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Revolution and Counterrevolution in Georgia, 1865–1870:
Charles Hopkins, Aaron Bradley, and the Union Leagues

by

Robert Braxton

Under the Direction of Charles Steffen, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2023

ABSTRACT

At the end of the Civil War, the struggles between working people and the capitalist class moved to the center of US politics. In Georgia, freedmen fought for an agrarian revolution—forty acres and a mule—and rejected “free labor.” Poor and yeomen whites demanded relief from oppressive debt. When Radical Reconstruction began, masses of working people awoke to political life. Tens of thousands of freedmen and poor whites joined Union Leagues. Freedmen confronted planters in the fields and rebel officials in the streets and prepared militarily to seize their forty acres. With property rights under threat, Republicans gave the army the task of dismantling the Union Leagues. Then the army stood aside while Georgia’s rebel ruling class used terror and violence to complete the job against its enemies, white as well as black. Class conflict, not race, was the submerged shoal on which Reconstruction in Georgia foundered.

INDEX WORDS: Charles Hopkins, Aaron Bradley, Savannah, Union Leagues, Republican Party, Ku Klux Klan, Georgia Reconstruction, Class, Race

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2023

Revolution and Counterrevolution in Georgia, 1865–1870:

Charles Hopkins, Aaron Bradley, and the Union Leagues

by

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May 2023

DEDICATION

To my wife Marla. We've had to put a lot of other things on hold over the years due to this thesis. Through it all, I have had your encouragement and support. In addition, your political acumen and sharp editing skills have made it, in many ways, a joint project. So I'm dedicating this thesis to you, with all my love and affection.

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To Dr. Wendy Hamand Venet: it was in your 2015 class on the Civil War and Reconstruction that I first focused on the fight for forty acres and a mule, began work in the archives, and discovered the interview with the anonymous “Georgia lawyer” (Charles Hopkins) in Sidney Andrew’s book *The South Since the War*. To Academic Advisor Robin Jackson for keeping me on track with academic milestones and other requirements.

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1 INTRODUCTION

With the defeat of the Confederacy and the end of slavery, the Republican Party and the capitalist class which it represented became the undisputed rulers over the nation. An unforeseen consequence of the war was the emergence of new social forces coming from below. In union-occupied areas of the South, millions of freedpeople began to forge a new life. Over two hundred thousand black men received military training in the Union Army. Elsewhere in the South, hundreds of thousands of poor and yeomen whites, yoked into a “rich man’s war but a poor man’s fight,” many conscripted against their will, their families in misery, turned their anger against the secessionist planters. In the victorious North, workers groaned under the burdens of inflation and scarcity while a new generation of war profiteers grew ever richer and more powerful.

After the emancipation of the slaves, two key democratic tasks remained: a massive land reform to distribute plantation land to the freedmen, and the establishment of blacks as full citizens. Of these, the most important by far was land reform. Unless their plantations were confiscated, former slaveholders would continue to rule the South. Freedpeople clamored for an agrarian revolution. “The way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land,” representatives of the freedmen told General Sherman and Secretary of War Stanton in their historic meeting in Savannah in January 1865. Reconstruction began with great promise in early 1865 when Sherman and Stanton listened to the freedmen and began dividing plantations into forty-acre allotments and turning them over to the freedmen in coastal Georgia and South Carolina. Shortly afterwards, the newly established Freedmen’s Bureau was empowered to distribute plantation land to blacks and loyal whites.¹

¹ *New York Daily Tribune*, February 13, 1865.

Once the war was over, however, the conservative businessmen who led the Republican Party reversed course. They had no interest in promoting a social revolution in the South. Southern plantation crops were too valuable for the US economy. Substantial profits would accrue on the lands, but only if blacks continued to work them. Under President Andrew Johnson, the institutions which had distributed land to the freedmen—the Army and Freedmen’s Bureau—were mandated to return these lands to the planters. Free (wage) labor, Republicans insisted, would resolve all the problems between black workers and their employers.

Over the next year and a half, freedmen in Georgia and South Carolina waged a fierce struggle to hold onto their forty acres and a mule, a battle closely followed by blacks across the South. Thaddeus Stevens waged a lonely fight for Congress and the Republican Party to “confiscate all the estate of every rebel belligerent,” arguing that “it is impossible that any practical equality of rights can exist where a few thousand men monopolize the whole landed property.”²

In Georgia, the fight for “forty acres and a mule” was led by a former slave, Aaron Bradley, and strongly supported by a former slaveholder, Charles Hopkins. This thesis is the story of the fight of the freedmen, of Hopkins and Bradley, for the revolutionary transformation of Georgia.

1.1 Charles Hopkins and Aaron Bradley

Charles Hopkins was a prominent sea island cotton planter from McIntosh County, a well-known Whig politician, and former mayor of Darien. In the 1850s, he became a leader of the fight in coastal Georgia against secession. When the Civil War began, unlike the vast

² Thaddeus Stevens, “Address Delivered to the Citizens of Lancaster, Sept. 6, 1865,” *NYT*, September 10, 1865.

majority of his contemporaries, Hopkins did not “go with the state.” Instead, he resigned his military command and spoke out against secession, suffering threats and social isolation in consequence.

When his home and plantation were burned and ransacked by the Union Navy in 1862, Hopkins moved to the tiny wiregrass town of Blackshear. It was a life changing experience. By the last years of the war, tens of thousands of yeomen and poor whites across Georgia had concluded that the war was not in their interest. They hounded conscription and impressment officers and raided Confederate supply houses and commissaries. Many Confederate soldiers deserted. Hopkins realized that these men were the social forces who could wage a decisive fight against the planter aristocracy once the war was over. In April 1865, he led hundreds of deserters, draft dodgers, and other poor whites in armed combat against the Confederate army. After the battle, he fled for safety to Union headquarters on Hilton Head Island. He tried to convince the commanding officers that rather than propping up rebels in power, the Army should replace them with men who had turned against the war. Elected to Georgia’s constitutional convention that fall, Hopkins was a lone voice calling for trying Confederate President Jefferson Davis for treason.

