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# "The policy of intimidation had been so successfully managed that many colored men kept away from the polls": Violence in the Reconstruction Era South

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Reconstruction, "the period from 1865 to 1877 when national efforts were concentrated on incorporating the South back into the Union after the Civil War," was one of the most turbulent periods of US history.[1] Throughout the Reconstruction era, the Republican Party favored a process that would secure the rights of black Southerners, which faced opposition from many Democrats. This pushback often took the form of political violence against white Republicans in the South as well as freedpeople who attempted to take part in politics and assert their newly granted rights of citizenship. Mounting opposition against the federal government's Reconstruction policy in the South led to unrest as some Southerners engaged in organized political violence in order to maintain aspects of antebellum society.

In this paper I argue that in particular, Mississippi and Georgia during the late 1860s and early 1870s were states where racial, social, and political tension erupted into violence. Both Mississippi, a state famous for organized political terror in what would become known as the Mississippi Plan, and Georgia, where residents initially took a more subtle approach to disenfranchisement of black residents, had Democrats who ultimately utilized political violence in their reconstruction plans. The terror was significant because it served as a way for white Southern Democrats to maintain political and social control over freedpeople, overthrow Republican governments in Southern states, strengthen white supremacy, and ultimately bring about an end to Reconstruction in the South. The social and political chaos in the wake of the Civil War created a space for white Southern Democrats to engage in political violence, and bring about the end of Reconstruction.

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[1] Charles Reagan Wilson, "Reconstruction," in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 10: Law and Politics*, ed. James W. Ely and Bradley G. Bond (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 226.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, the federal and state governments began deliberating to determine a process for reunifying the nation. This was extremely difficult for several reasons, especially the fact that the highly destructive Civil War was unprecedented, so there was no blueprint for how best to reunite the nation. Reconstruction sought to bring the nation together again, restructure the Southern economy into a free labor society, and address the question of political rights for freedpeople. It was a process of trial and error, as various individuals and groups argued about the best course of action for the country. In addition, the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln sent shock waves across the nation and thrust Andrew Johnson into the presidency. Johnson's approach to Reconstruction put him at odds with many members of Congress, especially the Radical Republicans, in terms of creating a plan for Reconstruction and this added to the confusion and uncertainty of the process in the South. [2]

Another barrier to the process was the enormity of the task of restructuring the entirety of the Southern social, economic, and political systems. Prior to the war, a racialized system of slavery was crucial to society. While the war did not bring about an end to racism by any means, the abolition of slavery posed a threat to the general stability of these Southern states as well as the power of white supremacy. When Georgia's Alexander Stephens served as Vice President of the Confederacy he claimed, "[The Confederate States government's] foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man, that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and moral condition."[3] In Mississippi and

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[2] Radical Republicans were those with a "deep commitment to racial equality" and they believed that "Federal and state governments should be color-blind, with civil rights guaranteed to all regardless of race" (K. Stephen Prince, introduction to *Radical Reconstruction,* [Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016], 5).

[3] In his Cornerstone Address given on March 21, 1861, Stephens spoke about the important role slavery played in the formation of the Confederacy, and urged other slave states to join (Alexander H. Stephens, "Cornerstone Address," in *Southern Pamphlets on Secession, November*

Georgia, as well as in many other places across the South, slavery was a critical component of

antebellum society. In 1860, Georgia and Mississippi ranked second and third among the states

for the highest slave population.[4] According to the United States Census Bureau, in 1860

Georgia contained 462,198 slaves out of a total state population of 1,057,286 residents.[5]

Mississippi had 436,631 slaves with a total state population of 791,305 residents.[6] The sheer

number of slaves in these states, and the wealth they generated highlights the critical role slavery

played in their social, political, and economic systems. For example, prior to the outbreak of the

Civil War, Mississippi was a hub of plantation slavery where a "robust plantocracy" built

mansions to showcase their wealth, status, and power.[7] From 1800 to 1860 the population in the

state grew rapidly alongside the increase in cotton production in the area, making many

slaveholders incredibly wealthy.[8]

In antebellum Mississippi, black men, women, and children were bought and sold,

separated from their families, overworked, and beaten in order for the state's economy to boom

and plantation owners to become rich. Slaves who were "doomed to the block" were examined

and sold to the highest bidder, as though they were nothing but livestock or furniture.[9] After

these auctions, plantation owners forced their slaves to labor under horrible conditions and often

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*1860-April 1861*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher, and Jon L. Wakelyn [Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996], 402-412).

[4] United States Census Bureau, *1870 Census Volume 1. The Statistics of the Population of the United States,* Population by States and Territories 1790-1870, table 1, accessed March 26, 2020, https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1870/population/1870a-04.pdf#.

[5] United States Census Bureau, *1870 Census.*

[6] United States Census Bureau, *1870 Census.*

[7] Marc R. Matrana, "Mississippi," in *Lost Plantations of the South,* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 142.

[8] Matrana, "Mississippi," 142.

[9] Joseph B. Cobb, *Mississippi Scenes, Or, Sketches of Southern and Western Life and Adventure: Humorous, Satirical, and Descriptive, Including the Legend of Black Creek*, (Philadelphia: T.K. and P.G. Collins, Printers, 1851), 90.

beat and humiliated them. In addition to the physical misery that slaves experienced in antebellum Mississippi, hatred and racism ran deep through Southern society, and slaves were viewed as sub-human. In his 1851 book on Mississippi, writer Joseph Cobb claimed,

> A southern negro is regarded as a living deformity of vice and prostitution, a being with the shape of man, but lower in infamy than the brute; a member of the great human family whose situation is so depraved and isolated…so entirely cut off from sympathy with the human race, that all association with him is considered dangerous and contaminating.[10]

Many white Mississippians felt a sense of superiority over their slaves and this was deeply entrenched throughout the state's institutions. This poor treatment of slaves and the sentiment that they were not worthy of respect makes clear the difficulty of promoting political rights to freedpeople in the Reconstruction period, barely two decades after Cobb wrote his text on life in Mississippi. Yet, the reliance on slavery and tense relationships between slaves and slaveholders was not unique to Mississippi in the antebellum era. Georgia's economy also relied heavily on slave labor and its dependence on slavery in the antebellum period foreshadows its resistance to the postwar reconstruction process. In antebellum Georgia, many white families in the central part of the state were slaveholders, while "the rest owed their livelihoods and social privileges to slavery."[11] Thus, after emancipation the entire state was thrust into confusion and the livelihood of many white families was jeopardized.

