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## AFTERMATH OF MILITARY RECONSTRUCTION, 1868-1869

by RALPH L. PEEK

THE MILITARY RECONSTRUCTION OF FLORIDA ended on July 4, 1868, with ratification of a new constitution and the election of Harrison Reed as governor, William Gleason as lieutenant governor, and Charles Hamilton as congressman. A state legislature with a large Republican majority in both houses was also elected.<sup>1</sup>

The legislature met on June 8, 1868, and the next day ratified the fourteenth amendment to the Federal Constitution. After prolonged balloting the State Senate elected Adonijah Welch and Thomas Osborne as United States Senators. On June 29, General George Meade, commanding the third military district, ordered the civil and military officers in Florida to surrender all property and powers of office to the duly elected state officials. On July 4, Colonel John Sprague, sub-district commander, surrendered civil authority, and Harrison Reed was inaugurated as the first Republican governor of Florida.

Fearing trouble from conservative whites, Governor Reed in his inaugural address called for the retention of Federal troops in Florida.<sup>2</sup> He wanted the force to be placed at his disposal, but Colonel Sprague announced that this would not be practical. However, since there was no state militia, the colonel said that he would order an armed force to any point designated by the governor.<sup>3</sup> Reed also requested military aid from Washington,<sup>4</sup> but, on July 23, Secretary of War John Schofield informed him that there were adequate troops in Florida and in the neighboring

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1. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, June 9, 1868.

2. *Florida Senate Journal* (First Session, 1868), 59.

3. Colonel John Sprague to Governor Harrison Reed, July 8, 1868.

Copy in Letters Received (1868), Department of the South, Record Group 98, United States Army Commands, National Archives. Hereinafter cited as Letters Received, Department of the South.

4. *Florida Senate Journal* (1868), 65.

states to suppress any insurrection and to insure execution of the laws of the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Colonel Sprague reported to the adjutant general that he feared the consequences of removing troops from the interior of Florida. On July 8, 1868, two Negro men were killed in a cornfield in Madison by a group of whites. The following day a band of regulators came into a small settlement near Madison and warned the Negro men there that unless they vacated the place within eight days they would all be killed.<sup>6</sup> The Negroes ignored the ultimatum and two of them were shot, one fatally. Sprague cited these incidents to show why Union men could not feel safe without troops. Without these forces, he said, the only law in Florida would be that of violence.

Governor Reed was worried that the opposition had access to information vital to the welfare of his administration. On July 25, 1868, he informed the State Senate that former rebels who opposed the "establishment of a Republican State government" controlled telegraph operations and that confidential information was accessible to these "enemies of law and order."<sup>7</sup> Reed wanted a law requiring all telegraph operators to take the iron-clad oath as a prerequisite to employment and making it a felony for an operator to reveal the contents of a telegram. He also recommended that a new telegraph company be chartered by "loyal men" and that new lines be constructed.

Despite Governor Reed's importunities and the fears of Colonel Sprague, Washington placed rigid restrictions on the use of troops to enforce civil law; they could be employed only with express permission of the president. When United States Marshal Alex Magruder of St. Augustine asked Attorney General William Evarts to order the military to aid him "when necessary,"<sup>8</sup> he was informed that "frequent and ready resort to military aid in executing the duties of civil officers is foreign to our government and the disposition of our people."<sup>9</sup>

5. *Florida Assembly Journal* (First Session, 1868), 192-193.

6. "Report of Colonel John Sprague for July 1868," July 31, 1868, in Letters Received, Department of the South.

7. *Florida Senate Journal* (1868), 144-145.

8. Alex Magruder to Attorney General Evarts, August 12, 1868. Record Group 60, Department of Justice, Attorney General's Papers, Letters Received, United States Marshals: Florida, National Archives. Hereinafter cited as Attorney General's Papers.

9. Evarts to Magruder, August 20, 1868, Attorney General's Papers, Instruction Book A, December 24, 1867 - December 30, 1870.

General Meade ordered a concentration of troops at rail centers throughout the third military district.<sup>10</sup> The Seventh United States Infantry was stationed in Florida as follows: two companies at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, five companies at Jacksonville, and three companies at Fort Brooke in Tampa. One company of the Fifth United States Artillery was located at Fort Barrancas in Pensacola, one at Key West, and four at Fort Jefferson on Tortugas. Headquarters was St. Augustine.<sup>11</sup>

