power to implement politicians who sought to maintain Antebellum social structures. Democratic Floridians achieved this political hegemony without elections, completely bastardizing the democratic process granted by the 15th Amendment.

On February 16th, 1869, Congress passed the 15th Amendment and on February 3rd, 1870, Congress ratified the Amendment. Lumped in with the 13th and 14th Amendments, the ratification of the 15th Amendment represents the culmination of incredible efforts made by abolitionists, political groups, and American citizens alike. The ratification of the 15th amendment also represents the Federal Government inching closer to the line in the U.S. constitution recognizing that "All men are created equal". While the passing of the 15th

⁹³ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 144.

Amendment celebrated a landmark moment in American history, the language and implementation of the law left much to be desired.

The most glaring issue with the 15th Amendment is that Women continued to be excluded from the polls, leaving a large gap in political equality. Another aspect of the 15th Amendment, which is largely misunderstood, is that the amendment does not grant suffrage to anyone. Rather, it prevents states and the Federal Government from giving preference to one citizen over another on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. In *United States v. Reese* (which occurred in 1875), the court stated that “The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution does not confer the right of suffrage, but it invests citizens of the United States with the right of exemption from discrimination in the exercise of the elective franchise on account of their race, color, or previous condition of servitude, and empowers Congress to enforce that right by ‘appropriate legislation.’”⁹⁴ This distinction is important because, contrary to popular belief, the 15th Amendment does not serve as blanket coverage of voting rights for the previously disenfranchised, but rather it gives Congress the right to protect voters from disenfranchisement. On the surface, it appears that the 15th Amendment finally gave suffrage to black men, but state governments found ways around this new legislation with voting requirements that specifically targeted Black men.

As Eric Foner points out in his book, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, this oversight left space for entirely new strategies for disenfranchisement. These tactics skirted around the new law by implementing qualifications that predominantly affected

⁹⁴ *United States v. Reese*, 92 U.S. 214 (1875).

black men and effectively rendered the 15th Amendment a moot point. Foner argues that because the 15th Amendment did not forbid literacy, property, or educational tests, Black men continued to be excluded from the ballot box. It is important to point out that states all over the country used these tactics, not just the South. Northern states used these new qualifications to disenfranchise Black men and Western states prevented Black men and Chinese immigrants from having a voice in the political sphere with this new legislation.⁹⁵ Democrats stated that they put these qualifications in place to prevent voter fraud.⁹⁶ Essentially, while the 15th Amendment prevented discrimination based on race, color, and previous conditions of servitude, it did nothing to break the idea that voting is a right, not a privilege.⁹⁷

This chapter will focus on how Florida's citizens responded to the implementation of the 15th Amendment and how they disenfranchised voters through violence in the subsequent elections. To understand the grander context of Southern citizens' reaction to the 15th Amendment, I will compare the citizens of Florida's reactions to citizens to other southern states that participated in the large-scale Federal Investigations after the 1876 election. To deeper understand the nuances in Florida, I will analyze how different counties implemented these disenfranchising tactics, specifically in Alachua County and Jefferson County. Understanding the disenfranchisement tactics used by these specific counties provides a deeper understanding of how those counties operated during the antebellum period. This analysis creates a throughline that connects the pre and post-Reconstruction era; which emphasizes the true lack of change the Reconstruction era provided Florida in terms of violence. The efforts made by those who wanted

⁹⁵ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Row, 2014), 446

⁹⁶ Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 206.

⁹⁷ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 446.

to ensure white supremacy did all but negate the progress made during the Reconstruction era and left Florida's Black citizens in a similar type of powerlessness as they endured in antebellum society.

To better understand Floridian's reactions to the 15th Amendment, it is important to see how residents reacted in the other states that the Federal Government investigated after the 1876 election. These states are Louisiana, South Carolina, and Alabama. All three states used practices that reflect what Florida's citizens implemented after the ratification of the 15th Amendment; however, all three states experienced large-scale massacres which did not occur in Florida at the same level. While this aspect is true, it does not diminish the violent atrocities that plagued the state of Florida during Reconstruction.

The Louisiana government ratified the 15th Amendment on March 5th, 1869. While Louisiana ratified the Amendment relatively early, it does not mean that the citizens completely supported this change. What took place in 1873 might be the most violent massacre to occur during the Reconstruction era, the Colfax Massacre.⁹⁸ The result of the 1872 Louisiana governor election catalyzed the wave of violence. Colfax, Louisiana's population demographics reflected the political divide in the city. Colfax boasted 4,600 voters at that time, 2,400 Black residents who mostly voted Republican and 2,200 white voters who heavily supported the Democratic party. The Republicans narrowly won the gubernatorial election and Democrats vowed revenge over the defeat. This vow came to fruition in the spring of 1873. On March 28th, Democratic leaders called for armed support to take the Colfax courthouse from the Republican party on

⁹⁸ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 437.

April 1st. The Republican party called on its members to help defend the courthouse while friction between the parties continued to rise.

The tension finally came to a head on April 13th, Easter Sunday. This is when the Colfax Massacre took place. More than 300 white men, from various white supremacist groups, attacked the courthouse. Chaos ensued when the militias fired a cannon at the courthouse. The situation went from bad to worse when the attacks began to spread outside the courthouse area. The white mob killed approximately 150 Black men, which includes 48 more after the battle. The state militia arrived on April 14th and attempted to restore order. Authorities arrested 97 white men on the counts of breaking the Enforcement Acts, but only a handful received convictions. The Louisiana government released these men in 1875 when the U.S. Supreme Court in *United States v. Cruikshank* ruled the Enforcement Act unconstitutional, mirroring the system of due process in Florida.⁹⁹

South Carolina ratified the 15th Amendment on March 15th, 1869, and served as a unique example of political representation during Reconstruction. South Carolina boasted the most representation of Black politicians during the Reconstruction era.¹⁰⁰ Even though the state of South Carolina possessed this significant representation, it did not represent a racially harmonious state. This assertion is exemplified in the Hamburg massacre, which took place in July of 1876. The dispute arose during a 4th of July parade when white men in a horse-drawn carriage demanded passage during the Black militiamen march. After some arguing the

⁹⁹ Michael Stolp-Smith, *The Colfax Massacre (1873)*. BlackPast.org. April 07 2011. Accessed 2021. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/colfax-massacre-1873/>.