Eric Foner further details the difficulty associated with the Southern states coming to terms with the end of slavery. He explains that, "…the rebelling Southern states…could not resume their erstwhile position without acknowledging the destruction of slavery—a requirement

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[10] Cobb, *Mississippi Scenes, Or, Sketches of Southern and Western Life and Adventure,* 156.
[11] Joseph P. Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the Cotton Plantation South: Central Georgia, 1800-1880* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 108.

that implied far-reaching changes in Southern society and politics."[12] While voting eligibility

was granted to nearly all adult white men in the antebellum era South, "slavery everywhere

undergirded a pattern of political and economic privilege which seemed to discriminate against

non-slaveholders."[13] These antebellum slaveholders controlled politics, and thereby society.

However, when slavery was abolished and freedmen were granted political rights, including the

right to vote, this political system and the power structures within it began to shift. The powerful

Southern whites who had previously dominated politics now had to watch their former slaves

casting ballots.[14] Many political elites believed that these black men were not fit to participate

politically and this created tension that boiled over into everyday life in the South and formed a

barrier to Reconstruction.

The process of Reconstruction was further exacerbated by the pressure the federal

government was under to reunify the country. When the war ended, the South needed to be

brought back into the nation and Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson believed this

needed to be done in a timely manner. The longer it took for a course of action to be planned and

implemented, the more difficult it would be to bring the nation together, as keeping the Southern

states in a sort of limbo was inefficient and chaotic. This is evident through both Mississippi and

Georgia, which were not fully readmitted to the Union until 1870, several years later than many

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[12] Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1990), 35.

[13] Harry L. Watson, "Conflict and Collaboration: Yeomen, Slaveholders, and Politics in the Antebellum South," *Social History* 10, no. 3 (1985): 274.

[14] The Fifteenth Amendment allowed freedmen to cast ballots in US elections. It reads, "The rights of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude" (United States Constitution. art, XV, §1).

of the other Southern states.[15] A large portion of the problem with Reconstruction lay in the fact

that restructuring the South required more than simply declaring the nation whole again.

As previously noted, the Southern economic, social, and political systems needed to be

rebuilt without slavery and this process required time and resources. Therefore, a paradox

emerged as President Johnson wanted to reunify the nation as painlessly and quickly as possible,

while it became increasingly clear that this process could not happen overnight. Further,

Thaddeus Stevens, an influential Radical Republican in Congress, argued for a complete

transformation of the South in the post-war era, a plan that could not be accomplished quickly.

Stevens argued,

> In reconstruction…reformation *must* be effected; the foundation of [the South's]
> institutions, both political, municipal, and social *must* be broken up and *relaid,* or all our
> blood and treasure have been spent in vain. This can only be done by treating and holding
> them as a conquered people.[16]

The South could not be transformed easily and quickly if the impacts were to be long-lasting.

Thus, the paradox of time created another roadblock for the success of Reconstruction in both

Mississippi and Georgia.

After Lincoln was assassinated and Johnson became President, Johnson chose to

implement a lenient process of re-entry for the former Confederate states in hopes of bringing the

nation together as quickly as possible. He believed that as president he should be the one to

decide on a Reconstruction plan, not Congress because the president is elected by the people and

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[15] James Wilford Garner, Ph.M., *Reconstruction in Mississippi* (London: The Macmillan
Company, 1901), 273-274. William Harris Bragg, "Reconstruction," in *The Civil War in
Georgia: A New Georgia Encyclopedia Companion*, ed. John C. Inscoe (Athens, GA: University
of Georgia Press, 2011), 193.

[16] This excerpt came from a speech given by Thaddeus Stevens at the Pennsylvania's Republican
state convention in Lancaster in September 1865 (Eric Foner, "Thaddeus Stevens and the
Imperfect Republic," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 60, no. 2 [1993]:
147-148).

represents "*all* American people."[17] One historian described Johnson as, "[c]onfident of the correctness of his ideas, feeling sure that they were the only logical results of a true interpretation of the Constitution, [Johnson] pursued his policy of Reconstruction."[18] His plan stood in stark contrast to the beliefs he expressed immediately after his inauguration. Initially, Johnson stressed that the former Confederates were traitors and thus deserved to be met with severity and punishment.[19] He even went so far as to claim, "[t]reason must be made odious, and traitors must be punished and impoverished."[20]

However, when it came time to implement a Reconstruction strategy, Johnson's actions did not match up to his earlier sentiments. Johnson's plan involved great leniency and he ultimately dispensed numerous pardons to Southerners.[21] He was "[f]iercely committed to states' rights in handling the Reconstruction questions," and his plan placed the responsibility mainly on the individual Southern states to direct their own Reconstruction processes.[22] Charles Chadsey details the basis of Johnson's plan and writes that it "seemed to commit to a recently insurrectionary people the whole responsibility for proper reconstruction."[23] Therefore, Johnson's plan placed great trust in the Southern states to direct their own reconstruction and did not involve much federal oversight. This minimal federal role in the process laid the groundwork

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[17] Michael Les Benedict, "Andrew Johnson," in *The Presidents and the Constitution: A Living History,* ed. Ken Gormley (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 232.

[18] Charles Chadsey, Ph.D., "The Struggle Between President Johnson and Congress over Reconstruction," in *Studies in History, Economics and Public Law* 8, no. 1 (1896): 39.

[19] Chadsey, "The Struggle Between President Johnson and Congress over Reconstruction," 32.

[20] Mark L. Bradley, *The Army and Reconstruction 1865-1877* (Washington D.C.: CMH Publications, 2015), 9.

[21] Chadsey, "The Struggle Between President Johnson and Congress over Reconstruction," 32.

[22] Benedict, "Andrew Johnson," 229.

[23] Chadsey, "The Struggle Between President Johnson and Congress over Reconstruction," 39.

for Southern states to continue their racially biased legal systems, and it influenced the later

inability of the federal government to intervene in order to quell the political violence.

A speedy reunification process such as the one implemented by Johnson was not popular

with all government officials. President Johnson and many Republicans in Congress were at odds

over several pieces of legislation that involved "the question of the status and future of the

newly-freed blacks in the South."[24] The Radical Republicans wanted the Southern states to pay

for their act of secession and sought to prevent a restoration of the antebellum status quo.[25] They

believed federal oversight and aid through programs such as the Freedmen's Bureau were

necessary, while Johnson wanted to grant the southern states autonomy in directing their own

reconstruction.[26] This tension and hostility further damaged the possibility of a smooth

Reconstruction, as President Johnson vetoed bills such as the Freedmen's Bureau Bill and the

Civil Rights Act of 1866 due to his dedication to states' rights.[27] In the end, Johnson's plan of

Reconstruction allowed Southern states to re-enter the Union in a quick fashion and his lenient

oversight of these states created conditions where violence could occur.