In November 1865, Hopkins was interviewed by Sidney Andrews, a northern reporter. Andrews shared the Radical Republicans’ belief that the free labor system and black suffrage would solve the problems of the South. He despised the poor whites and the blacks on the rice plantations and believed that the South’s future lay in educated men like the current governor of Georgia. Hopkins argued that “you Northern men can’t see much of the real feeling here.” There was no hope that “capital and labor will reconcile themselves” in the postwar South. Echoing the views of Thaddeus Stevens, he insisted that “the landed aristocracy have always been the curse

of the State. Till that is broken down there can be no real freedom here. . . . The negroes and the poor whites are bitter enemies in many respects, but they agree in wanting land. You should have carried out your confiscation policy.”³

Aaron Bradley was born in South Carolina of a slave mother and a slaveowner father. Trained as a shoemaker in Augusta, he escaped to freedom in Williamsburg, New York in the 1830s. Bright and ambitious, his attempt to become one of the first black lawyers in the state in 1848 was opposed by racist judges and lawyers. Framed-up for the crime of “seduction,” he served two years at hard labor in Sing Sing prison. After he was released from prison, he moved to Boston, where in 1856 he became the third black man accepted to the bar in that state. Racist lawyers and policemen rose in opposition once again and Bradley was quickly disbarred. His hopes of entering the black middle class shattered, Bradley spent another decade in Boston leading a hardscrabble life.

The Emancipation Proclamation and the entry of blacks into the Union Army transformed Bradley’s outlook. His study of the US Constitution and other founding documents convinced him that by law blacks were citizens with full rights, that the southern states should be treated as conquered territories, that secessionist leaders should be prevented from holding elective office, that President Johnson should be censured for his restoration of rebel leaders, and that Congress rather than the President should oversee Reconstruction.

In November 1865, Bradley left behind his life of poverty, jail, and disgrace in the North and brought his revolutionary political outlook to Savannah. Within days of his arrival, he met plantation freedmen struggling to hold onto the forty acres they had received from the

³ Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War: Fourteen Weeks of Travel and Observation in Georgia and the Carolinas* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 371-72.

government. The meeting was a revelation. Bradley discovered the importance of the land question and he met fighters. These poor, illiterate plantation workers, men and women looked down upon by planters, Republicans, and most middle-class blacks, were the most determined people he had ever met.

Bradley held public meetings in support of the freedmen. He insisted that they should only give up their land “at the point of a bayonet.” His stance scandalized and appalled not only the planters but also the Army and the Freedmen’s Bureau. Brought before a military tribunal by Radical “friends of the negro,” Bradley was imprisoned in Fort Pulaski and later expelled from the state. In a matter of a few weeks, the man who had been considered a loser in New York and Boston had become a hero for thousands of blacks in Georgia and South Carolina and had made a name for himself across the country. His revolutionary ideas had found a home.⁴

1.2 Black Union Leagues and the Revolutionary Upsurge of 1867

In 1866 and 1867, the conflict between the laboring classes, North and South, and the victorious capitalist class moved to center-stage. A new period of US history began.

Workers’ demands for a shorter working day erupted into major strikes in New England and the Midwest, culminating in a general strike in Chicago. The National Labor Union supported labor candidates who challenged both the Democratic and Republican parties. In north Georgia, poor and yeoman whites demanded relief from oppressive debt and the threatened loss of their farms and homes and joined Union Leagues.

The most advanced struggles were waged by the newly emancipated blacks in the South. In their fight against the inequities of contracts forced on them (“free labor”) and planter

⁴ *Savannah Daily Republican*, Dec. 13, 1865.

violence, they began to organize collectively to fight for better working conditions and to defend themselves. When Bradley returned to Savannah at the end of 1866, he renewed his links with the Savannah freedmen, whose fight to hold onto their land was reaching a climax. In January 1867, Bradley organized an occupation of the historic Delta rice plantation north of the city. Arms in hand, the freedmen confronted the combined forces of the planters, the US Army, the Freedmen's Bureau, and conservative as well as Radical Republicans. A simultaneous strike of white and black dockworkers shut down Savannah's port. The city's "January revolution" was a dress rehearsal for what was to come.

In March 1867, appalled by the growing violence of the southern planters against blacks and white supporters of Reconstruction, Congress divided the South into five military districts, gave black men the right to vote, took away voting rights and the right to hold office from thousands of rebel leaders, and excluded the secessionist states from the Union until they wrote new constitutions providing for black suffrage and supporting the Fourteenth Amendment. The political landscape in the former Confederate states was transformed. Republicans hoped these measures would induce moderate Democrats to join newly established Republican parties in the secessionist states while at the same time channeling the energies of blacks and poor whites into the new parties and the voting booth.

What actually happened was totally unexpected. News of the Reconstruction Acts spread like wildfire through black communities around the state. Hundreds of thousands if not millions of freedpeople woke to political life. Freedmen had two years of "freedom" under their belts. Two years of bad contracts and wage slavery; two years of poverty and hunger and humiliation and jail; two years of planters, rebel mayors, racist cops, sheriffs and judges, Army officers and civilian agents of the Freedmen's Bureau controlling their lives. They saw the imposition of a

military government and the promise of suffrage as steps toward getting out from under the control of the planters and getting their forty-acre homesteads at last.

Politics in Georgia was transformed. It no longer consisted of back-room meetings of elite whites to decide on candidates. Politics was now public meetings where white and black speakers presented their perspectives before huge audiences. Tens of thousands joined Union Leagues and Loyal Leagues, which became the glue binding together all institutions of the black community. Freedmen confronted the employers in the fields and, “with weapons often in hand, demanded more liberal terms of work.” “Marching nightly through their plantation quarters with ‘guns and sticks’ propped over their shoulders,” black workers “announced that . . . the removal of land from white ownership to black” was on the agenda. The summer and fall of 1867 in Georgia was a “festival of the oppressed.” It was a revolutionary uprising, like nothing seen in American history before or since.⁵

In Savannah, Bradley built the Union Leagues in city precincts and on the nearby Ogeechee rice plantations into a powerful force. Charles Hopkins and Aaron Bradley joined forces. For the elections to Georgia’s Constitutional Convention, they presented a program to unite working people, white as well as black. Their program included the demand for the eight-hour day, tying it to the labor movement in the North. The alliance of Hopkins with Bradley terrified Savannah’s ruling class. They tried to kidnap Bradley—the first Klan-type action against a Republican leader in the state— then refused to prosecute his assailants. A mass meeting of freedmen protesting this attack was dispersed by a combined force of grey-clad city policemen and blue-clad US troops, an ominous omen. Hopkins did his best to unite all

⁵ Susan O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 237; V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), 125.

Republican forces in the city behind a single slate for the elections, but party leaders refused to have anything to do with Bradley. On the election days at the end of October and early November 1867, city and county Union Leaguers marched to the polls in ordered ranks, armed with clubs and hoes. With Democrats boycotting the ballot, the ticket led by Hopkins and Bradley garnered a stunning ninety-eight percent of the vote.