The withdrawal of Federal infantry forces from many towns in Florida created some disorder. Enmity between Negroes and whites flared into open violence, and the number of assaults and murders increased. A pregnant white housewife, a Mrs. Dupre, was brutally murdered near Orange Springs by a Negro. The culprit was seized by a mob of Negroes, given a hundred lashes and hanged. Many freedmen were assaulted by whites, both because of their color and their allegiance to the Republican Party.<sup>12</sup> Altercations between whites flared up also. Freedman Bureau Agent J. A. Remley reported from Ocala that suspension of military government had created a vacuum in that area of Florida, and, because of the implacable hatred of Southerners toward Negroes, it was imperative that former slaveholders be deprived of all political power. Civil law was absent, he said, and if troops were withdrawn the effect would be disastrous.<sup>13</sup> Many freedmen were assaulted by whites because of their Republican allegiance.<sup>14</sup>

The Reed administration moved quickly to organize the state militia authorized by the legislature.<sup>15</sup> If an "acceptable individual" wanted to organize a volunteer militia company, he could

10. *Report of the Secretary of War, 1868-1869*, Vol. 1, "Report of Major General George Meade," October 31, 1868. 40th Cong., 3rd Sess., *House Document No. 1* (Serial No. 1367), 75.

11. *Ibid.*, 752-753.

12. Report of J. A. Remley, sub-assistant commissioner, July 31, 1868, Ocala, in Papers of Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands: Reports of Assistant Commissioners for Florida, Sub-District Commissioners, and others, and Special Orders, National Archives. Hereinafter cited as Bureau Papers. Microfilm of original in P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Report of Lt. Julius Quentin, July 31, 1868, Madison, *ibid.*

15. Allen Bush, *A Digest of the Statute Law of Florida of a General and Public Character in Force up to the First Day of January, 1872* (Tallahassee, 1872), Chapter CXXI, (Act of August 6, 1868), 588-605. Hereinafter cited as *Bush's Digest*.

receive volunteer enlistments with permission of the adjutant general. The company would be armed with regulation army equipment.<sup>16</sup> In case of civil disorder, these troops could be called out by the governor upon request of army officers stationed in Florida, United States marshals, mayors, or any county judge.<sup>17</sup> If it became necessary to fire or charge upon a mob, the law required the militia to use live ammunition. Any soldier found guilty of using blank cartridges was subject to courtmartial.<sup>18</sup>

Negroes were eager for militia service.<sup>19</sup> Squads of freedmen were reportedly drilling at night, directed by their own commissioned and non-commissioned officers. One planter in Leon County reported to the Freedmen's Bureau that most of his hands had left the plantation to be mustered into a regiment.<sup>20</sup>

Several volunteer militia companies were formed during 1868, but they were not organized into regiments or brigades and no officers were appointed. The militia law was not implemented immediately. According to Governor Reed, the state did not yet have a militia because Federal law prohibited it and the presence of regular army troops made it unnecessary. Also, he stated, the "sensitive condition of the popular mind" made it expedient to delay.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, white Southerners feared that Negroes were being armed to attack them. The Tallahassee *Floridian* charged that Reed wanted to organize a Negro militia to support a government based "not upon intelligence, virtue, and affections of the people, but upon ignorance, vice, bayonets, and stuffed ballot boxes."<sup>22</sup> These fears had an important effect on the course of action taken by southern white Conservatives.

Enraged by alleged frauds in the May elections and the winning of almost all political offices by Republicans, the Conservatives exerted new efforts to organize against the Republicans. Governor Reed informed the legislature, on July 8, 1868, that a latent spirit of hostility animated many Southerners and that these

16. *Ibid.*, 591-592.

17. *Ibid.*, 596.

18. *Ibid.*, 601.

19. Report of Malachi Martin, August 31, 1868, Tallahassee, in Bureau Papers.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, January 19, 1869. Proceedings of the opening sessions of the 1869 legislature were included in this issue.

22. *Ibid.*, July 28, 1868.

people "in whose hands the State has been desolated and ruined" were quietly building an organization designed to restore them to power.<sup>23</sup> These efforts became so effective that the *Daily Florida Union*, a Republican newspaper of Jacksonville, claimed, on August 6, 1868, that Democrats were secretly organizing and would try to prevent Negro voting by violence and intimidation.

Conservatives were animated by the hope of victory in the approaching November elections. When the United States Congress accepted the Florida constitution as it had been ratified in May, the Conservatives saw in its lenient provisions the possibility of regaining political control, Former Confederates were not proscribed and suffrage was universal. The apportionment of members of the legislature placed greater power in the hands of voters in the more sparsely populated counties. If the Conservatives could reorganize, they thought that they might be able to elect thirteen of the twenty-four senators and twenty-eight of the fifty-two assemblymen, a working majority in both houses.<sup>24</sup> In several counties the Republican majority was very slight. In Wakulla County, Republicans outnumbered Conservatives only 248 to 239; in Suwannee County, only 259 to 257.<sup>25</sup> After much preparation on the local level, white Conservatives met in Tallahassee on August 1, 1868, to organize a Conservative Party. Former Governor David S. Walker was elected president of the convention, and resolutions were passed supporting the national Democratic candidates, Horatio Seymour and Francis P. Blair, Jr.<sup>26</sup>

The Republicans moved swiftly, however, to consolidate their victory. Loyal party men were appointed by Governor Reed to almost all offices on the state and county level. Many Republicans held more than one office. For example, State Senator William Purman of Jackson County was appointed solicitor for the first judicial circuit (Escambia, Santa Rosa, Walton, Holmes, Washington, Jackson counties), secretary of state, and county judge of

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23. *Florida Senate Journal* (1868), 62.