In Mississippi, Johnson's leniency with his Reconstruction plan was evident, as it

allowed for the creation of Black Codes in the state. These racial codes, the first in the postwar

South, severely restricted the opportunities of freedpeople in Mississippi.[28] The intent of these

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[24] Andrew Johnson, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson Volume 10, February-July 1866,* ed. Paul H. Bergeron (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee, 1992), xii.

[25] Thaddeus Stevens was one Radical Republican who supported temporary disenfranchisement of the former Confederates in order to give power to "loyal whites" and freedpeople (Foner, "Thaddeus Stevens and the Imperfect Republic," 150).

[26] Benedict, "Andrew Johnson," 229, 231.

[27] Benedict, "Andrew Johnson," 231.

[28] In November 1865 Mississippi became the first state to enact black codes and many other Southern states followed their example. These Black Codes granted some rights to freedpeople while simultaneously discriminating against them. Black Mississippians gained the right to marry, own property, and testify in court. However, others ensured freedpeople continued to

codes was to maintain white supremacy within the state and disadvantage black Mississippians.

Specifically, the laws heavily restricted the economic opportunities and movements of black

Mississippians.[29] Nicholas Lemann writes,

> Like other Confederate states, Mississippi had, just after the war, with the tacit
> encouragement of President Andrew Johnson, convened a legislature made up mainly of
> unrepentant Confederates, and it had passed 'black codes' that legislated the freed slaves
> into a condition as close to their former one as it was possible to get without actually
> reinstituting slavery.[30]

The creation of these black codes and the lack of oversight on the part of Johnson and the federal

government set the stage for the political violence that would erupt in the mid-1870s as

unchecked white Southern Democrats violently exerted political control over newly freed people.

Georgia took a different route for crafting its reconstruction process and granting freedom

and liberties to newly freed slaves in the state. The Georgia legislature did not pass the same

degree of "black codes" that Mississippi did during this era.[31] Yet, this lack of severity in

Georgia's laws did not stem from a concern for the newly emancipated slaves in the state. In

fact, a common sentiment among white Georgians was, "[h]atred, fear, resentment, and distrust

of the [black population]."[32] Instead, Georgia's elites planned to grant black men just enough

rights and liberties to minimize interference from the Freedmen's Bureau[33] or other federal

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work as agricultural laborers ("Mississippi Black Codes, 1865," in *Reconstruction: a Reference Guide,* ed. Paul E. Teed and Melissa Ladd Teed [Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2015], 203).

[29] "Mississippi Black Codes, 1865," in *Reconstruction*, 203.

[30] Nicholas Lemann, *Redemption: The Last Battle of the Civil War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 34.

[31] Alan Conway, *The Reconstruction of Georgia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 55.

[32] Conway, *The Reconstruction of Georgia*, 63.

[33] The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands or the "Freedmen's Bureau" was an agency of the federal government that provided "social welfare programs to the former rebellious states and their localities" and the primary goal "to assist and protect the freedmen in their new social status." Congress passed the legislation to create the Bureau on March 3, 1865

institutions.[34] The seemingly benign nature of Georgia's reconstruction plan kept federal

involvement at a minimum and allowed Georgia to maintain greater control over its

reconstruction process. This autonomy ultimately created the conditions for violence and terror

to spring up across the state with relatively little consequence. Once again, Johnson's leniency

allowed the states to choose their own reconstruction paths, and the lack of federal oversight led

to violence and the victimization of black people across the South, particularly in Georgia and

Mississippi.

After the Civil War the entire economic system of the slave South had to be altered and

this shift was another point of tension between black Southerners and white Southern Democrats,

which erupted into violence. The Federal Government's expectation that the South was to

become a free labor society was not popular among many Southerners, especially white

plantation owners. There was a widely held belief across the Southern states that freedpeople

would not labor without force because they were greedy or lazy. These sentiments are expressed

in a report from Sidney Andrews, who travelled to various Southern states in the postwar period

and reported on white Southern attitudes towards free black labor. His report documents some

Southerners' belief that, "[t]he experiment of free [black] labor is bound to be a failure…"

because black men and women would not labor on their own without the coercion of slavery.[35]

In addition to the belief that black Southerners would not labor freely, many Southern

whites also had the opinion that black men were unfit to participate in government. This would

become a major roadblock to a peaceful and efficient Reconstruction process, as the issue of

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(Ira C. Colby, "The Freedmen's Bureau: From Social Welfare to Segregation," *Phylon [1960-201])* 46, no. 3 [1985]: 219-220).

[34] Conway, *The Reconstruction of Georgia,* 55.

[35] Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War: as Shown by Fourteen Weeks of Travel and Observation in Georgia and the Carolinas,* (Boston, MA: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), 101.

rights and citizenship and who could claim them often led to violence. In Georgia for example,

the granting of freedoms and rights to black residents was a subjective and sporadic process.

Essentially, as Andrews reports, in the South, "the position decreed for the Negro was one of

political oblivion, social inferiority, and superficial legal equality. Legal equality was entirely

dependent upon the good will and the genuine desire of the lawmakers and law enforcers to

provide equality of treatment before the law."[36] While legal equality among black and white

Georgians existed in theory, a power imbalance between the races was the reality.

The belief that black men were not qualified to govern is evident in Georgia's changes to

their legislature throughout the Reconstruction era. While there were thirty-three black

legislators elected in Georgia in 1868, they faced scrutiny and hostility as they "attempted to take

their seats for the opening of the Georgia General Assembly."[37] The white members of the

legislature voted to bar all the black members, and were successful in doing so,[38] claiming that

black members of the legislature were "unconstitutional" and this increased tensions within the

state.[39] At the time these black men were elected, the once explicit racial requirements for

holding public office were no longer included in the state's constitution, therefore the election of

black legislators was legal, although still contested.[40]

In Georgia's 1865 constitution, signed in November, the requirements for holding state

office included a racial component, specifying that, "[t]he electors of members of the General

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[36] Conway, *The Reconstruction of Georgia,* 56-57.

[37] Robert A. Holmes, "The Georgia Legislative Black Caucus: An Analysis of a Racial Legislative Subgroup," in *Journal of Black Studies* 30, no. 6 (2000): 768-769.

[38] W.E.B. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1935), 503. Holmes, "The Georgia Legislative Black Caucus," 769.

[39] John M. Matthews, "Negro Republicans in the Reconstruction of Georgia," in *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (1976): 151-152.