1.3 The Ruling Class Counterrevolution of 1868

“The political actions of freedmen in the summer of that year made conservative and moderate Republicans begin to equate Southern ex-slaves with labor radicals who believed in class struggle,” explains historian Heather Richardson. The Republican Party rapidly retreated from the Radical project.⁶

In Georgia, the US military under General George Meade began a campaign to dismantle the Union Leagues, disarm blacks, and end labor protests. In the Ogeechee, the army arrested Union League leaders and joined with the planters to ban meetings. The army and Freedmen’s Bureau ceased aiding freedmen. Problems between freedmen and planters were turned over to civil authorities. Hopkins and his sons were fired from their jobs in the Department of Internal Revenue. In the constitutional convention, conservative Republicans and Democrats cited Meade’s policies to defeat a proposal to replace rebel officials with supporters of Reconstruction. They expelled Aaron Bradley from the convention.

Republicans hoped these measures would win “moderate” Democrats to Georgia’s Republican Party. But for the southern plantation owners, the politicization and organization of their labor force constituted an existential threat. Legal measures would not suffice to deal with

⁶ Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 48.

such a foe. Taking advantage of the conservative turn of the army and the Republican Party, the rebel ruling class organized Democratic Party branches in counties throughout the state with secret paramilitary components. Former Confederate generals took the lead in forming klaverns of the Ku Klux Klan.

The counterrevolution kicked off the state election campaign in the spring of 1868 by assassinating scalawag Republican leader Charles Ashburn in Columbus, Georgia. Meade, Grant, and Republican Party leaders understood immediately the significance of this event. “Leading citizens” in a “secret organization” were “threatening the lives and property of Union citizens” in Georgia and Alabama. The army arrested prominent Columbus Democrats who had organized Ashburn’s murder. But Republicans were too invested in their strategy of appeasing the southern ruling class to change course. Days later, Meade gave the go-ahead for Klan Grand Dragon John Gordon to run as the Democratic candidate for governor. In Gordon’s first speech as candidate, he spelled out “H-o-p-k-i-n-s” at the top of his list of traitors to be dealt with appropriately. Georgia’s Republican leaders did their best to distance themselves from the “fanatic” Ashburn.⁷

In most Georgia counties, Democratic Party leaders believed that the “proper time” for “secret organizations” like the Klan had not yet arrived. They hoped to win black votes by a combination of carrots and sticks. In Savannah, Hopkins and Bradley were forced to keep armed guards around their homes at night. Freedmen overwhelmingly rejected the Democrats’ carrots and sticks. Poor and yeomen whites’ support for Republicans in north Georgia remained strong. Augusta businessman Rufus Bullock was elected Republican governor of Georgia.

⁷ George G. Meade to General U. S. Grant, April 4, 1868, in *Major General Meade’s Report on the Ashburn Murder* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1868), 8-9; *Savannah Daily News and Herald (SDNH)*, Apr. 7, 1868; *Augusta Weekly Chronicle & Sentinel*, Apr. 8, 1868; *Georgia Weekly Opinion*, Apr. 7, 1868.

But in southwest Georgia, Democrats won a big victory when gun-toting planters and rebel officeholders prevented thousands of blacks from voting. The rebel ruling class drew three important lessons from the April elections. Democrats could not win elections in a free vote; success was possible using violence and terror; the US Army would not stand in their way. After the elections, noted Gordon, “the very best citizens of the state, men of large property,” turned to the Klan as the solution to their problems. The “first and main reason” for the growth of the Klan, Gordon explained, was “the organization of the Union League.”⁸

The Klan was an elite formation of planters, doctors, lawyers, sheriffs, and former Confederate army officers organized along military lines of command. Klan leaders considered poor whites as much an enemy as Union League blacks. “Probably ninety per cent of the whites were debtors,” explained Oglethorpe County Grand Giant John Reed. “After the April elections, many weak-kneed whites were secretly beginning to curry favor with the Scalawags. . . . To prevent this menaced defection of the whites who were tempted to get relief by yielding suffrage to the negro was *the hardest of all the tasks of the Ku Klux.*”⁹

Ulysses Grant’s nomination as Republican presidential candidate meant there would be no change in Republican policy. When Francis Blair, a close personal friend of Nathan Bedford Forrest, won the nomination as the vice-presidential candidate of the Democratic Party, Georgia rebels believed that a Democratic victory would overturn Reconstruction measures entirely.

⁸ *Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States: Georgia, Vol. 1* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 308.

⁹ John C. Reed, “What I Know of the Ku Klux Klan,” in *Uncle Remus’s The Home Magazine*, January 1908. Emphasis added.

At the end of July, Bullock was inaugurated as governor and Georgia was restored to the Union. Meade turned over Ashburn's killers to the state; they were quickly released. He announced that the Army would be reduced in size, concentrated in three cities, and restricted to barracks. Georgia's Democratic Party, led by prominent Confederate leaders, declared war on Reconstruction and the Republican Party. With no fear of intervention by the US Army or Freedmen's Bureau, the unreconstructed rebels began their national election campaign.

The counterrevolution raged over the summer and fall of 1868. Black militants were driven from their homes, physically attacked, tortured, and murdered. Republican Party meetings were broken up. Republicans elected to office in the April elections were threatened, clubbed, and driven out of town. In Savannah, the politically prominent Russell family organized paramilitary units of armed civilians—rifle clubs, Young Democrats, Central Railroad employees, the white fire department—to counter black organizations in the city. The day after a mass Democratic Party meeting in support of Blair and Seymour, deputy sheriff Isaac Russell dealt with Klan leader Gordon's number one enemy. He shot and killed Robert Hopkins, Charles Hopkins's youngest son and political associate. Savannah blacks mobilized in opposition to the murder. They were jailed and their organizations attacked in response. Conservative Republicans and Democrats teamed up to oust Bradley from the Georgia Senate, followed by all the other black members of the legislature.

The new Republican governments in North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and Alabama were overwhelmed by this upsurge in rebel violence and demanded aid from the army. Meade said the army could do nothing. The new state governments would have to defend themselves. In September 1868, Democrats opened fire on a peaceful Republican rally in the tiny town of Camilla in southwest Georgia. They followed it up with a days-long manhunt across

several counties killing dozens of blacks. The army did not intervene. Meade blamed the organizers of the meeting for the slaughter. Republicans ceased to campaign across large swaths of the state.

