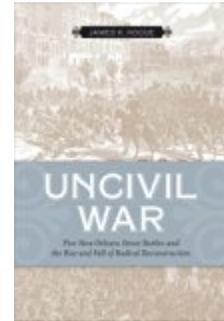


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James K. Hogue. *Uncivil War: Five New Orleans Street Battles and the Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006. xii + 227 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-3147-3.

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Taking Reconstruction to the Streets

In his latest work, James K. Hogue dispels any notion that the violence of the American Civil War concluded when Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant sat down in a parlor at Appomattox Court House. On the contrary, in Louisiana throughout the course of a decade following the war, over 3,500 people died as a result of political violence. Following J. David Singer's definition of a civil war, Hogue describes the street battles in New Orleans from 1866 to 1877 as an "uncivil war." Although military historians have ignored the fighting that took place in the streets of New Orleans, Hogue persuasively argues that to comprehend the political complexities of the city, our understanding of fighting must include vigilante action, paramilitary action, and the rise of white supremacist militias. To draw attention to the diversity of military action in Louisiana, the author focuses his narrative on the street battles of 1866, 1872, 1873, 1874, and 1877. He also looks at the political chaos surrounding the five governors who attempted to maintain order in Louisiana between 1865 and 1877.

The city of New Orleans presented a unique set of difficulties for Reconstruction. Many of the citizens had remained bitter over the lengthy Union occupation during the war and the economic problems that emerged during the transition from slavery to freedom. Unionist Governor James Wells worked closely with the Lincoln and Johnson administration to restore Louisiana back to the way it had been prior to the war, without slavery. In the months following his inauguration, a new state legislature would be seated. Hogue refers to them as the Rebel

Legislature due to the large number of Confederate veterans who occupied the halls of power. The legislature quickly worked to dispose of the Unionist governor by trying to get him to run for the U.S. Senate and leave his post. When he refused, the Rebel Legislature worked against his proposed vision for the state and wrangled over the legality of the state constitution. Inflammatory speeches against the governor filled the streets and created tension. On July 30, 1866, black Union veterans fought with white spectators in the streets of New Orleans, resulting in the death of 38 veterans and an additional 184 wounded. Historians, such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Eric Foner, have argued that the massacre had been a moment when the white elites of New Orleans conspired to ensure that black soldiers endured a massacre. Philip Sheridan reported the same idea in a telegram to Grant, despite the fact that Sheridan had not been present for the massacre. Several local officials remained surprised about the outbreak of violence, even though the Rebel Legislature had worked "to prepare the New Orleans police for action" (p. 48). Hogue does not necessarily support or contest the idea of a conspiracy. Instead, he works to find the motivation behind the racial violence and concludes that the actions should not be surprising, considering the long pattern of violence against black soldiers throughout the course of the Civil War. He mentions such events as the massacre at Fort Pillow in 1864 to see the street battle of 1866 as a continuation of racial atrocities from the war. With the passage of the Military Reconstruction Act in 1867, General Sheridan took the reigns as military dictator of Louisiana and

promptly canceled elections until the terms of the Reconstruction Act had been fulfilled. Military occupation allowed Republican Henry Clay Warmoth, a Union veteran from Illinois, to quickly rise as a potential candidate for governor. Warmoth, who cut his political teeth in registering black voters and leading the Louisiana chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic, gained enough Republican recognition to win the election. Hogue argues that Warmoth secured the position in 1868 based on his strength among black voters and his willingness to hold the position at all costs, especially in an environment where a violent overthrow remained a daily possibility. However, Warmoth received constant notice for possible corruption and bribery charges. When the Speaker of the Louisiana House, George Washington Carter, a former Confederate veteran, earned notice for corruption charges in 1872, Warmoth's supporters declared that the Speaker needed to give up his seat. When he refused, a brawl broke out in the legislature and spilled into the streets over the course of a few weeks as Carter's supporters rallied around him and threatened to attack the Capitol. Nevertheless, Warmoth held his ground, mostly through an effective use of federal troops, to retain power and defeat Carter.