[40] Georgia Const. of 1865, art. V §1. Georgia Const. of 1868, art. III §1

Assembly shall be free white male citizens of this State...and no person not qualified to vote for members of the General Assembly shall hold any office in this State."[41] However, in the state's 1868 constitution the voting and office-holding requirements do not utilize racial language and simply require that the elected officials be citizens of the State for at least one or two years depending on the office.[42] The ousting of Georgia's black legislators thus received backlash from those who supported equality among the races as the existence of black legislators did not explicitly violate any portion of the state's revised constitution. The removal of Georgia's thirty-three black legislators attracted national attention, and when it was paired with the political violence that erupted in the state, it sparked federal involvement that Georgia previously tried to avoid by passing their more lenient black codes.

Political violence carried out by the Ku Klux Klan played a major role in Georgia's post-1867 elections. The tactics used by the Klan to intimidate black voters heavily impacted the results of these races. This was particularly true in 1868, as this year marked the first presidential election in Georgia in the postwar period. In his piece on Reconstruction Georgia, John Matthews observes that in regard to the question of whether, "fraud, intimidation and violence, including the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, characterized this election there can be no doubt."[43] The violence perpetrated by the Klan in Georgia was purposeful, obvious, and precise. In fact, "Klan violence was rarely random, and white raiders did not simply assault blacks for being black."[44] This distinction is crucial because random violence would have minimized its political impact and been less successful in keeping white men in power in the state of Georgia. Fear and

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[41] Georgia Const. of 1865, art. V §1.
[42] Georgia Const. of 1868, art. III §1.
[43] Matthews, "Negro Republicans in the Reconstruction of Georgia," 153-154.
[44] Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2014), 290.

hostility still led some white Georgians to engage in less organized violence if they felt that their power as white men was under attack. In fact, "[a]ny assault upon the citadel of white supremacy could bring an instinctive violent reaction, not so much on a personal basis but against the race generally."[45] There were many calculated instances of political violence, yet fear and paranoia led to some more generalized violence against black Georgians during this era.

Many of these calculated acts of violence were carried out by organized groups of white supremacists such as the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan was essentially, "a terrorist group that used violence against blacks and white Republicans in the name of preserving the morality and virtue of white civilization."[46] Members of the Klan in Georgia claimed they were,

> an organization, a brotherhood of the property-holders, the peaceable, law-abiding citizens of the State, for self-protection. The instinct of self-protection prompted the organization; the sense of insecurity and danger, particularly in those neighborhoods where the [black] population largely predominated.[47]

This viewpoint expressed by Klan members highlights that they either believed, or wanted others to believe, that their organization was one of merely protective aims, seeking to defend themselves from a black population they deemed as dangerous. However, historian Eric Foner counters the claim of self-protection and instead states, "[The Klan] aimed to reverse the interlocking changes sweeping over the South during Reconstruction: to destroy the Republican party's infrastructure, undermine the Reconstruction state, reestablish control of the black labor force, and restore racial subordination in every aspect of Southern life."[48] Essentially he argues

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[45] Conway, *The Reconstruction of Georgia,* 64.

[46] Wilson, "Reconstruction," 270.

[47] John B. Gordon, "Testimony of a Georgia Leader, 1871," in *Reconstruction [1865-1877],* ed. Richard N. Current (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965), 99.

[48] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877,* First ed., New American Nation Series (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1988), 426.

that the Klan wanted to maintain as many aspects of the antebellum South as possible, including upholding white supremacy and taking control over the former slaves.

The elections of 1868 served as the perfect opportunity for the Klan to increase its scope and intensity, as its members fought to maintain white supremacy and restore Democratic rule to the South. Eager to control the elections as well as to "keep [black men] in [their] place economically, socially, and politically," the Klan escalated its violence that year in Georgia.[49] In addition, the absence of an effective military force to combat political terrorism created a space for the KKK to rise and maintain a stronghold in the state. 1868 was the first presidential election since the end of the Civil War and a lot was on the line for the residents of Georgia. Therefore, some white Democrats were willing to utilize a variety of tactics to maintain their own power. This election had the potential to either uphold white supremacy in the state and keep Georgia's freed people in a subservient position despite the end of slavery, or allow these black men to have a voice in the political realm and undercut the institution of white supremacy. Thus, tensions were high as "Conservative Georgia whites were determined to win back control of their government, but at the same time, newly-enfranchised blacks along with white Republicans (scalawags and carpetbaggers)[50] were equally determined to retain their voice in Georgia politics."[51] These tensions played out in political acts of violence throughout the year.

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[49] Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction,* First ed. (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1971), 227.

[50] Carpetbaggers were Northern men who moved to the South in the postwar period while scalawags were white Southerners who supported Reconstruction and both groups were a part of the Republican Party (Peter Kolchin, "Scalawags, Carpetbaggers, and Reconstruction: A Quantitative Look at Southern Congressional Politics, 1868-1872," in *The Journal of Southern History* 45, no. 1 [1979]: 63).

[51] Lee W. Formwalt, "The Camilla Massacre of 1868: Racial Violence as Political Propaganda," in *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (1987): 401.

Despite its slow beginning, organized political violence reached a higher, more intense, and more widespread level in Georgia than anywhere else in the South. In particular, Warren County, Georgia "descended much further into terrorism in 1869 than most Southern counties ever got."[52] In this area, "Ku Klux Klan violence began seriously in the summer of 1868. Night riding, with accompanying whippings and shootings, became an almost nightly occurrence, and the Klan murdered its first Negro in September."[53] Yet, Warren County was not the only locale in Georgia to experience intense political terrorism as men, women, and children across the state were impacted by this violence.

Typically, the assaults were targeted at black Georgians, yet some white people were subjected to political terrorism if they were seen as obstacles to the Democratic Party or white supremacy groups in the area.[54] A prime example of this was the murder of George Ashburn, a white Republican who was killed on March 31, 1868 by what was thought to be his political enemies, members of the Democratic Party in disguise.[55] Many instances of political violence were never reported, however, because of the lack of justice within the state, and the victims' reluctance to come forward. Despite horrific acts of violence, terror, and rage, there was little justice for victims of the KKK, and the lack of consequences served as motive for Klan members to continue their violent acts.[56]

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[52] Trelease, *White Terror,* 226.
[53] Trelease, *White Terror,* 227.
[54] Trelease, *White Terror,* 227.
[55] The official death reports indicate that it was "parties unknown" who murdered George Ashburn while others believe it was carried out by the KKK and still others think it was members of Ashburn's own political party (Elizabeth Otto Daniell, "The Ashburn Murder Case in Georgia Reconstruction, 1868," in *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 3 [1975]: 300).
[56] Trelease, *White Terror,* 230.