In the November elections, Democrats used open violence and non-payment of the poll tax to prevent tens of thousands of blacks and poor whites from voting. When that didn't suffice, they stuffed ballot boxes. In Savannah, hundreds of blacks waiting to vote at the courthouse were fired on in a carefully planned armed attack by city cops and rebel paramilitaries. The army did not intervene. The fairest vote in the state took place at a polling place in the Ogeechee. Bradley and armed members of the Union League took control of the site and made sure no one, white or black, was denied the vote due to failure to pay the poll tax. When the Savannah rebels heard what had happened in the Ogeechee, they sent an armed contingent to attack Bradley and his bodyguard. A confrontation ensued, in which several blacks and one of the rebels was killed. Bradley was charged with murder and forced to flee the state. When Georgia election results were tallied, the Democratic slate of Seymour and Blair crushed the Republican slate headed by General Grant. An estimated 54,000 freedmen, along with thousands of poor whites, were prevented from voting or coerced into voting Democratic.

Ulysses Grant won the 1868 elections. Republicans cemented their victory by adopting a new constitutional amendment, the Fifteenth, which prohibited denial of suffrage because of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Grant's victory and the Fifteenth Amendment were hailed by Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and other abolitionists and Radicals as the definitive triumph of their cause. Blacks, they said, had won the equality they had fought for so long.

The reality was otherwise. In Georgia and Louisiana, the Klan and similar organizations had led the Democrats to victory by terrorizing tens of thousands of blacks and white Republicans from voting. The counterrevolution was on the offensive in Tennessee, Alabama, and South Carolina as well. The ruling class in the South had no fear of Grant and the Union Army. They looked to their victories in Georgia and Louisiana as models to be emulated. Rather than marking the triumph of Reconstruction, the 1868 elections announced the beginning of the end.

1.4 Aftermath

After their defeat in the elections, Georgia Republicans divided into two warring camps. Governor Bullock demanded another round of military rule to prop up his administration. He was backed by the ousted black legislators, who were rewarded for their support with appointments to posts in the Republican Party and federal offices. Desperate to form an alliance with the Democrats, the legislature's leading Radical Republican, John Bryant, joined with conservative Republicans and Democrats in opposing any return to military rule. In October 1869, Charles Hopkins ran for mayor of Savannah. He received no support from either the Bullock or the Bryant wing of the party. Savannah's few black officeholders did not want to endanger their new positions by supporting a man too closely linked to Aaron Bradley. Although nearly one thousand blacks voted for Hopkins, hundreds more were rejected for nonpayment of the poll tax and he was defeated. For Hopkins, the municipal elections marked a turning point. The party he had played a central role in building since 1867 had collapsed. He left Savannah and returned to McIntosh County.

Aaron Bradley was the first to recognize that Georgia's Republican Party was not the way forward for blacks or white workers. Forced to flee the state after the elections, he

discovered in Massachusetts an alternative to both Republicans and Democrats. While his black colleagues in Georgia were vying for Republican patronage positions, Bradley became a leading labor reformer. He spoke to large crowds of black and white workers in Massachusetts and New York. “When capital has completed its work,” Bradley argued, “the laboring people of the United States will be slaves, without regard to color, sex or race.” The problem now is that “capital is united—labor is divided.”¹⁰

Bradley returned to Georgia with high hopes of creating a labor reform movement like the one he had been part of in Massachusetts and New York. He presented a program beginning with the statement that “the future prosperity of the people of this Republic is under the control of the laboring classes . . . regardless of race, color or sex.” But there were no more Union Leagues. The brief shining period of labor upsurge in 1867 was long gone.¹¹

In August Bradley announced his independent Republican candidacy for Congress in the First District. He still had a strong base of support from the Ogeechee and from poor blacks in the city. Speaking in Savannah and elsewhere, he presented a not inaccurate picture of what Georgia’s Republican Party had become. He denounced the leaders, who were only interested in prolonging their offices; the railroad contractor friends of the party, who were profiting from “chain-gang slavery”; the northern “bondholders, bankers, insurance agents, carpet-baggers, collectors,” who were all looking to take advantage of cheap southern labor. What was missing from his speeches was any criticism of the Democrats: of the ongoing Klan violence against blacks, of Democrats’ opposition to black voting rights and civil rights, and of the terrible working conditions on the plantations. In his rage against Georgia Republicans, Bradley began to

¹⁰ *Pomeroy’s Democrat*, December 1, 1869.

¹¹ *Atlanta Constitution*, May 4, 1870.

foster vain hopes that blacks would be better treated by the Democrats. His labor reform program all but disappeared.¹²

Savannah Republicans divided into two camps. The Bullock supporters were many of the same men who had founded the Savannah party three years earlier. A few white carpetbaggers now held top positions in the Post Office and Customs. The majority were light-skinned, property-owning blacks, men holding federal posts or elected offices in predominantly black areas. Their speeches recalled the past: the Union victory in the Civil War, emancipation, and the Republican promise of voting rights and civil rights for blacks.

On election day, the black vote in Chatham County was divided between the two Republican slates. Democrats profited from the split vote to coast to an easy victory. Across the state, Democrats disqualified thousands of blacks for failure to pay the poll tax. They used violence and the threat of violence to intimidate thousands of poor whites as well as blacks. Democrats swept the elections, taking complete control of both houses of the legislature.

Charles Hopkins introduced Bradley at a big campaign rally in Savannah in October 1870. He was elected vice president of the meeting and was nominated for office on Bradley's slate. It was the last time the two men would share the stage at a political meeting. Their struggle for the unity of black and white working people, their faith in the Republican Party, their fight for a total transformation of Georgia had ended in bitter disappointment. Capitalism had proven too strong, labor too undeveloped, for Hopkins's and Bradley's hopes to become reality.

Days after the elections, Bullock announced the sale of the state-owned Western and Atlantic Railway to two newly formed companies. Members of the companies included Republican Joe Brown and Democrats Alexander Stephens and Benjamin Hill. Confederate

¹² *Savannah Daily Advertiser (SDA)*, Oct. 6, 1870.

railroad magnates shared ownership with their Yankee counterparts. Both new companies included ample numbers of prominent northern Republican politicians, including close political associates of Presidents Lincoln and Grant. Reconstruction was dead in Georgia. Its defeat had given birth to the “New South.”

1.5 Historiography

Four years after the withdrawal of Union troops, former Klan member I. W. Avery wrote the first account of Reconstruction in Georgia, *History of the State of Georgia from 1850 to 1881*. Avery’s account is old-style history, mainly dealing with conventions and legislatures and the personal relations of leading men. The chief villains in his story were the northern Radicals who imposed “bayonet despotism” on the bleeding South, giving “untutored” blacks the vote while removing voting rights from whites. Their lust for vengeance produced the corrupt and criminal government of Rufus Bullock. Fortunately, whites were united against “negro supremacy.” With Joseph Brown fighting against radicalism from within the Republican Party and Benjamin Hill leading the Democratic opposition, Reconstruction—“the darkest era of Georgia history”—had been brief. Now Georgians were enjoying “a solid and fraternal rehabilitation of a sundered Union.” The Union Leagues and the Ku Klux Klan were mentioned in single paragraphs. Aaron Bradley was described as “incendiary” and “vicious,” but Avery gave little weight to anything blacks did or said either in the legislature or outside of it.¹³

The story of Reconstruction changed in the Jim Crow era with the publication of C. Mildred Thompson’s *Reconstruction in Georgia: Economic, Social, Political, 1865-1872*, D. W. Griffith’s 1915 film *Birth of a Nation*, and Claude Bowers 1929 book *The Tragic Era*.