¹⁰⁰ William C. Hine, "Black Politicians in Reconstruction Charleston, South Carolina: A Collective Study", *The Journal of Southern History*, Nov., 1983, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Nov., 1983), pp. 555-584.

militiamen let the carriage pass. Four days later more than 200 armed white men (most of them “Red Shirts” from a paramilitary rifle club) arrived in Hamburg with a former Confederate general demanding the black militia disarm. The conflict led to 7 black men being killed and several more wounded. This massacre ignited more race-based attacks leading up to the 1876 election. For example, in September, white attackers killed as many as 100 black citizens in Ellington, South Carolina. During the battle, one white man stated “By God! We will carry South Carolina now. About the time we kill four or five hundred men, we will scare the rest,” showing the true motive for these attacks was to maintain white supremacy as well as disarm the Black militia.¹⁰¹

In 1874, Alabama voters geared up for their midterm elections. Black Republican Henry Frazer spent two weeks canvassing sharecroppers for their support. The Monday before Election Day, he led about 400 Black men to vote. Frazer informed these men that sticks would be fine, but no weaponry would be taken with them on their journey to the polls. Frazer also wanted the men to stay in groups until all the men voted. Frazer took as many precautions as possible to help curb any instigation of violence, but it proved to be inconsequential. The trouble began when a dispute arose concerning a Black man’s age and whether he should be allowed to vote. Some White Democrats took the young man aside as an abandoned ally. When the Black man emerged, he suspiciously changed his party and held a Democratic ticket in his hand. A Black man named Milas Lawrence said to the young man, “God damn you, are you going to vote for the Democratic ticket?” The conversation continued to escalate until it finally came to a head

¹⁰¹ Ronald G. Shafer, “July Fourth parade led to a massacre of Black people in Hamburg, S.C.”, *The Washington Post*, July, 4th, 2022.

when a white man named Clayton yelled, “Shoot the damn son of a bitch!” And then another white man named Dowdy pulled a Bowie knife and stabbed Lawrence in the back. Lawrence tried to flee but fell a few yards from where the man stabbed him.¹⁰²

In the ensuing chaos, a white man fired his gun in the air, signaling to the rest of the group to organize. The man shouted “Fall in, company A. Fall in Company B.” According to witnesses “white men shuffled out of the crowd and gathered on the side of the street opposite the polling boxes. The men on the ground drew pistols and shotguns and the second-story windows of the storefronts opened showing men aiming rifles at the crowd. This is where the shooting began. The white mob wounded about eighty Black men. In the wake of the attack, White Democrats burned precinct boxes and declared themselves the victors of the elections. The Democrats gained control of the Alabama legislature and maintained that majority for over 130 years.¹⁰³

These massacres served as only one example from each of the states that the Federal Government investigated (alongside Florida) after the 1876 election. Across the South, massacres took place while legislators continued to implement laws that prevented any progress made by the 15th amendment. The violence seen in Florida during Reconstruction, much like the rest of the South, increased around election season to maintain white supremacy in the South. Andrew Flowers, a Black cooper from Chattanooga, testified that the main goal of White Democrats was to intimidate black and white Republican voters and that they get worse around

¹⁰² Kyle Whitmire, “Ambushed in Eufaula: Alabama’s Forgotten Race Massacre,” *Al.com*, February 7th, 2022, <https://www.al.com/news/2022/01/ambushed-in-eufaula-alabamas-forgotten-race-massacre.html>

¹⁰³ Whitmire, “Ambushed in Eufaula.”

election time. He has heard one white man threaten, “You vote that ticket, and you will be Kluxed tonight.”¹⁰⁴ These acts of intimidation carried weight due to the violence that white Democrats used outside election season. Regarding Florida, from 1868 to 1876, assassins killed at least six Republican legislators. In Lafayette County, Democrats shot Senator Kreminger while he smoked on his porch. In Nassau County, an unknown man killed Senator Johnson at his home by the Callahan Railroad. Before his death, an even number of senators represented Florida (twelve Republicans and twelve Democrats). Democrats assassinated Senator Johnson to give themselves the majority. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Luke Lot shot James Yearty in broad daylight. Another member of the assembly, Mr. Mahoney, lost his life to assassins as well.¹⁰⁵ And of course, assailants killed Dr. Kreminger and John Q. Dickenson just feet from each other in Jackson County.

Threats and intimidation served as extremely effective tools in the effort of disenfranchisement; and coupled with the justice system being imbalanced against Black men, many of the white perpetrators left courthouses exonerated of their crimes. This left many Black men in a lose-lose situation. They could vote for the Republican ticket and risk being attacked for their political affiliation, or vote Democrat to protect themselves, but support a system that continued to oppress them and ignore their humanity.

¹⁰⁴ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 48

¹⁰⁵ *Florida Election, 1876. Report of the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections, with the Testimony and Documentary Evidence on the Election in the State of Florida in 1876.* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1877), 47

The disenfranchisement tactics used by Florida's citizens (while reminiscent of the lawlessness exhibited in the Antebellum era) modeled themselves after another state's ploy to reaffirm white Supremacy. This is The Mississippi Plan. The Mississippi Plan served as a direct response to the 15th Amendment. White Democrats in Mississippi devised the scheme to combat the rising Black, Republican majority from voting. This plan came to fruition a year before the 1876 Election with a two-pronged attack. White Democrats attempted to "persuade" (by any means necessary) the small number of white Republicans to switch and support the Democratic Party as the first objective. White Democrats utilized a fear of social, political, and economic "ostracism" to convince Republicans to switch. The second objective was simply to intimidate the Black population into not voting. While economic coercion provided an important aspect of disenfranchisement, violence offered the largest contribution to the intimidation of Black voters. Although citizens called upon the Federal Government to help curb the violence, President Grant did not step in because he did not want to be accused of "bayonet rule." Ultimately, the Mississippi Plan succeeded, and its influence spread across the South.¹⁰⁶

The Mississippi Plan provided order and an easy-to-follow mission for White Democrats in Florida. It assigned goals for white supremacists in Florida outside of their typical motivation (immediate satisfaction of "besting" another man). The addition of this framework is where violence shifted again in Florida. Much of the violence seen early in the Reconstruction era came from a place of rage in the face of black mobility. After the Mississippi Plan, the motivations for violence became more political in the push for Democratic victories at the polls.