24. *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, April 14, 1868.

25. *Ibid.*, March 31, 1868, quoting the *Washington Chronicle*, March 23, 1868.

26. *Ibid.*, August 4, 1868.

Jackson County.<sup>27</sup> State Senator George Alden from Escambia was appointed secretary of state after Purman resigned. Senator John Davidson of Gadsden County was appointed county judge, and Senator Robert Meacham of Jefferson County was appointed clerk of the court and superintendent of education for his county. Horatio Jenkins, Jr., senator from the Alachua-Levy district, was commissioned county judge of Alachua County. Several members of the House also held county and state offices.<sup>28</sup> Naturally, very few Conservatives were appointed to office. Governor Reed stated that it was his plain duty to appoint to office only those "not opposed to the principle of republican government, or whose prejudices arising from education or habit, do not unfit them for the equal and impartial administration of the laws."<sup>29</sup> Conservatives were appointed only in the two or three counties where there were no available Republicans.<sup>30</sup>

The legislature, in 1868, enacted several laws designed to strengthen the Republican position. One outlawed all combinations formed to overturn or usurp the government or to interfere forcibly in the administration of government.<sup>31</sup> Another provided that when two or more persons combined to levy war against the people of Florida or to remove any of them forcibly from the state or from their homes to another part of the state, they would be liable for five years' imprisonment or a fine of one thousand dollars.<sup>32</sup> Conviction of conspiracy and illegal combination were punishable by a fine of \$500 or one year imprisonment in the county jail.<sup>33</sup> Riotous assemblies, defined as twelve or more persons armed or thirty or more persons unarmed, were illegal. Moreover, the sheriff might call upon bystanders for aid in appre-

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27. *Florida Senate Journal* (1868), 73, 112, and 152. The Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, September 1, 1868, noted that Purman resigned as secretary of state "in favor of a Negro appointee" (Jonathan Gibbs). Actually, George Alden was appointed. *The Pensacola Observer*, October 1, 1868, lists all the circuits in Florida.

28. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, November 3, 1868.

29. *Florida Assembly Journal* (1868), Governor's Message, 77.

30. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, December 15, 1868, quoting Governor Reed's speech to a Negro meeting in Jacksonville, as reported in Jacksonville *Daily Florida Union*, December 10, 1868.

31. *Bush's Digest*, Chapter XLII, 211-212.

32. *Ibid.*, 212.

33. *Ibid.*, Chapter XLVI, 242.

hending such persons, and if they refused to help they were to be classified as rioters themselves.<sup>34</sup>

The Republican-dominated legislature, apparently concerned that Conservatives might succeed in creating a viable organization that could conceivably place Florida in the Seymour-Blair column in the national elections, passed a law authorizing the Senate to choose presidential electors.<sup>35</sup> The Tallahassee *Floridian* bitterly denounced this action, calling it an outrage, and claiming that it was motivated by fear of Conservative unity.<sup>36</sup>

Conservatives poured a barrage of criticism upon Reed's administration whenever they had the opportunity. They charged that the intelligent and virtuous people of the state were excluded from government while it was monopolized by out-of-state men and scalawags who were misleading and corrupting the Negro in order to use him as a political pawn.<sup>37</sup> The governor's appointees were described as the "worst men in the community," moral lepers, and scoundrels. The acts of the legislature were hit as tyrannical, particularly the militia law and the presidential electors act. Conservatives claimed that the Republicans were trying to make the whites subservient to Negroes and that many Northerners were "revolted at the strange sight of Negro supremacy."

Lawlessness increased during August and September, 1868. On the night of August 15, 1868, a Seymour-Blair rally in St. Augustine was attacked and dispersed by a crowd of Negroes. Several shots were fired, and a participant in the rally, a white man named Emory, was shot through the leg. In his report of the incident, Colonel Sprague stated that he might have to resort to summary military measures in order to restore and maintain the peace.<sup>38</sup> The Conservative press called the incident an outrage, the logical result of Republican teachings, and stated that only bloodshed would satisfy the radicals.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the

34. *Ibid.*, Chapter XLIX, 251-252.

35. *Florida Senate Journal* (1868), 229.

36. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, August 4, 1868.

37. *Ibid.*, August 11, 1868. This item is the speech of Wilkinson Call at the Conservative convention, August 1, 1868, and appears to be a concise summary of the whole Conservative attack on the Republicans.