¹³ I. W. Avery, *The History of the State of Georgia from 1850 to 1881* (New York: Brown & Derby, Publishers, 1877), 335, 376, 382-83, 396, 463.

Thompson, a historian who studied under William Archibald Dunning at Columbia University, put the question of race at the center of her study. “By emancipation the negro became a social menace to the class of poor whites,” Thompson argued. “By becoming a voter he was a source of danger to the whites of all classes.” In Thompson’s account, blacks were portrayed either as “a weak, childish, irresponsible people” or as the “tools, if not leaders, of ultra radicalism.” Bradley was a “notorious, disreputable organizer of blacks in Savannah,” a man responsible for the “Ogeechee insurrection.” In the wildly popular works of D. W. Griffith and Claude Bowers, black men were portrayed as sexually crazed rapists of white women; black women were debauched; members of the black Union Leagues were “oath-bound, impervious to reason, race-conscious, dreaming of domination.” Faced with this threat, whites were terrified. All three authors agreed that the Klan was organized by the best men of the South to “frighten or otherwise deal with obstreperous or insolent negroes, to teach them their place.” The excesses of the Klan were attributed to the “racial animosity of the poorer class of whites to the blacks.”¹⁴

In *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*, published in 1936, W. E. B. Du Bois brought a totally different perspective to the study of Reconstruction. He saw Reconstruction as a turning point in US and world history. Reconstruction was the “the greatest opportunity for a real national labor movement which the nation ever saw or is likely to see for many decades.” The military dictatorship over the South under Radical Reconstruction opened the possibility of a dictatorship of labor, partially realized in the Reconstruction government in South Carolina. Overturning the racist assumptions of Dunning scholars, Du Bois placed blacks at the center of

¹⁴ C. Mildred Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia: Economic, Social, Political, 1865-1872* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1915), 129-30, 193, 361, 365, 388, 391; Claude Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1929), 51, 203, 308, 311.

both the Civil War and Reconstruction. They demanded land, “this absolutely fundamental and essential thing to any real emancipation of the slaves.” They played a leading role in the Reconstruction governments. In his discussion of Reconstruction in Georgia, Du Bois cited the contributions of Bradley, Campbell, Turner as well as other black leaders. He described Bradley as “a fighter” and discussed his ouster from the convention and legislature.¹⁵

But the period of military reconstruction was a fleeting one, according to Du Bois, the temporary coupling of the “abolition-democracy” (Du Bois’s term for the Radicals), who focused on the vote, with northern capitalists, who strived “to retain control of the government as against Northern labor and Southern and Western agriculture.” The “petit-bourgeois” Radicals “did not understand . . . that such a revolution [making blacks free] was economic and involved force.” Du Bois continued:

It was inconceivable . . . that the masters of Northern industry through their growing control of American government, were going to allow the laborers of the South any more real control of wealth and industry than was necessary to curb the political power of the planters and their successors. As soon as the Southern landholders and merchants yielded to the Northern demands of a plutocracy, at that moment the military dictatorship should be withdrawn and a dictatorship of capital allowed unhampered sway.

“[T]he overthrow of Reconstruction was in essence a revolution inspired by property,” insisted Du Bois, “and not a race war.”¹⁶

Du Bois’s insistence on a class framework for understanding Reconstruction and his placing the actions of the freedmen at the center of his story marked a big step forward.

However, as Marxist historian George Novack points out, “[t]he southern revolution was not

¹⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* (New York: Atheneum, 1975), 353, 499, 601.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 214, 345-46, 622.

proletarian in its character or socialist in its aims . . . but plebian and petty-bourgeois in its social basis and bourgeois in its tasks.” The freedmen’s demand for land “did not pass beyond the foundations of private ownership, production for the market, and capitalist relations.”¹⁷

Du Bois had little information about what was actually happening in the South in 1865, 1866, and 1867. Basing his text on the *Congressional Globe*, official records of state conventions and legislatures, and the histories of individual states published by Dunning school authors, he saw the first three years of Reconstruction as a period of anarchy, lawlessness, and violence. He had no information about the actual struggles of Bradley and Campbell and the coastal freedmen for forty acres and a mule, or about the growing militancy and organization of the freedmen and poor whites in 1866. There is nothing in *Black Reconstruction* about the explosion of grass-roots black organizing after the imposition of military rule in 1867, their rejection of the views of the “abolition democrats,” black as well as white, or of their military preparations. He dismissed the significance of the Union Leagues in one paragraph by saying they “employed among Negroes some ceremonies and secrecy.”¹⁸

Writing at the height of support by many white workers for the second coming of the Ku Klux Klan, Du Bois accepted as fact the argument of Jim Crow historians that the white South as a whole was against Reconstruction, that the Klan of the 1860s and 1870s was an expression of this opposition, that the poor whites hated blacks even more than the planters did. In the South, Du Bois argued, “the white laborer joined the white landholder and capitalist and beat the black laborer into subjection through secret organizations and the rise of a new doctrine of race hatred.” This generalization was not only untrue with respect to Reconstruction in Georgia and

¹⁷ George Novack, *America’s Revolutionary Heritage* (New York: Pathfinder, 2013), 354.

¹⁸ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 671-74, 680.

other states. It undermined his class perspective on Reconstruction and opened the door to historians who see race, not class, as the central theme of American history.¹⁹

A new generation of “revisionist” historians arose in the context of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Many took Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction* as their starting point. Blacks are placed at the center of the struggle for their own emancipation. Countless books and articles written by revisionist historians have demolished the Dunning school’s racist account of Reconstruction. Historians involved in the Freedmen and Southern Society Project tapped a vast new range of archival resources on the Civil War and the first two years of Reconstruction, notably those of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the US Army. Books produced by Project editors have been very important for this thesis, documenting among other things the prolonged fight of blacks to hold onto their land, including Bradley’s defense of the freedmen in December 1865; the story of Bradley and the “January revolution” of 1867; and Hopkins’s negotiations with Tunis Campbell concerning the lease of his Belleville plantation in early 1867.