¹⁰⁶ Judy Richardson, "The Mississippi Plan is Enacted", African American Registry. September 11, 2022. <https://aaregistry.org/story/the-mississippi-plan-political-deviance/>.

These acts of violence and intimidation manifested differently in Florida depending on the county. Some counties relied more on social ostracism or economic violence to disenfranchise voters, whereas other counties utilized outright violence to intimidate Black Floridians and white Republicans. To examine this discrepancy, I will be investigating two specific counties in Florida: Alachua and Jefferson. Alachua county has the city center of Gainesville, which served as a relatively urban area in Florida, while Jefferson County is identified as more rural due to its reliance on agricultural production. Looking at Jefferson County and Alachua County will provide examples of how different tactics led to disenfranchisement within the state.

In Alachua, constant fighting plagued the county after the Civil War, especially in the central hub of Gainesville. It came to the point that was rare when a person would not be killed or severely injured on a Saturday night. Authors Charles H. Hildreth and Merlin G. Cox state that the carrying of firearms by both Black people and whites was common, and gunshots would be heard in the center of town almost every evening.¹⁰⁷ It did not help that Alachua County was also poorly policed. The lack of law enforcement and the citizen's reliance on discharging firearms to make their point created a dangerous environment for the county's most vulnerable residents.

Jefferson County was not as intense as Alachua. As mentioned in the last chapter, The Freedman's Bureau aided Black Floridians in their transition to citizens. The Bureau provided rations, medical care, and educational opportunities on a small level. This assistance however

¹⁰⁷ Charles H. Hildreth and Merlin G. Cox, *History of Gainesville Florida 1854-1979* (Gainesville: Alachua County Historical Society, 1981), 58.

was only meant to be temporary making long-term employment vital to the survival of many of these Floridians. The planters needed families to produce the agriculture on their large plantations, and Black men needed jobs for fear of being arrested for vagrancy. This left many of those who worked on plantations before Emancipation to labor in fields their masters enslaved them on. This left most formerly enslaved people to sign labor contracts on Jefferson County plantations where a slave/master power dynamic continued to thrive.

These contracts almost always benefited the landowner and included certain articles and agreements that allowed them to exploit the worker's labor without paying them. Since governmental policies barred the majority of black Floridians from educational services, the landowners held a distinct advantage when making these contracts. The bulk of the contracts provides the landowners with a lien option for any debt the laborers incur. The landowners often utilized this policy in August and September when the crops are laid. The slightest neglect or mistake when performing this task could incite the landowner to revoke pay and refer to the contract as justification.¹⁰⁸ The farm laborers of Jefferson County rarely found justice in these fields. For example, Hector Lang, a formerly enslaved person working on a large plantation, kept getting harassed by a white laborer on the same plantation. The judge dismissed Hector Lang's case for a couple of reasons. First, Lang could not afford the fee to prosecute his instigator. Second, the judge decided to throw out the case. The judge felt that Lang held no reasonable claim and dismissed the case. It came to the point where those in the justice system persuaded formerly enslaved people to not bring their issues to court and try to settle their issues outside the

¹⁰⁸ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 101.

court system because they rarely received a fair trial anyway. As seen by this example, the violence exhibited in Jefferson County aligned more with political and social repercussions rather than physical attacks.

Looking at these two counties will establish how White Democrats used different types of violence to maintain white supremacy through the ballot box. It is important to establish context for how these different counties operated to better understand why certain tactics worked better in each county. Distilling Alachua County and Jefferson County to their main differences leaves us with a strictly agrarian county in Jefferson and a semi-urbanized community in Alachua. Delving deeper into what this identity means for the citizens of those counties reveals important information about how the people of these counties interact. Mainly the interactions between white Floridians and black Floridians.

In a county like Jefferson, Black people primarily interacted with other Black sharecroppers and their white employers. Since the framework of labor contracts and sharecropping resembled slavery so much, the interpersonal dynamics remained stagnated in the Antebellum era. For these families, conflict arose when they disobeyed their employer's wishes, but these rarely ended in murder. Since the plantation owner relied on Black labor so heavily, it served their best interest to keep them alive, but extremely oppressed. Jefferson County violence, especially before election season, relied heavily on intimidation and threats of loss of pay. These threats focus on future repercussions, rather than the immediacy seen in Alachua.

A county like Alachua offered more opportunities for Black people to interact with white people; for better or worse. Black laborers found other avenues of employment outside the

strictly agrarian sector in Gainesville. This reality took Black men out of the fields and into the city. While many Black men still worked in agriculture, Gainesville offered the opportunity to go to stores and shops which also created a potentially hazardous situation for Black citizens just trying to operate within society. For example, J.D. Child's testified that "a desperate character rode into a store and shot a colored man deliberately and killed him; there was no arrest made."¹⁰⁹ This testimony presents a county where violence can occur at any moment, whereas Jefferson County residents experienced threats and intimidation rather than outright killings.

Jefferson County records show very little evidence of violence during Reconstruction. This provides multiple avenues of exploration for why this might be. First, it is important to note that many records of violence, especially lynching, start around the 1880s. This provides us with one possible outcome: No one recorded the violence. There could have been dozens of lynching victims in Jefferson County, but records fail to show this information. A second option could be Jefferson County's status as a plantation county. In a more urban environment like Alachua, Black men are not as valuable to white men since they are in direct competition for jobs and property, thus making them prime subjects for violence and murder. In Jefferson County, Black families are much more valuable. The planters are exploiting Black labor using contracts and sharecropping policies that make them more useful to whites and place back workers back into slavery. This leads to the final option: sharecropping. The institution of sharecropping is so similar to slavery that the master/slave power dynamic managed to remain intact. The mere threat of violence quelled any attempts at challenging white supremacy. So, while it is extremely

¹⁰⁹ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 292.

difficult to find statistics on violence in Jefferson County, the lack of this information provides multiple options for why it is absent.