The story of Perry Jeffers and his family sheds light on the experience of black families who the Klan deemed to be obstacles to white supremacy in the state. Klansmen came to Perry Jeffers' home after hearing he was going to vote for Ulysses S. Grant and shot at him through the walls.[57] He returned fire and killed and injured some of the men.[58] They later returned with 50 to 100 men to find only Jeffers' wife and their bedridden son at the house while the other family members hid in the woods.[59] Yet this did not deter the assailants. from committing horrible acts of violence towards the wife and sick child.[60] Trelease details the heinous crime, noting that the two:

> were dragged outside, and the son was shot eleven times. The Klansmen then threw out the cabin's contents—furniture, feather mattresses, and all—making a pile of them in the yard. To this they added the boy's body and then set fire to the whole. Finally they seized the mother and with a length of bed cord hung her from a tree. As soon as they rode off, the woman was cut down; she survived but continued to bear the marks of her treatment.[61]

This incident of Klan violence highlights the severity of the harm inflicted upon black Georgians as well as the cruelty of the Klan members who would murder a sick child in order to impact the political leanings of the boy's father.

The violence in Georgia did not go unnoticed by a national audience, and while justice was rarely administered to the victims, some individuals tried to ease the situation and provide aid to those impacted by the violence by documenting their stories. In the late 1860s in Georgia "[c]ommittees were organized to gather reports of violence that allegedly accompanied the presidential campaign, going on at the same time, and to present this information to Congress."[62]

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[57] Trelease, *White Terror,* 229.
[58] Trelease, *White Terror,* 229.
[59] Trelease, *White Terror,* 229.
[60] Trelease, *White Terror,* 229.
[61] Trelease, *White Terror*, 229.
[62] Matthews, "Negro Republicans in the Reconstruction of Georgia," 152, 153.

Delegates at an all-black protest convention in Macon, Georgia created these committees as they,

"expressed the feeling of outrage that prevailed in the fall of 1868" and "warned whites of the

growing independence of black voters."[63] Stories that were documented during these efforts

provide evidence for the political terrorism that individuals experienced in Georgia during

Reconstruction.

Caroline Smith was one such individual who testified before the Congressional

Committee about her experience as a black woman facing Klan violence.[64] She details how they

took her out of her house at night and whipped because she was accused of disrespecting a white

woman.[65] This experience highlights the abuse that black men, women, and children faced in

Georgia during Reconstruction and the efforts to try to "keep [black men and women] in [their]

place" of social, economic, and political subservience.[66]

Abram Colby's experiences show the varying tactics and the degree of violence utilized

by members of the Democratic Party to impact the elections in Georgia. Colby testified to the

Congressional Committee about his experiences with political terrorism.[67] He claimed that some

members of the Democratic Party in Georgia offered him $5,000 if he would agree to give up his

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[63] Matthews, "Negro Republicans in the Reconstruction of Georgia," 153.

[64] Caroline Smith testified in Atlanta on October 21, 1871. Caroline Smith, "Testimony to the Congressional Committee in Atlanta, Georgia, October 21, 1871," in *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings,* ed. Shawn L. Alexander (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015), 35-36.

[65] Smith, "Testimony to the Congressional Committee in Atlanta, Georgia, October 21, 1871," 35-36.

[66] Trelease, *White Terror,* 227.

[67] Abram Colby testified on October 27 and 28, 1871 in Atlanta Georgia. Abram Colby, "Testimony to the Congressional Committee in Atlanta, Georgia, October 27 and 28, 1871," in *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings,* ed. Shawn L. Alexander (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015), 48.

seat in the Georgia legislature during Reconstruction, yet he refused.[68] When he did not comply

with the demand, the Klan targeted Colby with violence. His testimony read:

> "*Question.* You had voted in the legislature for Foster Blodgett, and had voted at the polls
> for Bullock and Grant?[69]
> *Answer.* Yes, sir.
> *Question.* And that was the reason they gave for whipping you?
> *Answer.* Yes sir; and they said I had influence with the negroes of other counties, and had
> carried negroes against them..."[70]

The violence that Abram Colby experienced was directly linked to his political affiliation. Klan

members who supported the Democratic Party saw him as a threat to their efforts in Georgia and

sought to silence his voice and his vote.

1868 in Georgia bore witness to both individual and group acts of violence aimed at

black men and women. The Freedmen's Bureau documented many of these attacks, including a

race riot that took place. In fact, "[o]utrages and guerrilla warfare against [black men and

women] were widespread in Georgia. General [John Randolph] Lewis of the Freedmen's

Bureau[71] reported 260 attacks, whippings and murders of freedmen between January and

November 1868. In September, there was a race riot at Camilla."[72] The Camilla riot occurred

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[68] Colby, "Testimony to the Congressional Committee in Atlanta, Georgia, October 27 and 28, 1871," 48.

[69] The quotation references Foster Blodgett who was a Republican mayor of Augusta, Georgia during the early years of Reconstruction, Republican Rufus Bullock who served as Georgia's governor from 1868-1871, and Republican President Ulysses S. Grant (United States Congress, "The Congressional Globe: Containing the Debates and Proceedings of the First Session Forty-Second Congress; with an Appendix, Embracing the Laws Passed at that Session; also, Special Session of the Senate," in *Congressional Globe and Appendix First Session Forty-Second Congress: in Two Parts. Part I, Congressional Globe* [Washington D.C.: F. & J. Rivers & George A. Bailey, 1871], 543). (Matthews, "Negro Republicans in the Reconstruction of Georgia," 150, 151, 156).

[70] Colby, "Testimony to the Congressional Committee in Atlanta, Georgia, October 27 and 28, 1871," 51.

[71] Paul A. Cimbala, "On the Front Line of Freedom: Freedmen's Bureau Officers and Agents in Reconstruction Georgia, 1865-1868," in *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (1992): 607.

[72] Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*, 507.

when Democrats disrupted a Republican parade by firing on it, and in the end twenty black marchers were either injured or killed in the assault.[73] The Camilla riot was not simply a protest that got out of hand and resulted in violence. Rather, the riot "had been part of a 'concerted determination' among whites in the Second Congressional District 'to force the colored vote and to prevent a canvass by Republicans.'"[74] Thus, the riot was an organized effort to reduce voter turnout among Republicans and restore the Democratic party to power.