But while placing blacks at the center of the Reconstruction story, revisionist historians dismiss Du Bois’s class framework. Kenneth Stampp, for example, argues that Du Bois’s “Marxian interpretation” is “at best naïve.” What many contemporary historians of Reconstruction in Georgia retain of Du Bois—his focus on the actions of black members of the conventions and legislatures in 1868 and afterwards—sits uncomfortably with their discovery of the explosion of the Union Leagues in 1867 and 1868, of the freedmen’s revolutionary ardor and military preparations. Many continue to see the rise of the Klan as proof of white Georgia’s opposition to Reconstruction.²⁰

¹⁹ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 670.

²⁰ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction 1865-1877* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 218.

The strengths and weaknesses of contemporary articles on Reconstruction are on full display in the three main accounts of Bradley and Reconstruction in Savannah: the three-part biography of Bradley published by Dunning school historian E. Merton Coulter in the pages of the *Georgia Historical Quarterly* in 1867; a biographical article about Bradley written by revisionist historian Joseph Reidy in 1982; and Jacqueline Jones's book on the Civil War and Reconstruction in Savannah published in 2008.²¹

E. Merton Coulter, Regents' Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Georgia in Athens and the founder and editor of the *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, was Georgia's leading historian of the Dunning/Claude Bowers school. In *Georgia: A Short History*, published in 1960, he named Aaron Bradley, Tunis Campbell, and Henry Turner as the leaders of "the vicious, the innocent, the ignorant, the illiterate" Negroes who were "clay in the hands of their cunning and designing white friends." Coulter's racist views were challenged in the 1960s by revisionist historians in such books as Kenneth M. Stampp's *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865–1877*. Coulter responded in the mid-sixties with multipart biographies of Turner, Campbell, and Bradley in the pages of the *Georgia Historical Quarterly*.²²

²¹ E. Merton Coulter, "Aaron Alpeoria Bradley, Georgia Negro Politician During Reconstruction Times," Part I, *GHQ* 51, no. 1 (March 1967), 15-41; Part II, *GHQ* 51, no. 2 (June 1967), 154-174; Part III, *GHQ* 51, no. 3 (September 1967), 264-306; Joseph P. Reidy, "Aaron A. Bradley: Voice of Black Labor in the Georgia Lowcountry," in *Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era*, ed. Howard N. Rabinowitz (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 281-308; Jacqueline Jones, *Saving Savannah: The City and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2008).

²² E. Merton Coulter, *Georgia: A Short History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 367; Stampp, *Era of Reconstruction*. See also E. Merton Coulter, *The South During Reconstruction 1865-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1947).

Coulter's account of Bradley's activities in Savannah differs in no way from his previous writings. Bradley was a "mischief-making character" who defrauded the negroes of their money by "misrepresentations, deceptions and unlawful promises" and survived "by petty trickery and spoils." In early 1867, Bradley stirred up a "minor insurrection" which had to be put down by Federal soldiers. In Bradley's big campaign meeting in September 1867, his "inflammable" "harangue" caused a near riot. In the national elections of November 1868, "a mob of armed Negroes" from the Ogeechee, led by Bradley, marched on Savannah, then fired on and killed an "admirable young man" who tried to stop them. Two months later, Bradley's "legacy of lawlessness" resulted in the Ogeechee "insurrection."²³

But Coulter's views changed under the impact of the Civil Rights Movement and revisionist scholarship. An entirely different picture emerges in his discussion of Bradley in the constitutional convention and the Georgia Senate. "Apart from his pugnacity and showmanship," says Coulter, "Bradley gave evidence of worthy impulses and desire to promote the public good." Bradley was intent "in seeing that Negroes be given their proper share and position in everything," a trait "not to be condemned but only when he ran into extremes." Coulter remarks positively on Bradley's introduction of ordinances against segregation on public transport, his insistence on blacks' competence to fulfill any public office, his call for the "prohibition of chain-gang slavery," and his support for the eight-hour day. In short, Coulter asserts, Bradley was "a believer in what was in the twentieth century called 'black power'." Coulter sums up Bradley as follows:

What a character! He was not all bad; he had some good impulses at times, but too often he let something inside make him run amuck. . . . He was a genius of a sort . . . endowed with a pertinacity and an amusing audacity that knew no ends. He . . . made his living . . . by swindling and duping his fellow Negroes. . . . *He*

²³ Coulter, "Aaron Alpeoria Bradley," Part I, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 30-32; Part II, 169-171.

*was a mulatto, and from time out of mind mulattoes have been classed as Negroes; but some of his qualities might have had their origin in his white father, whoever he was.*²⁴

Jacqueline Jones, in *Saving Savannah: The City and the Civil War*, and Joseph Reidy, in “Aaron A. Bradley: Voice of Black Labor in the Georgia Lowcountry,” offer revisionist accounts of Bradley in Savannah. Both authors have written many valuable books and articles on the black experience in the South. Both have won the Bancroft award for their efforts. Reidy is one of the editors of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*. He bases his study of Bradley in large part on Army and Freedmen’s Bureau documents. Jones has dredged the archives to present the most detailed history of Savannah seen from the perspective of blacks from the antebellum era through Reconstruction.

Both authors laud Bradley’s efforts on behalf of the rice plantation workers: his defense of freedmen’s right to the land in 1865 and the “January Revolution” of 1867. Reidy notes that “no other state-level black leader in either South Carolina or Georgia cultivated the relationship with rice freedmen that Bradley did; neither did any espouse their cause with his passion or militancy.” But, they say, the situation changed with Congressional Reconstruction. “As [James] Simms and [Tunis] Campbell embraced a newly inclusive political process,” Jones states, “they grew skeptical of what they considered Bradley’s outrageous personal style and reckless rhetoric. And Bradley’s successful appeal to rice hands throughout the coastal region threatened to spark a

²⁴ Coulter, “Aaron Alpeoria Bradley,” Part I, 28, 29; Part II, 156-57, 158, 164; Part III, 268, 302-03.

backlash among white officials, a reaction that might hamper black organizing efforts more generally.”²⁵

Jones, who had written the first half of her book lauding James Simms and his determined struggles in support of black rights, suddenly found Simms and other “respectable” black men in the Republican Party bypassed by the huge numbers of illiterate blacks from the Ogeechee and the Savannah slums who joined the Union Leagues and followed Bradley. But this wasn’t a phenomenon peculiar to Savannah. Mass meetings of ordinary blacks were taking place all around the state. Literate, property-owning blacks were giving way to men who had fought in the Army, to men who like Bradley engaged in “reckless rhetoric.” All across the state there were “country negroes in gangs . . . armed with muskets, and parading through the streets in imitations of Sherman.” What happened in Georgia in 1867 and 1868 was not a dress rehearsal of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and ’60s. It was the beginning stage of a revolution.²⁶