It is not as difficult to find statistics on violence in Alachua County. Throughout Reconstruction, Alachua resembled that lawless nature Florida held during the Antebellum period, only with new targets and motives. White Democrats in Alachua also disregarded the judicial process since it favored them. This imbalance made Alachua County an extremely dangerous place to live. For example, in the winter of 1870, a mob broke into an Alachua County jail and took a black man out, and lynched him. The man was in jail because he was accused of shooting a white man. Knowing how the justice system operated during Reconstruction-era Florida, there is little doubt that this man awaiting trial would have been charged and punished for his crime. This act points towards how emboldened these men became with their acts of violence. Acts like these are what made the intimidation practices so believable. While the violence exhibited itself in different ways in each county, one major constant remained, violence became more politically motivated, and worsened around election season.¹¹⁰

Another similarity between Alachua and Jefferson County is how the democrats in these counties supported the Mississippi plan. L.G. Dennis testified that he has debated with many Democrats “on the stump” about the Mississippi Plan and how they want it to be implemented. White Democrats in Florida saw this as the “proper policy” for their Reconstruction-era politics and wanted to implement its structure within Florida. Dennis also provided an article from *The*

¹¹⁰ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, made to the two Houses of Congress February 19, 1872*, 292.

Weekly Constitution, which is a Democratic paper published in Jefferson County. The article is titled “Stand by your Pledge” and it is essentially a call to arms for violence against those who vote Republican. The most glaring aspect of this is the 4th resolution. It reads “That in this ensuing year we positively refuse to re-employ one out of every three who may be upon our places and who voted against reform and low taxes; and that a list of all such persons be published in the *Constitution*, in order that we may know our friends from our enemies.”¹¹¹ This resolution, which is reminiscent of the tasks of Democratic Clubs mentioned in chapter one, is an obvious ploy to collect the names of any potential Republicans in the interest of either intimidating them to vote Democrat or killing them. So, while Alachua and Jefferson operated in very different ways, the white Democrats held the same goal: disenfranchisement through intimidation and violence.

Alachua did not have many reports of violence at the polls during the 1876 election. Like many other counties in Florida, armed men guarded the polls with “all kinds of weapons” continuing the thread of intimidation of Republican voters.¹¹² It did not always work though, which is exhibited through the Archer precincts in Gainesville. This controversy is what dominated the testimonies on Alachua in the investigation of the 1876 election. The cause of concern was a massive increase in Democratic votes at these precincts. In 1872, The results of the Democratic vote topped out at 44. In 1874, the count dropped lower. The democratic member of Congress, Mr. Finley, only received 25 votes in that election year. During the 1876 election,

¹¹¹ *Florida Election, 1876*, 47

¹¹² *Florida Election, 1876*, 221

however, the democrats claimed to have 230 votes. This massive increase became the subject of much debate and required investigation.

Originally, the Democrats wanted to throw out the vote because of fraudulent activity on behalf of Republicans. It failed before the county canvassers (whose responsibility it is to monitor these elections) and pushed through to the State Canvassing Board. The Democrats wanted to either throw out the vote or deduct 219 votes from Republicans on the grounds of alleged fraud. However, the state committee decided that there was “grave reason to believe that a gross democratic fraud committed at that poll” not Republican.¹¹³ The dispute started because of an inconsistency in the number of those who voted. Election workers announced the vote after 11 o’clock and multiple witnesses testified the election resulted in 535 total votes, 399 Republican votes for Rutherford B. Hayes, and 136 Democratic votes for Samuel J. Tilden. This is not the count that the county canvassers received the next day though.¹¹⁴

The conflict at Archer precinct No. 2 began when Samuel T. Fleming attacked the returns for being fraudulent. Samuel T. Fleming, a town merchant, and a democrat, “is familiar with the names and faces of nearly all the persons who are in the habit of voting at said Archer [precinct].”¹¹⁵ He, “at the request of several citizens in the county,” took the names of every citizen who voted as they announced their name to the inspector.¹¹⁶ His list showed only 305 voters, 230 less than what the returns box showed.¹¹⁷ Another man claiming to be present for the

¹¹³ *Florida Election, 1876*, 13

¹¹⁴ *Florida Election, 1876*, 14

¹¹⁵ *Florida Election, 1876*, 34

¹¹⁶ *Florida Election, 1876*, 34

¹¹⁷ *Florida Election, 1876*, 13

canvassing, S.C. Tucker (another democrat), stated that there were 316 votes cast; 180 Republican votes to 136 Democratic votes. It came to light that Samuel T. Fleming was not present for the entirety of the election and two election officers, inspector R.H. Black and clerk T.H. Vance confirmed the original 535 return. This massive imbalance in votes returned sparked the interest of the committee and they decided to investigate the debacle.

From the testimonies given, the discrepancy came from the night of the election. Irving G. Webster who served as the county clerk, placed the ballot box in his office at the courthouse, around 11 o'clock. Like many other public buildings in Florida, it was quite feeble. Irving G. Webster described it as an "insecure building, into which anyone can intrude at will through loose shutters and yielding fastenings."¹¹⁸ Now, people guarded the ballot box, but they identified as registered democrats. Their responsibility was to "keep anyone from interfering with the ballot box, which gave them and deprived everybody else of access to the boxes."¹¹⁹ When inspectors looked at the ballot box the next day, the seal remained unbroken. However, the lid "was loose enough to run a pen-holder under it."¹²⁰ Officials found nothing else at the time, but when the House got a hold of the ballot box, they noticed someone loosened the screws in the lid so that the box could be lifted without being unlocked.¹²¹ This is what ultimately shifted the focus from possible Republican fraud to probable Democrat fraud. When Democrats presented the ballot box to the county canvass the day after the election, the box only contained 277 tickets; 39 less than the number S.C. Tucker claimed to be in the box, and 28 less than

¹¹⁸ *Florida Election, 1876, 14*

¹¹⁹ *Florida Election, 1876, 14*

¹²⁰ *Florida Election, 1876, 14*

¹²¹ *Florida Election, 1876, 14*

Samuel T. Fleming claimed to be in the box. This discrepancy deepened the mistrust of the House committee concerning Democratic fraud in Alachua. This coupled with the investigation of a certain inspector named Floyd Dukes at said precinct further implicated Democratic fraud in Alachua County.