The violence organized by white Democrats in Camilla was extremely effective for advancing the party's political agenda. Several outcomes from the riot highlight this. First, in the aftermath, Major O.H. Howard encouraged freedmen "to avoid political meetings except in their own neighborhoods, and 'then always without arms.'"[75] The advice was intended as a protective measure for the freedmen, yet it also had the consequence of limiting their political involvement and in turn, their political power.[76] In addition, the riot scared many black Georgians in Camilla, causing them to stay home and avoid the polls. On election day only two Republicans cast their ballots.[77] This incredibly low voter turnout in the aftermath of the Camilla riot illustrates its effectiveness. In fact, "[i]t was clear to most observers that campaign violence and election fraud did work."[78] The effectiveness of political violence created a cycle that popularized intimidation as it generated its intended consequence of maintaining white supremacy and granting power to the Democratic Party in Georgia.

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[73] Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction*, 291.

[74] Formwalt, "The Camilla Massacre of 1868," 419.

[75] Formwalt, "The Camilla Massacre of 1868," 405, 419.

[76] Major O.H. Howard was a "white Union army veteran" who worked as the subassistant commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau in the Albany, Georgia area (Formwalt, "The Camilla Massacre of 1868," 405).

[77] Formwalt, "The Camilla Massacre of 1868," 422.

[78] Formwalt, "The Camilla Massacre of 1868," 422.

Violent acts of terror alone were not enough to alter the election results in Georgia in the late 1860s and early 1870s, however. The Democratic Party's use of more subtle intimidation tactics paired with the political terrorism further increased the party's power in the state during the Reconstruction era. In the 1868 election for example, the successes of the Democratic party were due in part to restricting black men from voting utilizing a variety of tactics. In Crenshaw County, Georgia white officials strategically placed barricades so that "every [black] voter had to run the gauntlet of their jeers and threats."[79] This method of disenfranchisement for black voters served as a secondary measure to keep away those who were not deterred by the political terrorism that ran rampant throughout Georgia prior to the election. If violence and intimidation did not keep black voters away from the polls, then white Georgian Democrats would simply not allow black men to cast a ballot. This plan kept black men from voting by attempting to circumvent the "Civil War Amendments."[80]

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[79] Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction,* 253.

[80] In the years following the war, Congress passed the "Civil War Amendments" which altered the nation's political landscape. The 13th Amendment which was passed in 1865 abolished slavery in the US. The 14th Amendment which was passed in 1868 included several sections. The first section gave citizenship to everyone born in the US, regardless of race as well as "provided all citizens with 'equal protection under the laws.'" The second section issued sanctions for states who do not comply with the expanded right to vote by reducing their congressional representation. The third section "prevented Confederates who had previously served in the U.S. government from holding office." The 15th Amendment, ratified in 1870 "prohibited states from disenfranchising voters 'on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.'" Each former Confederate state had to ratify the 13th and 14th Amendments in order to be readmitted to the Union (United States Senate, "Landmark Legislation: Thirteenth, Fourteenth, & Fifteenth Amendments). ("The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution," in *Radical Reconstruction: A Brief History with Documents,* ed. K. Stephen Prince, [Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016], 85-86).

The violence and intimidation in Georgia in 1868 had consequences that impacted Georgia residents long after the new year began. One major impact[81] of the 1868 violence was the restoration of military rule[82] in Georgia under the direction of President Ulysses S. Grant. [83] Unchecked Klan violence raised concerns about Georgia's readiness to reenter the Union, and on December 22, 1869 Congress created stricter requirements for Georgia's readmittance.[84] This included agreeing to the Reorganization Act for Georgia in December of 1869,[85] which "required the governor to summon the original legislature elected in April, 1868; the expelled [black legislators] were to be reseated, whites unable to fulfill the test oath were to be excluded, and the legislature was to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment before Georgia could be readmitted to the union."[86] Yet, these changes were not long term as the military intervention lasted only a year and Philip Joiner was the only black representative to serve more than one term.[87]

Once again Georgia fell victim to the violence and chaos of political terrorism as White Democrats continued to utilize terror and fear in order to achieve their aims.[88] In fact, Klan violence increased in many places in Georgia during the 1870 election and most of the victims were black.[89] While Klan activity increased, it no longer took the same form as in previous years.

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[81] As part of the Reconstruction Acts of 1867, Congress placed the South under temporary military rule in hopes that the former Confederacy could "secure fundamental and lasting change" (Prince, *Radical Reconstruction,* 18).

[82] Georgia was under military rule until it was readmitted to the Union for the first time in the summer of 1868 after ratifying the 14th Amendment and sending their new state constitution to Congress for approval (Bradley, *The Army and Reconstruction 1865-1877*, 46).

[83] In January 1870, President Grant placed Georgia back under military control to "ensure the success of Georgia's 'second Reconstruction'" (Bradley, *The Army and Reconstruction 1865-1877,* 57).

[84] Bradley, *The Army and Reconstruction 1865-1877,* 57.

[85] Matthews, "Negro Republicans in the Reconstruction of Georgia," 155.

[86] Matthews, "Negro Republicans in the Reconstruction of Georgia," 155.

[87] Formwalt, "The Camilla Massacre of 1868," 423.

[88] Formwalt, "The Camilla Massacre of 1868," 423.

[89] Trelease, *White Terror,* 238.

The 1870 election in Georgia saw less systematic violence than in 1868, but "the memory of earlier Ku Klux raids kept many [black men] from voting and stimulated others to cast Democratic ballots."[90]

Despite the attempts to quell political violence in the early 1870s, organized groups continued to terrorize black Georgians and Republicans. The new system of political terror that arose after the state's re-admittance to the Union was less upfront and more difficult to punish. As Allen W. Trelease states,

> "[b]y the end of 1870 Georgia Democrats had devised a system of intimidation which no longer required the grosser outrages of the Ku Klux Klan…Georgia pioneered for the deep South in developing a more subtle and acceptable way of nullifying [black] majorities than the rustic terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan."[91]

Thus, political violence did not end with military interference or a new state constitution, rather it shifted forms and continued to run unchecked through the 1870s.

Besides altering the economic system of the South, Reconstruction aimed to bring about legal equality between the races. The intervention of the federal government to accomplish this goal, paired with the idea that black men would have political power, including the right to vote, was unpopular across the South. The federal government, through the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, forced the South to grant political rights to black men. Georgia was not readmitted to the Union until it ratified the Fifteenth Amendment, along with other stipulations, which did not occur until 1870.[92] However, it is clear from the numerous incidents of political violence, especially attacks that occurred at night on black Southerners' homes, or at the polls themselves, that these amendments were not always strictly enforced. The

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[90] Trelease, *White Terror,* 240-241.
[91] Trelease, *White Terror,* 241-242.
[92] Matthews, "Negro Republicans in the Reconstruction of Georgia," 155.