Reidy’s and Jones’s accounts of Bradley’s actions in 1867 and 1868 differ little from that of Coulter. Jones titles her chapter on 1867 “To Have a Big Meeting, a Big Shooting, or Big Blood,” words allegedly spoken by Bradley prior to his September 30 meeting. Her title effectively blames the violence of that year on Bradley. What she leaves out of the story is that days before the meeting there was a brutal nighttime attack and attempted kidnapping of Bradley

²⁵ Reidy, “Aaron A. Bradley,” 285-86, 287-89; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 248-50, 271-75. James Simms was a Baptist missionary, teacher, labor negotiator, orator, and political activist in Savannah. Tunis Campbell was a Methodist missionary and Freedmen’s Bureau agent overseeing freedmen’s land claims on the sea islands in south Georgia. Simms and Campbell were founders of Georgia’s Republican Party and played prominent roles in the Georgia legislature in 1868 and 1870.

²⁶ Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 291; Reidy, “Aaron A. Bradley,” 292.

carried out by Savannah policemen. It was the first Klan-type operation against a leading Republican in the state. Three of the men who participated—light-skinned black men, one of them a prominent Republican Party member—were never prosecuted by city authorities. Bradley’s meeting was called to protest the attempt to kidnap him and the failure of the city to prosecute his attackers. He had armed bodyguards to protect his life. Bradley’s rhetoric did not help—he was often his own worst enemy in that regard—but the only violence in this whole episode was the attempted kidnapping of Bradley and the beatings and arrests of his supporters by the city cops and US Army who broke up his meeting.²⁷

Reidy asserts that Bradley’s program in 1867 and 1868 was “black political power.” That is not the case. His program, presented prior to the September 30 meeting, was aimed at white workers as well as the freedmen. He drafted his program together with Charles Hopkins. One of the leading organizers of the Union Leagues in the city was Henry Eden, a white man. Hundreds of white workers hung around the edges of all Bradley’s and Hopkins’s public meetings, interested in what was going on, waiting to see if the Republicans would defend them from the city rulers, their employers, and the cops before committing to the new party. Reidy never mentions Hopkins. Jones portrays Hopkins as just another white man trying to profit off blacks, as a former slaveowner, Tunis Campbell’s landlord.²⁸

Reidy asserts that “Bradley’s factional infighting diluted the power of the black voting majority.” Neither Reidy nor Jones describes what actually happened in the 1867 elections. There was a massive black turnout for the Hopkins-Bradley slate, which captured 98% of the

²⁷ “To Have a Big Meeting, a Big Shooting, or Big Blood,” in Jones, *Saving Savannah*, Chapter 12, 282-301. For a full account of the September 30, 1867 meeting, see pages 278-87 of this thesis.

²⁸ Reidy, “Aaron A. Bradley,” 291; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 286-87, 293.

vote. The Simms faction of the Republican Party didn't even present candidates. Nor was Bradley's slate a "black power" slate. It was composed of four whites and four blacks. Jones misrepresents the slate, asserting that there were only two blacks and six whites.²⁹

In 1868, the southern ruling class turned to counterrevolution to deal with its enemies, white as well as black. In July, Robert Hopkins, Charles Hopkins's son and a leading Republican, was killed in a bar by deputy sheriff Isaac Russell, a member of the most powerful rebel family in the city. Blacks understood immediately the significance of the event and mobilized against his attacker. Jones understands none of this. All she sees in Hopkins's killing is two "trigger-happy sons of privilege" getting into a "barroom brawl." Why did blacks care about the death of this particular "son of privilege"? No answer. As for the violence which rained down on black leaders and organizations after Hopkins's killing, up to and including the election, Jones blames it on the local government responding to "white fears" rather than the calculated plans of the Chatham County ruling class to crush its class enemies. Like Avery, Coulter, and Reidy, Jones credits the made-up story of an "Ogeechee insurrection" in December 1868.³⁰

Jones and Reidy look at what happened with Bradley and the freedmen in 1867 and 1868 through the eyes of Radical blacks. Two books written by editors of the Freedmen and Southern Society Project, *The Work of Reconstruction* by Julie Saville and *Becoming Free in the Cotton*

²⁹ Reidy, "Aaron A. Bradley," 293; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 293. Jones also repeats the canard that many Bradley-Hopkins voters came from South Carolina.

³⁰ Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 316, 322; Reidy, "Aaron A. Bradley," 296. In addition to belittling the significance of Robert Hopkins's murder, Jones cites a slanderous story that Charles Hopkins offered to support Mayor Anderson for the Senate if Anderson would support his run for mayor. The July 29, 1868 edition of the *Savannah Daily News* cited as the source of this story contains no mention of any such proposal. See Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 318. For a full account of the "Ogeechee Insurrection," see pages 414-17 of this thesis.

South by Susan O'Donovan, tell a different story. They track the deepening of the *class* struggle between the freedmen and the planters in Georgia and South Carolina from the end of the war through 1868.³¹

O'Donovan charts the deterioration of freedmen's working conditions in southwest Georgia in 1865 under relentless assault by the planters. She describes the beginning of the fightback in 1866 as the freedmen contest the planters over terms of work, days off, and control of the crops they grew on their own time. When mobs of disguised "regulators" swept the countryside in the spring of 1866, "former slaves wasted little time organizing among themselves more systematic and collective responses to white violence": "drilling clubs, military companies, neighborhood posses." It was the same in South Carolina. "By the end of the first full planting year since emancipation," says Saville, "rural clubs had taken up a range of activities, all geared to reshape the social and economic content of emancipation."³²

Saville explains that "Republican moderates expected universal suffrage to blunt the antagonism of subordinate social groups. . . . [E]qual voting rights offered an antidote to threats of revolutionary upheaval." O'Donovan notes that freedmen in southwest Georgia rejected the views of "black moderates," the "propertied men who presumed to speak in their behalf." "Turner's belief in the sanctity of private property hardly accorded with freedpeople whose grapevines continued to vibrate with wistful reports of free soil." "It was men drawn from local wage-working communities, rather than propertied men, itinerant strangers, or professional

³¹ Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860–1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Susan E. O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

³² O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 223, 229; Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 148.

partisan spokesmen, who tended to lead the call-and-response catechisms by which black men absorbed Republican and Union League principles.” “For better or worse,” insists Saville, “ex-slaves rejected the patronage proffered by southern conservatives and moderate Republicans alike when they came to the aid of the Republican Party.” In 1867, O’Donovan continues, freedpeople “imposed new limits on employers’ power to command, enlarged laborers’ rights of refusal, scared off with threats of violence civil authorities and private citizens who tried to call them to heel, and as a result of their ferocity, drove incidents of white-on-black violence down to their lowest regional levels since freedom.”³³