Floyd Dukes, an inspector at the precinct, and according to the words of the official government document “an intensely stupid person, leaving a doubt if he knew the meaning of his own testimony or had any recollection of his own acts concerning the election.”¹²² Floyd Dukes also admitted to receiving a bribe in his affidavit, so while harsh, the government document appears to be accurate in its representation of Floyd Dukes’ mental fortitude and moral compass. This prompted the House committee to have to work backward. The testimonies by inspectors would be a dead end due to their reputation for being dishonest. The committee decided to verify the votes cast by the testimonies of the voters, which proved to be difficult.

The Federal Government wanted voters to testify but finding them posed a difficult task. After the election, many Black voters left the area looking for work because they already harvested the crops that season.¹²³ Many of these voters did not have the time or funds to testify before the committee. Even with this situation, the committee found that out of the individual voters, Republicans cast 321 votes at that precinct, with Democrats only casting 180 votes. This finding exposed Samuel T. Fleming’s and V.C. Tucker's returns as unreliable.

¹²² *Florida Election, 1876, 14*

¹²³ *Florida Election, 1876, 14*

Through these testimonies, officials found more fraudulent data. An analysis of the names of people who testified showed that Fleming's list contained only 217 republican votes, 104 less than the returns yielded. Of these names, Fleming's stated to have voted in the election combined with the names of those who could not make the hearing because of time and economic restraints do equal the 399 republican votes, but it does not leave room for the claim of 136 Democratic votes.¹²⁴ The house found that someone badly tampered with the polls. Fleming claimed 58 people voted who did not show up on the list and 43 people who swore they voted also did not find their names on Fleming's list.

All these voting statistics can get confusing. Essentially, the House committee took the final ticket number given to them by the Democrats of 277 votes, 39 less than what V.C Tucker stated with his poll numbers. The House committee took the testimonies and found that 321 Republicans cast votes to 180 Democrats who cast votes. Keep in mind that not everyone could testify due to time and economic restraints as well as the inaccuracy of the Fleming list that left off and added people who claimed to have voted. The committee took the testimonies along with Fleming's "admissions" and found a Republican majority of 280 votes out of the 316 votes claimed by the Democrats of the precinct.¹²⁵ So if this is true, where did the 136 democratic votes come from? The House committee believed that the votes the Democrats claimed were most likely fraudulent.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ *Florida Election, 1876, 14*

¹²⁵ *Florida Election, 1876, 14-15*

¹²⁶ *Florida Election, 1876, 15*

Fraud dominated all topics concerning the 1876 Election in Alachua County. Because of this, much of the attention shifted from violence and intimidation to fraud. Looking at how white Democrats treated People of Color and white Republicans, and the fact that armed men guarded the polls, it is easy to assume that white Democrats used intimidation practices during this election. It just got overshadowed by the major subject of interest, Democratic voter fraud. What this information does show is that Democrats recognized that violence could no longer be the only tool to ensure white supremacy in Florida. Democrats added election fraud to their approach to political and social domination. This new angle signifies that Democrats recognized the popularity of the Republican Party and resorted to new deceptions to prevent them from establishing power in Florida.

While Jefferson County did not resemble the lawlessness or political corruption exhibited in Alachua County during Reconstruction; many instances of violence still occurred. Especially leading up to election season. One of the worst offenses came in October of 1876. Some white men came to Senator Robert Meacham's house with the intent to kill him. The two men saw Meacham earlier in the day, remarking "That is some damned radical leader." Meacham previously worked his way up the political ladder to become a senator and one of Florida's most prominent, Black politicians. His death would ensure another possible seat for Democrats while simultaneously taking out one of the more powerful Republicans in Florida.¹²⁷

Between eight and nine o'clock, Meacham sat in his house with four other Black men and a schoolteacher. One of the men got ready to leave and saw two men waiting at Meacham's gate.

¹²⁷ *Florida Election, 1876*, 335

He walked outside and the two men asked if Meacham was home, and he told the men they were correct. The man called for Meacham, saying that some men wanted to see him. The house sat about fifteen feet from the gate and Meacham left his house to go meet them. As he walked down the steps one of the men asked if he was Senator Meacham. Meacham said, “Yes sir” and just after he got the words out of his mouth, they discharged two shots from their pistols. Meacham came out unscathed, but he fell to the ground during the attack. Meacham wore his pistol on him since he canvassed that day and returned fire as the assailants fled. Meacham luckily escaped this attack with his life, but as seen before, many other Republican politicians did not find the same fate.¹²⁸

Aside from outright assassinating Republican politicians, Democrats also threatened to starve those who voted on the Republican ticket. Since many of the Black Jefferson County residents worked on exploitative contracts; it left them without available cash on hand. This situation forced these residents to ask for advances in meat, corn, and other necessities, thus leaving them in the debt of the landowners. An editorial published in Jefferson County’s paper *The Constitution* looked to exploit this situation, calling for democrats to not extend these favors to farmers unless they voted on the Republican ticket. Not only that, but the article also proposed that those who voted on the Democratic ticket would also gain preference in seeking employment, adding another aspect of coercion and economic violence on Black men.¹²⁹

Loss of employment served as a common threat of economic violence during Reconstruction. For example, farm laborer Emanuel Gunn worked for a man named George

¹²⁸ *Florida Election, 1876*, 335-336

¹²⁹ *Florida Election, 1876*, 336

Rosa. Rosa inquired which party Gunn intended on voting for. When Gunn stated that he would cast his vote for the Republican ticket, Rosa responded “If you do, you cannot remain on my place any longer than the election.” After the election, Rosa discovered that Gunn voted republican and expelled him from his farm “without giving him an ear of corn or a hill of potatoes.” Another instance of this kind of violence concerns a livery-stable man named Simpkins. Simpkins gave his workers until he returned from his trip to the North to decide what party they wanted to vote for, or risk loss of employment. The men decided to “inhibit” their vote and told their friends as well. White democrats also targeted Black women to help sway Black men to either vote Democrat or abstain from voting. During Reconstruction, many Black women worked as cooks and washerwomen. Their employers told these women that they would be fired if their husbands voted Republican.¹³⁰