Reconstruction Amendments were disliked by many Southerners and some worked to

circumvent the amendments or flat out refused to enforce them. In fact, according to Joel Hays,

> After the ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, African Americans gained the right to vote and the right to participate in the democratic process. The enfranchisement of the African American population led to the creation of white supremacist organizations that resorted to intimidation, violence, and assassinations to prevent African Americans from exercising their civil and voting rights.[93]

These groups aimed to keep black men from exercising their right to vote and wanted to ensure

that white supremacy would continue to reign in the South.

Hannah Rosen's, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the*

*Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South,* depicts the era as a "region of terror" and

highlights the prevalence of vigilantism that occurred during Reconstruction and made this an

extremely violent era.[94] Throughout the text, Rosen highlights the political motivation for these

acts of violence as well as their implications by describing how organized groups of white men

inflicted terror on black people in their homes at night, and how the actions of these groups, such

as the Klan, were often justified in the minds of those inflicting the terror. She writes, "[r]umors

circulating among whites to justify Klan violence described African American men and women

as threatening the orderly arrangement of sexuality and domestic life along racial lines in

southern society."[95] This excerpt highlights the sentiment that white Southerners viewed

themselves as superior to their black neighbors and justified using violence in order to maintain

societal order.

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[93] Joel Stanford Hays, "A Constitutional Enigma: Section 2 of the Fourteenth 129 Amendment and the Mississippi," in *The Journal of Mississippi History LXXVI,* no. 3 and 4. (2014): 134.
[94] Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 179.
[95] Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom,* 198.

Political terrorism ran rampant throughout the South in this era, as many white

Democrats utilized political violence to maintain a racial hierarchy and overthrow Republican

rule. Yet, not all white Southerners sought to keep black men and women subservient and

prevent black men from exercising their political rights. Governor James Lusk Alcorn of

Mississippi[96] published his views on the political situation of the state in 1867 and detailed his

plan to address the newly gained rights of black men in the South.[97] In his writing, Alcorn

expressed his desire to uphold the rights granted to black men by Congress, and detailed his

willingness to discuss politics with black men and even vote with them, as well as creating a

political party that consisted of black and white men together.[98] Many Mississippians viewed

these beliefs as extreme and Alcorn while proposing a mixed race political party declared that,

"[i]f this be radicalism, then indeed, gentlemen, do I confess that I am a thorough radical…"[99]

Governor Alcorn's approach to the political scene of Reconstruction was in stark contrast to the

white supremacist sentiments expressed by group like the Klan or the Red Shirts that were active

in Mississippi during the Reconstruction era.

As time progressed, many individuals became frustrated with Reconstruction and wanted

it and its violence to end. Southern whites and Democrats disliked the federal Reconstruction

policy from the start but in the mid-1870s, even some Republicans and Northerners grew

impatient with the process and its apparent failure. People across the nation were becoming tired

of the divisions it caused in society, and many viewed the efforts as a failure because of the

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[96] Republican James Lusk Alcorn was elected governor of Mississippi in 1869 and served in this
role until he entered the Senate in 1871 (P.L. Rainwater, "Letters of James Lusk Alcorn.," in *The
Journal of Southern History* 3, no. 2 [1937]: 196).
[97] Hon. J. L. Alcorn, "Views of the Hon. J. L. Alcorn on the Political Situation of Mississippi."
1867, 4.
[98] Alcorn, "Views of the Hon. J. L. Alcorn on the Political Situation of Mississippi," 4.
[99] Alcorn, "Views of the Hon. J. L. Alcorn on the Political Situation of Mississippi," 4.

persistent violence that accompanied them. In 1875, a decade after the Civil War ended, violence towards black Southerners and growing sentiments of despair and frustration were continually evident. Mississippi governor Adelbert Ames[100] continually pleaded with the federal government to send him aid in quelling the violence throughout the state that threatened elections.[101] Attorney General Edwards Pierrepont replied to the request in 1875 with excerpts from President Ulysses S. Grant which read, "'[t]he whole public are tired out with these annual autumnal outbreaks in the South, and the great majority are ready now to condemn any interference on the part of the Government."[102] At this time, a general weariness with Reconstruction set in across the nation, and many people wanted the federal government to stop interfering within Southern states.

The political violence in both Mississippi and Georgia in the mid-1870s was so prominent in part because the federal government was at various points either unable or unwilling to address the violence and prevent it from occurring. The violence that accompanied the Reconstruction process was taking a toll on the federal government and its resources. Further, the cost of funding the Freedmen's Bureau and the use of federal troops was a burden.[103]

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[100] Adelbert Ames, deemed a carpetbagger, served as provisional governor of Mississippi after the war until 1870 when he was elected to the Senate. In 1873 Ames was elected governor of Mississippi and served in this role until Democrats resumed control in the state in 1876 and forced Ames to resign or face impeachment (Paul E. Teed, and Melissa Ladd Teed, *Reconstruction: a Reference Guide* [Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2015], 183).

[101] Ames was from New England originally and believed that he had a duty to protect the rights and safety of black residents in Mississippi (Edwards Pierrepont, "The Public is Tired of These Outbreaks in the South, 1875," in *The Civil War and Reconstruction: A Documentary Collection,* ed. William E. Gienapp [New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001], 406).

[102] Pierrepont, "The Public is Tired of These Outbreaks in the South, 1875," 407.

[103] The Freedmen's Bureau provided over 22 million rations during its time of operation. In addition, 200,000 troops were stationed in the South as part of the Bureau's operations. (Thomas Carson and Mary Bonk, *Gale Encyclopedia of U.S. Economic History,* s.v. "Freedmen's Bureau," Gale Virtual Reference Library [Detroit: Gale Group, 1999]).

Beginning in 1865, federal troops occupied the eleven former Confederate states to carry out the reconstruction process.[104] When the federal government chose to intervene, they sent troops to Southern states to enforce the Reconstruction Amendments and attempt to control the rampant violence against Republicans and black Southerners. However, as time progressed the number of troops was reduced from 270,000 in June 1865 to 87,550 by January 1866 and only 3,230 by 1876.[105] The low number of available troops struggled to keep the violence at bay. The inability of federal military force to stop the widespread political violence in the South during this era sheds light on the deep entrenchment of racism and animosity in the post-war South.