38. Report of Colonel John Sprague to the Adjutant General's Office, August 17, 1868, in *Letters Received*, Department of the South.

39. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, August 23, 1868.

attempts of incendiary white men to foment racial strife were seen as spawning inevitable combat between the races.

Governor Reed, alarmed by the growing tide of lawlessness and Conservative threats, informed General Meade, September 1, 1868, that violations of the law were increasing in Florida and that conspiracies were being formed to intimidate government officials. Reed insisted that military force was the only power capable of maintaining law and order, and he asked that a company of troops be ordered to Tallahassee, another to Gainesville, and smaller detachments to Ocala and Marianna.<sup>40</sup> There is reason to believe that he expected the Conservatives to try to overthrow the government by force and violence. Acting on his own responsibility, Reed went to New York on September 15, 1868, and purchased 2,000 muskets and 40,000 rounds of ammunition to be used in case of attack by "lawless bands of conspirators."<sup>41</sup>

On September 15, 1868, the *Floridian* reported the proceedings of a Republican meeting held in Tallahassee. Nine-tenths of the audience were freedmen, according to the report, and one Negro speaker, John Wallace, was quoted as saying, "I understand the Ku Klux are here - if so let them come on - we are armed and ready for them." Wallace's statement was viewed by many Conservatives as confirmation that Negroes were arming themselves. Southern whites had always feared armed Negroes, and this fear probably had an important effect in precipitating the fierce violence that began in August 1868.

Organizations commonly known as Ku Klux had become more active in Florida as the Republican program began to be enacted into law. The Ku Klux began in Tennessee in 1865, when, according to former Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, head of the original Klan, Governor William Brownlow of that state promised the militia complete immunity regardless of their acts toward white Southerners.<sup>42</sup> Forrest cited the formation of

40. Governor Reed to General Meade, September 1, 1868, in Letters Received, Department of the South.

41. *Florida Assembly Journal* (1870), 20. See also Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, December 15, 1868, and January 19, 1869.

42. Joint Select Committee on Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., *House Reports* No. 22 (Serial No. 1541), 13 vols. (Washington, 1872), I, 3-41. Hereinafter cited as *House Report* 22.

secret leagues by Northern men, secret Negro meetings, increases in "insolent behavior" by Negroes, and the rape of white women by Negroes as justification for the formation of the Klan. This extra-legal, quasi-military organization carried on effective warfare against the Brownlow administration in Tennessee and spread into several states, enlisting more than 550,000 men. The activities of the secret organizations in Florida were generally attributed to the Ku Klux Klan, although these organizations, at first, were probably not connected with the Klan.

Joseph John Williams, thirty-six year old Tallahassee planter, who before the war owned more than 300 slaves and who was a nine-term member of the Florida legislature, asserted that the white people of Florida needed protection from Negroes. He had utilized "regulators" in dealing with refractory blacks before the war, and, in 1868, believed that similar measures were the answer to the problem posed by the ascendancy of Negroes over whites. Precipitating factors in the decision to create the organization in Leon County were alleged frauds in the election of May 1868. Williams claimed that the white people in Tallahassee, outnumbered about seven to one by Negroes, were crowded out of the polls and were not allowed to vote. He stated that "colored people were brought up in squads of from eight to ten and fifteen deep, and from one to two hundred yards long, and it was really worth your life to go in there." According to testimony that Williams gave before a Congressional subcommittee in 1871, this precipitated the organization of Young Men's Democratic Clubs. He stated that about 300 of the 700 Democratic voters in the county were members of the the three clubs. He denied knowledge of the existence of any similar organization outside Leon County. There were other clubs, however, in other counties and they had identical constitutions.<sup>43</sup>

Samuel Douglas, Tallahassee lawyer and former associate justice of the Florida Supreme Court, was a member of one of the Tallahassee clubs before joining the Republican Party late in 1868. He claimed that Negroes, aroused by Congressional debate on additional safeguards for Negro rights and armed with

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43. *Ibid.*, XIII, 227. See pp. 157-158 for a copy of the constitution used by the various county organizations, and pp. 265, 266, 294-295, and 298 for mention of the organization in various counties.

clubs or guns, habitually congregated in Tallahassee, parading the streets and alarming white women. One purpose of the clubs, Douglas said, was to prevent a bloody racial collision arising out of these circumstances, and to defend "our homes and firesides against any assault." Another purpose was to counteract the Loyal League whose state-wide organization and great power had so alarmed the southern whites that they felt that their lives and property were endangered by its existence, and that a sudden outbreak of violence might destroy the southern white people entirely.<sup>44</sup> It seems clear from the evidence that Joseph John Williams was the moving spirit in initiating the revolutionary organizations in Florida. Such groups were needed, he argued, because courts met only twice yearly while "a committee" could act at will to protect white people from violence.