White Democrats in Jefferson County also threatened Black-owned businesses if they voted Republican. Benjamin Dilworth owned a carpentry shop and worked as a wheelwright. White democrats approached him and threatened that if he did not “stop his course” as a Republican, he would not gain any employment. Without employment, these men risked being targeted for breaking vagrancy laws, thus making them a felon in the eyes of the government. This label strips these men’s right to suffrage, further establishing white supremacy within Florida.¹³¹

Forcing Black men into labor contracts that indebt them to the landowner kept these families in poverty. Threatening to withhold supplies and employment opportunities from these

¹³⁰ *Florida Election, 1876, 338*

¹³¹ *Florida Election, 1876, 338*

men served as another element of control over the Black population. These economic threats were not new to Jefferson County residents, however. Senator Robert Meacham testified that throughout Reconstruction, white landowners refused to sell land to Black residents. They either did not give them the opportunity or stated a price so high that they knew no Black man could afford to purchase it, forcing them back onto the plantations their masters enslaved them on.¹³²

Black men and women were not the only recipients of these kinds of economic violence. White Republicans found themselves as targets of white Democrats as well. A white Preacher named Murdock, who in the past voted democrat, changed his politics and declared himself a Republican. After this change in political stance, the Democratic congregation renounced Murdock as their Preacher and completely barred him from their church. Another white man, Walker, who served as Deacon in a Baptist church, declared himself a Republican and the Preacher revoked his status. The Preacher excused his actions by saying that they would lose their congregation if he “acted in that capacity” illustrating both social ostracism as well as loss of employment for identifying as a Republican.¹³³

The differences in which white Democrats in both Alachua and Jefferson County utilized violence reveal important information as to how disenfranchisement evolved in Florida. Alachua County represents a Southern “Wild West” where people are struck down in the streets without any repercussions. When the white Democrats of Alachua realized that their voter turnout continued to dwindle, despite all the violence and intimidation they doled out, they decided to take it a step further and commit fraud at one of their weaker polls. Since white Democrats rarely

¹³² *Florida Election, 1876, 337*

¹³³ *Florida Election, 1876, 337*

received any punishment for violent offenses, why should they receive any for voter fraud? The emboldened nature of these men attracted the attention of the Federal Government and resulted in a large-scale investigation of their precinct.

White Democrats in Jefferson County resorted to intimidation and violence on an economic and social level to ensure white supremacy. Since many of the Black residents worked on sharecropping contracts, white Democrats held immense power over these families' lives. Refusing to pay them or fire them from voting Republican served as the common use of coercion. Just like the violence seen in Alachua, white Democrats published these threats openly without fear of retribution. The common element is that white Democrats became more and more emboldened in both counties as the Reconstruction era progressed. As conservative whites grew more confident in their open displays of violence, their threats began to carry more weight. All the violence and bloodshed seen between 1868 and 1872 took a toll on Black and white Florida Republicans alike. The threat of racial or political violence became as effective as the attacks themselves. Democratic whites no longer had to back up their threats because the first half of Reconstruction served as its own evidence. This made intimidating possible voters much easier as Reconstruction continued. Eventually, this open display of violence and intimidation attracted the attention of Federal authorities. Once the dust cleared after the 1876 presidential election, Rutherford B. Hayes ended up winning the State of Florida, as well as the presidency, but it came at a cost. Republicans won the White House but lost in many of the local elections. In an even worse turn of fate, an unwritten, bi-partisan compromise ensured the end of the Reconstruction era and white Democrats rejoiced in its collapse. White conservatives continued

their reign of terror well into the 20th century, establishing Florida as the lynching capital of the United States.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Ray Downs, "Florida Lynched More Black People Per Capita Than Any Other State, According to Report," *Broward Palm Beach New Times*, February 12, 2015.

CONCLUSION

On February 1st, 1877, a joint session of the 44th congress convened for the first time to discuss the controversial results of the 1876 election. Contested returns from Oregon, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Florida delayed the final result. Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes prepared to concede the election to his Democratic opponent, Samuel J. Tilden, but New Hampshire, Republican leader William E. Chandler, noticed that if Hayes won each contested vote, he would claim victory over Tilden by one.¹³⁵ The problem was both candidates' electors claimed victories in all the contested Southern states.¹³⁶

While congressional and senate politicians debated how to proceed nationally, Democratic litigators in Florida continually attacked Republican assertions that they won the election. When Congress convened in December, both houses sent investigatory committees to Florida (along with the other contested states). These committees investigated the returns from each race, not just the presidential election. The Democrats wanted to strengthen their argument against Republican returns and Republicans eagerly awaited to defend their position. As stated above, both parties aligned with their partisan leanings and reported that their party emerged victorious. While the citizens of Florida selected Rutherford B. Hayes as their president, the control of the

¹³⁵ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia, "Electoral Commission," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 28, 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Electoral-Commission>.

¹³⁶ *History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives*, "The Electoral Vote Count of the 1876 Presidential Election," <https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1851-1900/The-electoral-vote-count-of-the-1876-presidential-election/> (October 10, 2022).

state went to the Democrats. The Democratic party secured important positions locally (especially in the courtroom), strengthening their power over People of Color once Reconstruction ended.¹³⁷

Besides Florida, South Carolina, Louisiana, and Oregon turning in conflicting reports, the discrepancy between the popular and electoral college votes also added to the conflict. Democratic candidate Samuel J. Tilden won the popular vote by over 250,000, but Hayes won the Electoral college vote by 1, strengthening Democrats' assertions that they won in those Southern states. The task of solving the conflict fell to Congress. The Constitution allowed each state to send its electoral certificate to the Senate, which will count the votes in the presence of the House and Senate members. However, the constitution was unclear whether Congress might investigate officials or electors. This dispute continued until January 29th, 1877, when Congress finally created the Electoral Commission to investigate the contested votes. The Commission contained five members from the House of Representatives, five from the Senate, and four from the Supreme Court. Each vote went along party lines of an 8-7 vote (Republicans held the majority), and after 4 am on March 2nd, Congress declared Rutherford B. Hayes the President of the United States.¹³⁸

Before the Electoral Commission announced this decision, Republicans and Democrats agreed on an unwritten compromise (known as the Compromise of 1877 or the Wormley agreement) that created a lasting, negative impact on the Black citizens of Florida. On February 26th, 1877, Republicans and Democrats met at the Wormley Hotel in Washington D.C. to settle

¹³⁷ Shofner, *Nor is it Over Yet*, 328-339.

