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LeeAnna Keith. *Colfax Massacre: The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror, and the Death of Reconstruction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 240 pp. $15.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-539308-8.

Mark Wahlgren Summers. *A Dangerous Stir: Fear, Paranoia, and the Making of Reconstruction.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. Illustrations. 329 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3304-9.

Reviewed by Court Carney (Stephen F. Austin State University)
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Fear and Loathing during Reconstruction

In a cartoon published in *Harper's Weekly* in the fall of 1868, several weeks before the presidential election, Thomas Nast portrayed the Democratic Party as a crooked triumvirate of former Confederates, immigrant Irish, and northeastern bankers. At their feet, a black Union soldier seeks in vain to cast his vote. Nast amended the cartoon with a quotation from the 1868 Democratic platform: "We regard the Reconstruction Acts (so called) of Congress as usurpations, and unconstitutional, revolutionary, and void." In this one cartoon, Nast ably summarized at least one perspective of Reconstruction with its racial intimidation, threats of violence, and political opportunism. The cartoon also underscores the point that, though many historians emphasize the public memory of the Civil War, it is Reconstruction that has really defined the nation's image of that period. What LeeAnna Keith and Mark Wahlgren Summers, in their respective books on Reconstruction, remind us is just how violent, turbulent, and ultimately uncertain this entire period was for many Americans. Taken together, these two books refract the complexity and confusion of Reconstruction attitudes captured in Nast's scene with a careful, if wary, eye on the ominous dagger marked "Lost Cause" held aloft at the center.

In *The Colfax Massacre*, Keith attempts to provide a compelling context for the 1873 massacre while making a strong case for the bloody event as a potent symbol of the tragedy of Reconstruction. Overall, Keith strives to recover "the lost history of the Colfax Massacre, pursuing origins, characters, and legacies in the fragmented documentary record of events" (p. xviii). Keith begins her book with the disconcerting strangeness of bones uncovered accidentally and terms blurred purposefully. From the onset, Keith works to highlight both the historical account of the Colfax Massacre as well as the tortured narrative of its legacy. Throughout the first chapters of the book, Keith capably sets up her story with a careful eye for detail and an engaging writing style. Her early section on the Alabama Fever, for example, is an engrossing yet concise study of slavery, wealth, land speculation, and general Red River ridiculousness. Likewise, her section on William Calhoun's "brief, unhappy career in politics" and the various ways his life became entwined with "Radical" Reconstruction parses a convoluted tale in a succinct manner (p. 53). An ambitious former slave owner with unpopular racial and social views, Calhoun (described by Keith as a "hunchbacked, misfit, peripatetic scalawag") plays a central role in much of this book and provides a fascinating glimpse at the complexities of life in postwar Louisiana (p. 61).

The last part of Keith's book focuses, of course, on the massacre itself as well as its controversial political and legal aftermath. Again, Keith skillfully navigates the local, state, and national scenes and provides a nicely detailed tableau of a shattered landscape. "Louisiana," as Keith summarizes this period, "had distinguished itself as the most difficult and disappointing state in the seething wreckage of the former Confederacy" (p. 134). Keith appends her story of Colfax with an overview of *U.S. v. Cruikshank et al.* (1876), the post-Fourteenth Amendment Supreme Court decision that would have a major impact on black southerners in the years after the Civil War. Although Charles Lane's *The Day Freedom Died: The Colfax Massacre, the Supreme Court, and the Betrayal of Reconstruction* (published within months of Keith's own book) is focused more specifically on *Cruikshank*, Keith's commentary provides a good segue between the massacre and the issues surrounding its legacy. The last part

of Keith's book is a quick summary of the local monument that sought to redefine the Colfax Massacre as the Colfax Riot and distinguish white participants of the event simply as "heroes." "Half-remembered," Keith concludes, "the history of the Colfax Massacre remained a subject for the citizens of Colfax, whose pride in the era of war and Reconstruction came to substitute for prosperity and wholesome community in the 20th century" (p. 169).

Taking a much wider perspective than Keith, Summers focuses on the role played by fear and paranoia in defining the political climate of the nation after the Civil War. Summers's premise is an intriguing one and his book maintains a feeling of uncertainly, even though the story is well known. Summers organizes *A Dangerous Stir* around a two-part argument that brings together a discussion of the role fear played in establishing Reconstruction policy with a study of the various ways Americans desperately avoided a "second American Revolution." "Reconstruction policy," Summers argues, "was shaped not simply from politics, principles, and prejudices, but also from fears, often unreasonable, phantasms of conspiracy, dreads and hopes of renewed civil war, and a widespread sense that four years of war had thrown the normal constitutional process dangerously out of kilter" (p. 2). "Indeed," Summers writes regarding the second point, "it seems to me possible that a 'second revolution' was precisely what most white southerners and many northerners of both parties were anxious to avoid" (p. 5). At once an argumentative take on a complex period as well as summary of the larger context of nineteenth-century politics, Summers's book provides an intelligently sketched take on, in his words, "*misconstruction*" (p. 3). Summers opens with a nicely compact overview of the party system and the numerous conspiracies that defined the antebellum period from the Locofocos through the secessionist crisis. These early sections of the book help establish his larger theme of the impact of misinformation and disinformation on public policy. Once he gets to Reconstruction, Summers's chapters unfortunately tend to be a mixed bag with some sections being simply too selective while other chapters are quite strong. More important, the book's use as a fresh survey of the period is diminished by a limited bibliography that includes little recent scholarship.

One of the tantalizing aspects of *A Dangerous Stir* is the use of images and cartoons (and University of North Carolina Press deserves praise for producing another attractive and well-designed monograph); but Summers uses these images, many by Nast, as window dressing rather than as fully integrated elements of his argument. Despite discussions of media and the uses of propaganda, the book remains too rooted to the political narrative to allow room for Nast (who is never mentioned in the text itself). The strengths of the book relate to Summers's experienced political eye, but the inclusion of larger themes of cultural history would have enriched his argument. Even in one of the stronger chapters of the book, in his discussion of the fading gasps of Reconstruction, entitled "The Wolf Who Cried Wolf," there are some missed opportunities. More of an emphasis, for example, on Matt Morgan–the English counterpart of sorts to Nast, and whose brutal 1872 cartoon, "Too Thin, Massa Grant," is included–would have been a welcome addition, especially as it resonates so strongly with Summers's larger point. To be clear, Summers did not set out to write a cultural history of the period, and the book is at its best when he plays to his strengths.

Today, 130 years after its conclusion, the echoes of Reconstruction still reverberate across the modern era with its racialized crush of politics, promises, and perfidy. From our current vantage point, that period still seems strange and implausible, and yet thoroughly and sadly believable. By focusing so clearly on the violence, fear, and paranoia of this period, Keith and Summers have crafted very different books that help underscore the twisted unpredictability of Reconstruction as well as the moral and political costs that leached out from the period. Using fear and violence to define this era of course is not new, and observers in the 1860s and 1870s emphasized repeatedly these very themes. Nast's aforementioned 1868 cartoon for *Harper's*, for example, serves as a visual foil to both books. Amid the burning buildings and political stereotypes, Nast placed the focus on the dagger clutched (in a crucial detail) by Nathan Bedford Forrest, a man used repeatedly by Nast to represent the brutal and unrepentant South. As both Keith and Summers remind us, the backdrop behind that blade is as important as the knife itself, and in many ways the gnarled contortion of fear, loathing, and violence represents the most identifiable legacy of Reconstruction.

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