The grim work of the regulators began in earnest in mid-1868, and before it was curbed by the force of United States law and the threat of greater force, Negroes were terrorized, intimidated, and prevented from voting. Many white and colored Republicans were killed, beaten, and driven from their homes and from the State, and virtual warfare existed for short periods in some areas, notably in Jackson County.

In Columbia County, in September 1868, the regulators killed or wounded several Negro Republicans.<sup>45</sup> In Alachua County, five Negroes were killed in the period from October 12 to November 30, 1868.<sup>46</sup> Six murders occurred in Madison County during the period from July 14 to October 15, 1868. On the latter date, Randall Coleman, leading Negro Republican of Madison, was found riddled with bullets at Moseley Hall, fifteen miles from Madison.<sup>47</sup>

The Conservatives worked against the Reed administration in every way possible, and their efforts must have been effective for the governor regarded the Young Men's Democratic Clubs as nothing less than devices designed to seize the state government in the event that Seymour and Blair were elected. It was be-

44. *Ibid.*, 293-298.

45. *Ibid.*, 263.

46. Leonard Dennis to Jonathan Gibbs, February 24, 1871. *Ibid.*

47. "Report of Colonel Sprague on condition of affairs for November 1868," November 30, 1868, in Letters Received, Department of the south.

cause of this threat, he said, that he had purchased arms and ammunition in New York in September.<sup>48</sup> As election day approached, the situation became more turbulent. Governor Reed's request for troops on September 1, had been refused by General Meade who insisted that no troops would be detached to aid civil authorities unless an emergency arose.<sup>49</sup> Colonel Sprague, however, informed Meade on October 1, 1868, that lawlessness was increasing daily, that personal conflicts, fist-fights, cursing, and drunkenness, as well as the promiscuous display and shooting of firearms, kept the people in a state of turmoil constantly.<sup>50</sup> On October 15, 1868, six companies of the Seventh United States Infantry were ordered into Florida: two companies to Jacksonville, and the other four divided among Fernandina, Marianna, Tallahassee, Gainesville, and St. Augustine.<sup>51</sup> This force, according to the Republican newspaper of Tampa, would insure an orderly election.<sup>52</sup> Colonel Sprague's report of October 31, 1868, however, indicated that Florida was tottering on the brink of anarchy. He stated that civil law had no force because officials were afraid to enforce the law, and that Union men were thoroughly intimidated and afraid to speak. Moreover, he reported, Negroes roamed through the country at will, killing cattle and hogs with impunity, and that whites retaliated by personal assaults, violence, and murder.<sup>53</sup> Madison County was the scene of another murder in October, a total of seven since July 14. Marion and Alachua counties experienced great disorder and lawlessness, and the situation throughout Florida threatened widespread violence. On November 5, 1869, Sprague ordered an extra detachment of troops into Gainesville to quell disturbances around the courthouse where the sheriff had been defied

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48. *Florida Assembly Journal* (1872), Governor's Message, 30-31.

49. Meade to Sprague, September 16, 1868, in Letters Sent, Department of the South.

50. "Report of Colonel Sprague on condition of affairs for September 1868," September 30, 1868, in Letters Received, Department of the south.

51. *Jacksonville Daily Florida Union*, October 22, 1868.

52. *Tampa True Southerner*, November 12, 1868.

53. "Report of Colonel Sprague on conditions of affairs for October, 1868," October 31, 1868, in Letters Received, Department of the South.

by armed men.<sup>54</sup> On the same day, Sprague sent a small detachment to Madison to suppress disorder there.<sup>55</sup>

During the first week in November, a group of drunken, boisterous white men in Ocala defied arrest by Negro bailiffs. The county judge telegraphed Colonel Sprague for aid, and troops arrived in Ocala on November 7.<sup>56</sup> Murders of Negroes were common in Ocala and throughout Marion County and it was feared that Union men would begin retaliating unless something was done to curb the murders and violence.

Fernandina was the scene of continuing controversy over property questions during the fall of 1868. Daniel Richards and Liberty Billings, leading radicals, were reportedly inciting Negroes to lawless conduct which included ejecting whites from disputed property.<sup>57</sup> Richards had "forty of the worst Negroes of the city" ready to serve his purposes, according to Nassau County Judge D. M. Hammond who was also agent of the Freedmen's Bureau. On October 8, Hammond requested soldiers to deal with the trouble that seemed imminent, and General Meade ordered Company B, Seventh United States Infantry, to Fernandina.<sup>58</sup>

The events of Thursday, November 5, 1868, revealed that the secret organizations of white Conservatives had reached a high degree of efficiency. That evening, sixty boxes of the arms, including some 1,200 muskets, that had been purchased in New York by Governor Reed were thrown from the train as it was en route from Jacksonville to Tallahassee.<sup>59</sup> Many years later, United States Attorney General Thomas Gregory, a member of Woodrow Wilson's cabinet, said that a participant of this incident had revealed that all of the men operating the tram-telegraphers,

54. Telegram of Colonel Sprague, November 5, 1868, in Register of Letters Received, Department of the South, Vol. 265.

55. Telegram of Colonel Sprague to Assistant Adjutant General Richard Drum, November 9, 1868, in Letters Received, Department of the South.