¹³⁸ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia. "Electoral Commission."

the dispute over the 1876 Presidential Election. A Black man named James Wormley owned the hotel, which offers a cruel irony due to the parties' decision.¹³⁹ At the Wormley Conference, Democrats gave up their claim that Samuel J. Tilden won the election in return for guarantees by the Republican Party. Democrats wanted Republicans to withdraw their troops from the South, eliminate Northern interference with Southern politics, receive Congressional aid in reconstructing the South's railroad systems, share Southern patronage with Democrats, and appoint at least one Southern Democrat to the President's cabinet. Republican candidate Hayes supported these conditions because he sympathized with white Southerners' desire to end Reconstruction. Rutherford B. Hayes was inaugurated on March 2nd, 1877, and in April, he pulled federal troops out of the South, essentially ending the Reconstruction era.¹⁴⁰

While Hayes's decision to withdraw troops primarily affected South Carolina and Louisiana, it did not have the same impact on Florida. Democratic Governor George F. Drew began withdrawing troops out of Florida after his inauguration on January 2nd, 1877. The last federal troops left Tallahassee three months before Hayes's decision. Troop withdrawal served as the death knell of Reconstruction, and Black Floridians began to despair. Black Florida Comptroller Clayton A. Cowgill predicted that the Republican party "lost the state for a long, long time." The Conservative Democrat party emerged at the end of Reconstruction to take control of the state. This party, made up of Antebellum Whigs, Democrats, Confederates, and disillusioned Union

¹³⁹ Charles E. Wynes, "James Wormley of the Wormley Hotel Agreement," *The Centennial Review* 19, no. 1 (1975): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23738052>, 397.

¹⁴⁰ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia. "Wormley Conference." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, February 19, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Wormley-Conference>.

men came out of the Reconstruction era only losing the institution of legal slavery. By 1877, “a substitute suitable for them had evolved.”¹⁴¹

The policies established during Reconstruction by Andrew Johnson never threatened white supremacy in Florida. Specific legislation strengthened Confederate power and support during this time. Some former Union men flocked to conservative politics after they felt unappreciated by the Federal Government. For example, when President Johnson offered amnesty with the restoration of non-slave property to former Confederates who swore loyalty to the United States, Union men saw this as an insult due to how the Confederate government treated them. Other Unionists lost property to the Confederate sequestration laws and were forced to seek repossession through expensive litigation. Others bought property during wartime tax sales and found themselves dispossessed in favor of returning Confederates. These men viewed these policies as acts of an ungrateful government and looked to depose Republican policies across the state. While some Unionists resented the restoration of land to ex-Confederates, at the same time, these Union complaints undercut the Freedman’s bureau’s attempts to use this same land for Black citizens in Florida.¹⁴²

Even with governmental policies and white Democrats preventing their mobility, Black Floridians sustained their efforts for the state government to recognize them in the political sphere. As a result, white democrats placed extreme obstacles in the path of Black voters on their way to the ballot box. For example, in 1880, election officials denied Black voter Cuffie Washington’s right to vote because a jury convicted him of stealing three oranges, while his

¹⁴¹ Shofner, *Nor is it Over Yet*, 340-341.

¹⁴² Shofner, *Nor is it Over Yet*, 342.

white neighbor, A.J. Harrell, cast his vote even though he admitted to “shooting a n****r.” This example proves that these laws did not care about fraud or justice but rather the disenfranchisement of Black voters. Historian Paul Ortiz states, "Conservatives sought to wipe out black political activity because they realized that African American men and women were never going to accept an inferior place in the state’s economic and social order as long as they could participate in the electoral system.”¹⁴³

Throughout the 1880s, voting rights for Black men eroded. White Democrats continued to use violence on Black voters, and conservatives in politics used their growing legislative majorities to eradicate rights on the electoral front. The Florida press continued to manipulate and support conservative whites through editorials and suppression of incendiary movements by Democrats. All these factors led to a Democratic political hegemony that suppressed any activity the Republican party gave to its Black supporters.¹⁴⁴

Just like during Reconstruction, violence continued outside of election season. Those who testified to the Joint Select Committee on election fraud in Jacksonville put their lives on the line. For example, after he testified, a furious Democrat detained and arrested Augustus Crosby on his way back to Madison County. While he awaited trial in jail, a lynch mob descended upon the building. If it were not for the chain of Black women, standing arm in arm, preventing them from entering, the mob would almost certainly lynch him.

¹⁴³ Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920*, (University of California Press, 2005), 33-34.

¹⁴⁴ Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 37.

If they had the political support, some Black men hired protection from the governor when they traveled like Reverend H.C. Bailey. Another example is white vigilantes lynching John Bird on his way home to the same county after he testified on election fraud. Since these acts of violence did not deter Black men from voting Republican on a larger scale, white Democrats tightened their grip on a political level.¹⁴⁵

In 1885, Florida lawmakers held a constitutional convention to re-shape Florida's state constitution. The Democrats who took control of Florida after the 1876 election felt they inherited a "carpetbag" constitution and looked to make extreme alterations.¹⁴⁶ This new constitution reduced the extensive powers of the governor. The new constitution made more official positions determined by elections but kept county commissioners by governor appointment only. Democrats decided to keep counties with Black majorities under white, Democratic rule. Starting in 1887, the state established even more Jim Crow laws which reestablished the Antebellum social structure well into the 20th century. This new constitution also established a poll tax in Florida, one of the most popular acts of disenfranchisement in the Jim Crow era. Conservative whites continued to use violence and fraud to ensure Democratic victories at the polls. This law, along with the new constraints implemented in Florida's 1885 constitution, eradicated Black voter turnout. By 1890, a large portion of black Floridians ceased voting entirely.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 37-38.

¹⁴⁶ Edward C. Williamson, "The Constitutional Convention of 1885," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1962) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30139912>, 116-126

¹⁴⁷ Shofner, *Nor is it Over Yet*, 344.