The events of 1872 further fanned the flames of bitter partisanship between the rival political parties. The contested gubernatorial election of 1872, which produced rival governments the following year, created a wave of tension that covered much of the state, including Colfax. On Easter Sunday in 1873, white supremacists attacked blacks throughout the community, torched the courthouse, and executed over thirty blacks at point blank range. Bullets riddled those trying to flee the burning courthouse, and by the conclusion of the day, somewhere between sixty-four and four hundred had fallen. Hogue explains this discrepancy in numbers by referring to partisan reporting. Republican newspapers drastically raised the casualty numbers, while Democrats downplayed the level of violence. Yet, no matter how horrific the level of violence, Louisiana had clearly undergone "a new departure in white supremacist efforts to oust Republicans from power" (p. 113).

The author concludes his compelling narrative by drawing attention to the rise of the White Leaguers and their attempts to overthrow Governor William Kellogg. White Leagues appeared in Louisiana in 1873. The group replaced the Ku Klux Klan after the passage of Klan Enforcement Acts in 1872, marking the second phase of paramilitary action destined to assert a white supremacist vision of governmental control through vio-

lence. White Leaguers spent months orchestrating plans to utilize vigilante action, and instead of being done in secret, many of the leaders had been well known among community leaders. They specifically targeted "local officials, black militia companies, or Republican Party political allies" (p. 12).

After Republican Governor Kellogg, a carpetbagger from Vermont, escaped an attempted coup d'état (accompanied by another major street battle) in 1874, President Grant threw military support behind the struggling governor. Grant's moves failed to stop Louis Wiltz, a White Leaguer who conducted a coup that culminated in his temporary elevation to Speaker of the Louisiana House. When federal troops moved in to restore order, Wiltz abandoned his position and the Republicans again took control of the House of Representatives. When the White Leaguers failed in their attempted coup to control the Speaker position, they turned their attention to ensure that General Francis Nicholls, a Conservative Democrat who suffered the loss of two limbs in the Civil War, won the governorship in 1876 in yet another contested gubernatorial election. Both Nicholls and Republican Stephen Packard claimed victory. Packard's supporters discounted any votes that had been based on "terrorism, intimidation, and Conservative fraud" (p. 165). Nicholls's supporters claimed that the man in charge of certifying the election, J. Madison Wells, took a bribe of two hundred thousand dollars and declared Nicholls the winner. With both Nicholls and Packard sworn in as governor in separate parts of the city, Nicholls worked quickly to fill political appointments and set up a legitimate government. Nicholls remained in power even as Louisiana witnessed more violence and threatened to descend into civil war over the national returns in the presidential race of 1876. Hogue argues that Nicholls succeeded because he effectively grasped "central nodes in a network of communication, information, and transportation that composed the unique infrastructure converging in Louisiana's capital" (p. 178).

Hogue also positions himself within the larger historiographical debate about whether or not President Rutherford B. Hayes's removal of federal troops from the South effectively ended Reconstruction. Despite much violence, Reconstruction continued, especially after the National Guard was called out to break the strike against the Louisiana Sugar Planters Association in November 1887 (which resulted in the death of fifty black workers in Thibodaux, Louisiana). The massacre also resulted in the disarmament of black militia units, further erasing any political and social gains African Americans made in the

aftermath of the American Civil War. African Americans had become disillusioned with the possibility of attaining freedom and left for Kansas and Oklahoma as early as in the aftermath of the 1878 state elections. Through a discussion of labor conflicts and the unraveling of black militias, the author successfully follows recent historiographical trends that move Reconstruction well beyond the Compromise of 1877.

Since the work focuses on military as well as political events and leaders, many of the voices of average citizens in New Orleans are absent. I wondered what the citizens of the city thought about White Leaguers. Did they support the overthrow or reinstallation of Governor Kellogg? What did the average citizen say about the Colfax massacre? Did the horrific spilling over blood over a contested election shape the political views of the average voter in a profound manner? How did the com-

plexities of race and ethnicity within New Orleans impact the political agenda of the city and state? A fuller explanation of the voices of the people of New Orleans would bolster this work and provide keen insights into the dimensions of racial and ethnic politics in Louisiana during Reconstruction.

Despite these questions, Hogue has sketched a complex and thorough portrait of the military and political wrangling among the citizens of the Crescent City. By carefully walking through each of the street battles and the complex process of contested political elections, the author has effectively uncovered a previously ignored chapter in the history of Reconstruction. His framework will surely serve as a model for future examinations of Radical Reconstruction and the complexities of racial violence within an era of unprecedented uncertainty.

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