56. Report of J. A. Remley, November 30, 1868, Ocala, for November, 1868, in Bureau Papers.

57. Reports of D. M. Hammond. Special report, October 7, and Report for October 1868, October 31, 1868, Fernandina, in Bureau Papers.

58. Meade to Sprague, October 16, 1868, in Letters Sent, Department of the South. See also Jacksonville *Daily Florida Union*, October 22, 1868.

59. *New York Times*, November 7, 1868; Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, November 10, 1868.

brakemen, conductors, engineers—were members of the Ku Klux Klan. The regulators had boarded the train at a stop between Lake City and Madison, disposed of the arms, disembarked at the next station, and returned to destroy the muskets and ammunition. Soldiers detailed to guard the arms occupied two cars on the train, but seemingly were not aware of the theft until they reached Tallahassee.<sup>60</sup> The door to the ammunition car was found unlocked, not broken open, and half the shipment had disappeared.<sup>61</sup> The guns were to have been used by the few companies organized under the militia law, and Conservatives, apparently, were determined that Negroes would not be armed.<sup>62</sup> According to Colonel Sprague, the group that destroyed the arms was led by Captain John J. Dickison, former Confederate guerrilla leader, whose regulators supposedly operated in the area around Madison County.<sup>63</sup> Sprague described Dickison as the commander of a body of mounted Confederate troops which operated in the Tallahassee-Jacksonville area during the Civil War. He claimed that Dickison's men were noted for their "cruelties and atrocities" against Unionists at the time.

The destruction of the military supplies left the Reed administration in a precarious situation. For more than a year after this incident there was not enough equipment to outfit state troops who might have to meet a Conservative attack. Florida Adjutant General George Carse reported, on December 31, 1869, that there were only 1,100 broken muskets on hand.<sup>64</sup> The fact that Florida possessed so little military equipment raises a question as to whether white Conservatives really intended armed revolt. If violent overthrow of Florida's government was planned, the week in which the arms were destroyed would have been the strategic moment to strike.

The Republican Party in Florida was almost destroyed by intra-party conflict in October and November 1868. United

60. Robert Selph Henry, *The Story of Reconstruction* (New York, 1951), 360. Gregory quoted a lawyer living in Austin, Texas, who was evidently one of the participants.

61. *House Report* 22, XIII, 185.

62. *Ibid.*, 186.

63. "Report of Colonel Sprague on condition of affairs for November 1868," November 30, 1868, in *Letters Received, Department of the South*.

64. Report of the Adjutant-General, State of Florida, for 1869, January 6, 1870, *Florida Assembly Journal* (1873), *appendix*, 89.

States Senator Thomas Osborne was accused by Reed of trying to seize political power for reasons of personal aggrandizement while the governor was absent in New York. Apparently as an attack against the "Ring," as Osborne and his supporters were known, Reed, on October 28, declared vacant the seats of state legislators who held other political offices. Though he had appointed all these men to their positions, the governor claimed they were violating the constitution.<sup>65</sup> "The Ring" then attempted to impeach the governor at a special session of the legislature on November 3.<sup>66</sup> Horatio Jenkins, Jr., on November 6, charged Reed with a number of crimes and misdemeanors, and the Assembly (House), by a vote of twenty-seven to seven, supported impeachment. Lieutenant Governor William Gleason immediately declared himself acting governor,<sup>67</sup> but Reed refused to surrender his office and asked the Florida Supreme Court for an opinion on the legality of the proceedings. The court ruled, on November 24, that no quorum existed in the Senate, because of the seats declared vacant on October 28, and since the legislature could not assemble it could not vote impeachment.<sup>68</sup>

Reed moved at once against his opponents after receiving the court's decision. On December 14, the Florida Supreme Court ousted Gleason from his office as lieutenant governor on the grounds that at the time of his election he was not a Florida resident. The United States Supreme Court, however, reinstated Gleason temporarily,<sup>69</sup> but after the legislature assembled on January 5, 1869, he was forced to resign. On January 30, a resolution was introduced calling for the resignation of Senator Osborne, and on the same day William Edwards was confirmed as county judge of Alachua County, replacing Horatio Jenkins,

65. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, November 3, 1868. The seats declared vacant included those of William Purman, Horatio Jenkins, Jr., Robert Meacham, and George Alden. The latter was the secretary of state who issued the proclamation.