As Democrats continued to secure political power, violence against Black men skyrocketed. Between 1882 and 1930, white conservatives lynched 266 Black Floridians. During this period, they also sexually assaulted Black women, destroyed Black communities, and ran off Black residents in areas of Florida to create white homelands. One Black man stated, “Too late to talk about the suppressed vote now...we are in the hands of the devil.” This wave of violence and political corruption terrorized Black residents throughout the turn of the 20th century. This violence and political corruption came to a head with one of the most infamous events in Florida’s history, the Ocoee Massacre.

By 1920, even with all the constraints white conservatives placed on Black social and political mobility, Black families began to establish themselves in Ocoee. Take July Perry, for example. He became a prominent businessperson and assisted in brokering land deals and securing work for People of Color. Black families purchased new cars and saved up to send their kids to college. Historian Connie Lester posits that Black citizens followed the speech Booker T. Washington gave in 1895. Washington stated that if Black families worked hard, acquired property, and became vital to the economy, white citizens would accept them at the polls. The 1920 election put this theory to the test.¹⁴⁸

The 1920 presidential election placed Republican candidate Warren Harding against Democratic candidate James Cox. In the months leading up to the election, the NAACP pushed for voter registration of Black men. Other Republicans, like sitting judge and aspiring U.S. Senator John Cheney, strongly encouraged Black residents to exercise their right to vote.

¹⁴⁸ Robert Stephens, “The Truth Laid Bare,” *Pegasus*, Fall 2020, <https://www.ucf.edu/pegasus/the-truth-laid-bare/>.

However, Cheney's outspoken support of Black voters placed a target on his back. Cheney received a letter threatening that "there will be serious trouble" if Black residents attempted to vote. Since 90 percent of all law enforcement officers, judges, public servants, and lawyers in Winter Garden and Ocoee served as members of the KKK, they did not protect these residents. The KKK even held a parade three days before the election to intimidate voters. All these factors heightened tension among the voters, leading to one of the worst massacres in Florida's history.¹⁴⁹

While there are some conflicting reports on what exactly transpired on the day of the election, most historians agree on this sequence of events: On the morning of November 2nd, 1920, Mose Norman pulled up to his Ocoee precinct to vote. Those working the poll denied Norman his right to vote, so he drove to Orlando to tell John Cheney. Cheney instructed Norman to return and take the names of anyone denying him the right to vote. Norman returned with Cheney's assignment, and when he did, people began to shoot in his direction. Norman escaped, but Col. Smith rounded up about 200 white men to search for him. The mob surrounded July Perry's house (he and Norman were friends) and proceeded to shoot up his residence. The mob beat Perry, shot him, jailed him, and lynched him. The mob hung July Perry's body from a light pole (or tree limb) near the home of John Cheney, who also lost his senate race that evening. As one of the more prominent and resourceful Black men in the area, Perry's death served as a massive personal tragedy as well as the loss of an immensely influential member of Ocoee's Black community.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Robert Stephens, "The Truth Laid Bare."

¹⁵⁰ Robert Stephens, "The Truth Laid Bare."

In the ensuing chaos, Ocoee's Black community attempted to find safety. Black residents were captured, shot, lynched, or never heard from again. Sources range the death toll between 30 and 80 Black residents. While the immediate impact of this massacre remains an awful tragedy, the impact lasted far longer than anyone anticipated. In the 1920 census, 255 Black residents and 560 white residents lived in Ocoee. Just months after the election, no more than two Black residents lived in Ocoee. From the 1930s to the 1970s, no Black person resided in Ocoee. The impact of this massacre created a mass exodus of Black residents and established Ocoee as one of the most dangerous areas for People of Color in Florida.¹⁵¹

The Ocoee massacre is the natural end of how violence progressed in Florida. It establishes a circle of white supremacy. The circle begins with the Spanish using violence to take control and enslave the Indigenous population and ends with white Democrats using violence to run every Black citizen out of Ocoee. Between these two timeframes, the violence used to maintain control grew more sophisticated and targeted. In Florida's territorial days, violence manifested in a two-pronged approach. Spain (and various other colonizing countries) used violence to subjugate enslaved people and ward off competing nations. Similarly, once the U.S. established control in Florida, this same two-pronged method survived. Whites used violence to maintain control of the Black population, just like Spain did to the Native Americans, and instead of using violence to ward off other countries, whites used violence to maintain social status in Florida's society. They both come from the insecurity of not wanting to be "bested" and focus on establishing white supremacy within their borders.

¹⁵¹ Robert Stephens, "The Truth Laid Bare."

Once slavery is abolished, White democrat's main goal became to re-subjugate Black Floridians into slavery. Initially, this violence took the form of white men attacking Black residents for “not knowing their place” in a white supremacist society. At the same time, white conservatives tightened their grip on Florida by establishing an unjust court system that exonerated white aggressors, utilizing the power of the press to manipulate and misinform the population at large, and implementing legislation that favored white Democrats. Once these pillars were put into place, white violence had the space to evolve. Since the Black population refused to be deterred from exercising rights, the violence shifted in Florida from primarily white-on-white crime to white-on-Black crime. This shift occurred due to white Democrats recognizing that Black Floridians still held power through the ballot box and could weaken white supremacy through elections. The establishment of Democratic Clubs and racial hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan assisted in targeting the most powerful and respected members of the Republican party, who supported Black citizens' right to vote. Taking these prominent citizens out while simultaneously restricting access to the ballot box (through legislation and violence), helped keep white supremacy alive during the Reconstruction era.

The end of Reconstruction meant the end of progress for many Black Americans. Democratic whites chiseled away at the strides taken by Black Floridians during the Reconstruction era. Almost immediately after its demise, Democrats seized complete control of Florida and continued to stifle any progress made after Emancipation. While these conservative Democrats accomplished this control through many different methods, the tactic most effective and utilized remained violence. This is because impactful violence is achievable no matter the aggressor's status. Not everyone has the access to utilize voter fraud or implement policies to

maintain white supremacy, but everyone has the opportunity to attack their neighbor. Therefore, white conservatives found success in Florida through violence. Violence kept Black men from the polls, violence kept Black families on plantations, violence took out prominent Republican politicians, violence made Ocoee a whites-only city, and violence ended the Reconstruction era.

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