Federal troops were tasked with protecting the safety and rights of freedpeople in the South from attacks by white Southerners.[106] However, this did nothing to prevent the violence long term, and federal military power could not be utilized forever. In 1874, Grant vocalized his concerns with Reconstruction and expressed his belief that it needed to come to an end.[107] Grant believed that the effort was a failure and would keep the Republican Party from moving forward and winning elections.[108] By distancing themselves from the failing process the Republicans could be more successful as a national party. However, those in favor of equality for black men and women feared that without the aid of the federal government, freedpeople would continue to be terrorized and white southern Democrats would bring the South back to its pre-Civil War days, except for legalized slavery.

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[104] Bradley, *The Army and Reconstruction 1865-1877,* 7.
[105] Bradley, *The Army and Reconstruction 1865-1877,* 15. Clarence C. Clendenen, "President Hayes' 'Withdrawal' of the Troops: An Enduring Myth," in *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 70, no. 4 (1969): 242.
[106] Bradley, *The Army and Reconstruction 1865-1877,* 24.
[107] "Ulysses S. Grant Signals a Retreat from Reconstruction, 1874," in *The Civil War and Reconstruction: A Documentary Collection,* ed. William E. Gienapp (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 393.
[108] "Ulysses S. Grant Signals a Retreat from Reconstruction, 1874," 393.

The year 1875 saw a severe escalation in political violence towards black and white

Republicans in Mississippi, as the general public was fed up with Reconstruction and federal

troops were unable to stop the terror. This increase stemmed from the implementation of the

"Mississippi Plan" as white Southern Democrats moved to destroy the power of the Republican

party in the state. Joel Stanford Hays noted that the Mississippi Plan was intended to:

> nullify the effect of the Reconstruction laws, to restore a white minority to power through
> the agency of the Democratic Party, and in so doing emphasize to the African American
> population once and for all that they were to be subservient to the white population.[109]

In essence, the plan's goal was to re-establish white dominance in the South, bring the

Democratic party into power in the state, and break free of the confines of the Reconstruction

Amendments. These goals were achieved through both violent and nonviolent means.

The intimidation of Republican voters, especially black men who went to the polls, was

carried out by organized groups such as the White League and the Red Shirts in Mississippi, as

federal intervention had shut down the Ku Klux Klan by 1872.[110] These groups sought to return

Mississippi to Democratic control and achieved this aim by terrorizing black men into either

staying away from the polls or voting the Democratic ticket. In 1875, this plan was put into

action and was ultimately successful in its goals. In February of 1876, James W. Lee wrote to

Governor Ames and states, "[t]he policy of intimidation had been so successfully managed that

many colored men kept away from the polls."[111] The Democratic Party's intimidation of black

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[109] Hays, "A Constitutional Enigma," 146.

[110] Veni Vidi, "*'Veni Vidi'* Describes the Violence of Redemption in Mississippi, 1875," in *Radical Reconstruction: A Brief History with Documents,* ed. K. Stephen Prince, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016), 142.

[111] This letter was written by the Republican sheriff of Monroe County, Mississippi, James W. Lee in February of 1876. Lee sought to discuss the success of the Mississippi Plan with the Governor of Mississippi at the time, Adelbert Ames (James W. Lee, "The Mississippi Plan in Action, 1876," in *The Civil War and Reconstruction: A Documentary Collection,* ed. William E. Gienapp [New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001], 408).

men altered the election outcomes in its favor by limiting the total number of votes for the Republican Party and guaranteeing a Democratic victory.

While political violence in Mississippi had a profound impact on the elections of 1875 and 1876 in the state, as Democrats utilized terror to advance their political agenda and retain the power of white supremacy, it did not go unnoticed by a national audience. Accusations of election tampering led to a Senate hearing in order to determine if the elections were fair, or if intimidation and election fraud had skewed the results. This hearing involved many witnesses, as various incidents were recounted and explored. The records from these proceedings are detailed in a testimony taken under the resolution of the Senate in December 1876. One such account describes the violence and intimidation that black men faced from Democratic "military clubs" while trying to exercise their right to vote. These organizations sought to return the South to Democratic rule by disrupting the political process. A witness at the proceedings described what he had been told by black Mississippians who had experienced the violence first-hand:

> Several leading colored men came to me after the election and told me what had occurred on the night before the election: that these men would gallop up to their houses, firing off their pistols and guns…[a]nd they would tell him, "[w]e have come here to tell you that you had better not go there to-morrow, as all the negroes are going to be killed…"[112]

This intimidation achieved Democrats' goals because many black men did not go to the polls for fear of being injured or killed. Further along in the transcript the witness explained, "[a] colored man told me that they had not gone to the election because of the firing of these men."[113] The organized Democrats' intimidation tactics caused black Republican voters to stay away from the

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[112] United States Congress, Senate, Committee on Privileges and Elections, *Mississippi. Testimony As to Denial of Elective Franchise in Mississippi at the Elections of 1875 and 1876, Taken Under the Resolution of the Senate of December 5, 1876*. 44th Cong., 2nd sess., 1877, accessed March 15, 2019, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433081764320;view=1up;seq=7.

[113] United States Congress. Senate. Committee, *Mississippi,* 317.

polls. Through this election violence, white Democrats seized political control in 1875, as white supremacy once again reigned supreme in the state.[114] As Democrats gained control of the legislature they forced the resignation of Republicans in the state, including Governor Ames, in order to further solidify their political power.[115] Governor Ames resigned rather than face impeachment by the Democratic legislature, and after his time in office he remarked on Mississippi's political position saying, "[y]es a *revolution* has taken place—by force of arms— and a race are disenfranchised—they are to be returned to a condition of serfdom—an era of second slavery."[116] Thus, political terror effectively ended Reconstruction in Mississippi .

The unchecked political terrorism that occurred in Georgia and Mississippi during the Reconstruction era highlights the complex and chaotic process that existed across the South in the post-Civil War era. On one hand, Mississippi chose to implement strict black codes and utilize organized political terrorism to accomplish its goals. On the other hand, Georgia initially opted for a more subtle approach to avoid federal interference, which later transformed into enormous political terrorism. Despite taking varying approaches to violence, white Democrats in the two states had similar aims: restore white supremacy and keep black men away from the polls. Both states succeeded in their goals as Reconstruction came to an end and racism continued as the law of the land in Georgia and Mississippi.

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[114] Veni Vidi, "*'Veni Vidi'* Describes the Violence of Redemption in Mississippi, 1875," 142.
[115] Teed, and Teed, *Reconstruction,* 183.
[116] Ames shared his thoughts in a letter to his wife in 1875 (Gregory P. Downs, *The Second American Revolution: The Civil War-Era Struggle over Cuba and the Rebirth of the American Republic* [Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019], 50).

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