66. *Florida Assembly Journal* (Special Session, 1868), 41-42; *Florida Senate Journal* (Special Session, 1868), 24; Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, December 15, 1868, quoting the Jacksonville *Daily Florida Union*, December 10, 1868.

67. *Florida Assembly Journal* (Special Session, 1868), 46.

68. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, December 1, 1868, gives the complete opinions of Associate Justices James Westcott and Ossian B. Hart and Chief Justice Edward Randall.

69. *The American Cyclopedia and Annual Register of Important Events for the Year 1868*, 16 vols. (New York, 1869), VIII, 275.

Jr., who was removed on charges of neglecting his duty and making false charges against Governor Reed.<sup>70</sup> Although Osborne did not resign, Reed was left victorious and apparently in a stronger position than the previous fall.

Conservative attacks on the Republicans were unremitting. So vehement had these attacks become, that one of the most ardent Democratic newspapers in Florida, the Pensacola *West Florida Commercial*, warned on November 3, 1868, that extreme language and aggressive tactics would give Union men an excuse for legitimate criticism. The attacks continued, however.

Governor Reed set December 29, 1868, as the date for electing new legislators to fill the vacancies created by his proclamation of October 28, and for electing a congressman. The legislative enactment of August, giving the legislature power to appoint presidential electors, had cancelled the presidential election in Florida and no voting occurred at this time. The Conservatives concentrated their efforts on winning as many positions as possible in the voting on December 29. Their efforts were so enthusiastic that Colonel Sprague wired headquarters on November 9, 1868, that Conservatives were determined to discard the state government, that disturbances were occurring all over Florida, and that the government was in imminent danger of being overthrown unless the troops stationed in Florida were allowed to remain.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, he stated, private information indicated that the Negroes were arming on behalf of Governor Reed in his conflict with Lieutenant Governor Gleason. Many people expected rioting to break out in Tallahassee and elsewhere at any moment.<sup>72</sup> Sprague reported that murders were being committed, the laws were being defied, and Conservative politicians were stumping the state openly denouncing Union men.<sup>73</sup> He specifically called attention to Marianna, where there was mounting excitement and tension because of election activities and the activities of the Freedmen's Bureau in that community.

Despite a militant Conservative campaign, the Republicans

70. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, February 2, 1869.

71. Sprague to Drum, November 9, 1868, in Letters Received, Department of the South.

72. *New York Times*, November 8, 1868.

73. Sprague to Drum, November 9, 1868, in Letters Received, Department of the South.

won the December election. Charles Hamilton was elected to Congress over William Barnes of Jackson County by a majority of more than 3,000 votes.<sup>74</sup> Barnes carried twenty of the thirty-nine counties, but Hamilton carried all the counties with heavy Negro majorities. Seven of these counties - Duval, Escambia, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Madison, and Marion - gave him 7,749 of his 9,749 votes. Most of the men whose seats were declared vacant by Governor Reed were re-elected.<sup>75</sup>

The new year, 1869, saw many important changes taking place in Florida. The Freedmen's Bureau ceased operations on December 31, 1868, except for its educational services, and most of its officers and civil agents were discharged.<sup>76</sup> General Meade had been unimpressed by many of Colonel Sprague's statements concerning danger from conservative organizations. On November 8, 1868, he informed Sprague that unless soldiers were needed to preserve law and order there was no reason to keep them in Florida. Their function, he insisted, had nothing to do with politics.<sup>77</sup> Three days later, after receiving Sprague's telegram informing him that Florida's government was about to be overthrown by force, Meade cautioned him against too much interference in politics and assuming too much responsibility.<sup>78</sup> Late in February, Meade ordered the Seventh United States Infantry to the Dakota Territory.<sup>79</sup>

With the termination of Bureau operations and the withdrawal of military detachments from the state, Florida entered upon a very disturbed period. Jackson County experienced a new wave of violence in February and March 1869, resulting in four murders and the wounding of seven or eight other men.<sup>80</sup> On February 26, 1869, a large-scale riot occurred in Jacksonville

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74. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, May 11, 1869, gives the official county returns.
75. *Ibid.*, November 3, 1868. See the *Florida Senate Journal* (1869) and *Florida Assembly Journal* (1869) for composition of the 1869 legislature.
76. Jacksonville *Daily Florida Union*, December 3, 1868, quoting Order No. 10, November 17, 1868, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands.
77. Meade to Sprague, November 8, 1868, in Register of Letters Sent, Department of the South, Vol. 172.
78. *Ibid.*, Vol. 174.
79. Tallahassee *Sentinel*, February 27, 1869.
80. Ralph L. Peek, "Lawlessness in Florida, 1868-1871," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXXX (October, 1961), 164-185.

in which United States soldiers and Negroes engaged in open combat. After a band of Negroes had attacked several soldiers, killing one, the troops stormed the Negro section, killing several people and taking a number of prisoners.<sup>81</sup> Sprague reported that the riot was precipitated by the activities of a Negro organization commanded by a Captain McIntyre, a Negro army officer.<sup>82</sup> Citizens in Hernando County, identified as Ku Klux members, seized two Negroes accused of killing a small boy from the sheriff's custody and hanged them.<sup>83</sup>

Violence flared in Gainesville on March 4, 1869, when Harry Franklin, a Negro Republican, was shot to death in the street by an unknown assassin.<sup>84</sup> At about the same time, Lishur Johnson, Negro Republican leader in Columbia County, was kidnaped from the home of a white man where he was hiding, and except for a pile of clothing in the woods no trace was found of him.<sup>85</sup> In Hamilton County, nine or ten persons were murdered between July 4, 1868, and April 1869.<sup>86</sup> During the first week of April, a Negro named Jackson, charged with murder, was taken from jail at Jasper and lynched.<sup>87</sup> In Madison County, a band of regulators - reportedly armed with army rifles - were ranging the area, terrorizing Negro Republicans. Several murders were allegedly committed by these men during the first months of 1869.<sup>88</sup> Madison County regulators had an integral connection with a similar band in south Georgia.<sup>89</sup>

Among the factors influencing the turbulence and disorder in Florida after resumption of civil government were events in surrounding states, especially during the fall of 1868.<sup>90</sup> Ku Klux Klan activities in Tennessee caused authorities there great alarm. The governor issued a proclamation on September 16, 1868,

81. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, March 2, 1869.

82. S-92, 1869, in Register of Letters Received, Department of the South, Vol. 267.

83. *House Report 22*, XIII, 162.

84. Lieutenant William Armstrong to Drum, March 4, 1869, in Letters Received, Department of the South.

85. *House Report 22*, XIII, 263. No specific date, other than "Spring of 1869," is given.

86. *Ibid.*, 262.

87. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, April 6, 1869.

88. *House Report 22*, XIII, 114-125, 125-136.

89. *Ibid.*

90. Sprague to Drum, November 9, 1868, in Letters Received, Department of the South.

condemning the Klan and calling upon Tennessee citizens to aid him in suppressing it.<sup>91</sup> On January 20, 1869, Governor Brownlow issued a proclamation detailing the crimes of the Ku Klux Klan and called upon citizens to enroll in the state militia to suppress the organization. On February 20, 1869, he declared martial law in nine counties and called out the militia. His course of action soon restored order. Similar situations existed in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and North Carolina, and in these states outrages were committed and many people were murdered.<sup>92</sup> The Klan operated with devastating effectiveness in South Carolina until the presidential election of 1868, but then ceased much of its activity until the latter half of 1870.<sup>93</sup>

The fact that incidents of violence greatly increased as military forces were withdrawn from Florida is significant. After Meade ordered the withdrawal of the Seventh United States Infantry, Colonel Sprague reported, on March 4, 1869, that the state was in a more lawless condition than it had ever been and that the citizens were very much alarmed.<sup>94</sup> The Conservatives, it seems, had deliberately adopted violence as a method of regaining power. They had been thwarted, in 1867, in their attempts to block the radical program, believing the methods used against them were fraudulent. They saw the Negro enfranchised, won to a mass allegiance to the Republican Party, and used to keep that party in power. The Florida constitution, though lenient toward former Confederates, declared the equality of *all* citizens, the inviolability of their natural rights, and conferred universal manhood suffrage. Conservatives were not successful in their attempts to establish a winning political organization, mainly because Negro majorities in several counties were invincible bulwarks of Republican candidates. The presidential elector law, passed in August 1868, cancelled the election for president in November, and the people of Florida did not vote in that election. Their vote was cast by three Republican electors, one of whom was a Negro. Their spirited campaign to win the Congressional

91. Francis Wilson, "Federal Aid in Domestic Disturbances," *Senate Executive Documents*, 67th Cong., 2nd Sess., No. 263 (Serial No. 1789), 99-100.

92. *Ibid.*, 100.

93. *Ibid.*, 101.

94. S-114, 1869, in Register of Letters Received, Department of the South, Vol. 267.

seat held by Charles Hamilton failed because Negro majorities in seven counties overwhelmed their candidate who campaigned on a "white supremacy" platform.

It seems that the Conservatives concluded that the only way to defeat the Republicans was by physical force and violence. The evidence also seems to indicate that rage and frustration created a recklessness within Conservative ranks that disdained consequences and risk, and invited a total war between the races. They regarded the Negro as less than human and the fact that Republican power in Florida rested squarely upon the Negro vote made them hate Republicans as well as Negroes. Subsequent events seem to confirm these conclusions.