In 1868, the planters and their allies responded. O’Donovan charts the rise of the counterrevolution: the killing of George Ashburn; the brutal elections of April 1868; the violence directed against blacks and Republican voters by planters, their sons, and elected officials; the desperate fightback by the freedmen in Grant Clubs; the retreat, as “[o]ne by one, Republican supporters trickled away”; the Camilla massacre; the violence of the November elections.³⁴

In a couple of short chapters, O’Donovan captures the essence of Reconstruction in Georgia. What happened in southwest Georgia was class conflict between workers on one hand, the southern ruling class (planters, sheriffs, elected officials, lawyers, etc.) on the other. The Union Leagues not only contested the planters in the fields, they defied the ruling class in the courts and in the streets. Their armed drilling challenged the ruling class monopoly over the means of repression. This was a mass revolutionary upsurge, and it was met by a ruling class

³³ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 238, 239, 240, 245, 246; Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 157, 160.

³⁴ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 255-59, 260, 261-62.

counterrevolution. The workers were black, and the planters and their allies were white, but this was not fundamentally a conflict over race. It was a class struggle.

There is no good history of the Union Leagues in north Georgia or the working class and yeomen white supporters of Reconstruction across the state. It's time for historians to dig into the archives to put an end to the erroneous assumption that men like Joseph Brown or, worse still, Klan leader John Gordon reflected their views. A good start would be to make available in digital form the multipart series on the Klan written by Oglethorpe County Grand Giant John Reed. Reed's articles document the ruling class character of the Klan and its opposition to poor whites and freedmen alike.³⁵

The best book on conflicts between the labor movement in the North and the Republican Party in the first years of Reconstruction is David Montgomery's *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans 1862–1872*. Montgomery concludes that “[c]lass conflict . . . was the submerged shoal on which Radical dreams foundered.” In *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863–1877*, Eric Foner, the doyen of revisionist historians of Reconstruction, disputes Montgomery's analysis. “By itself, class conflict was not ‘the submerged shoal on which Radical dreams foundered’,” argues Foner. “Radical Republicanism . . . ran aground on the all too visible politics of race and Reconstruction. Yet what *The Nation* called the emerging

³⁵ John C. Reed, “What I Know of the Ku Klux Klan,” in *Uncle Remus's The Home Magazine*, January–August, October, and November 1908.

‘politics of class feeling’ did weaken Radicalism by fostering a new kind of political leadership: nonideological power brokers in a contentious pluralistic society.”³⁶

Foner draws a sharp line between his views and those of Montgomery, but also between his views and those of W. E. B. Du Bois. Race versus class. “Nonideological power brokers” and a “pluralistic society” versus the dictatorship of capital. This thesis sides with Montgomery and Du Bois. “[T]he overthrow of Reconstruction was in essence a revolution inspired by property,” insisted Du Bois, “and not a race war.” Class conflict was the submerged shoal on which Reconstruction foundered.³⁷

1.6 Sources

Neither Charles Hopkins nor Aaron Bradley preserved letters or any type of memorabilia relating to their lives, not even a photograph or drawing of their likenesses. Nor was I able to find much pertinent information about them in diaries or letters written by their contemporaries. This thesis is based in large part on newspaper articles of the time, supplemented by government documents, including Freedmen’s Bureau documents, official accounts of conventions and legislative sessions, and US Army documents.

The Georgia Historic Newspaper archive made available by the University of Georgia in Athens is a crucial resource for any student of 19th century Georgia history. The stories of Hopkins’s and Bradley’s lives prior to, during, and after Reconstruction are based on newspaper articles going as far back as the 1820s. Articles in Georgia newspapers added crucial information

³⁶ David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans 1862 – 1872* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), x; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863 – 1877* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2014), 484.

³⁷ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 622.

to the Freedmen Project's documentation of Bradley's actions in defense of land rights in Chatham County in 1865 and 1867. Newspaper accounts of the debates and discussions in Georgia's constitutional convention of 1867-68 and in the state legislature from 1868 through 1870 are much fuller and more comprehensive than the compressed accounts in official government documents.

The Savannah newspaper files in the Georgia Historic archives were the principal ones I used. But it is not possible to understand events in Savannah during Reconstruction using only those files. The preserved copies of the *Savannah Advertiser* and the *Savannah Daily Republican* in the archive, for instance, are very incomplete. Sometimes useful articles published in these newspapers were only found as reprints in newspapers published in Macon, Augusta, or Atlanta. At other times the most useful articles about events in Savannah appeared in the *New York Times* or in newspapers printed in other Georgia cities. Historians should be prepared to search through newspapers from several cities in Georgia to get a full picture of events. It is also necessary to be aware of the political biases of newspapers and reporters during this period, particularly the manipulation of news, exaggerations, and outright lies by the rebel press during the Civil War and by the pro-Andrew Johnson and Democratic press during Reconstruction.

Hopefully over time other newspapers will be added to the UGA archives; ways will be found to clean up the files; and the search engines will improve. It would also help if more universities would follow the example of UGA and make newspaper archives freely available rather than turning over the files to private corporations who set up paywalls for access.

The importance of Freedmen's Bureau and US Army documents for understanding this period has been demonstrated by the superb series of books published by the Freedmen and Southern Society Project and by the use of these documents in many monographs and articles on

Reconstruction. Hopefully historians will follow the Freedmen Project's lead and publish a similar set of books on the first three years of Radical Reconstruction, March 1867–December 1870, including not only documents from the Army and Freedmen's Bureau but also newspaper articles and correspondence from prominent Democratic and Republican politicians and businessmen. I think publishing these materials has the potential to transform Reconstruction studies in profound ways.

2 1863–1865, CHARLES HOPKINS: ‘PROMINENT UNION MEN IN BLACKSHEAR HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF INFLUENCE WITH THE DESERTERS’

In November 1862, Charles Hopkins’s plantation home “Belleville” in McIntosh County near Darien, Georgia was burned to the ground by a Union raiding party. It was an ironic victory for the Union army, for Hopkins, a wealthy sea island cotton planter, was the most prominent coastal Georgia Unionist and a fierce opponent of secession. Now he had fallen victim to the horrors of the war he had fought so hard to prevent.

Though he owned 106 slaves in 1860, Hopkins was not a typical planter or a typical coastal politician. A powerful orator, he dressed simply, was plain-spoken, and was widely respected for his honesty and sincerity. Through the decade of the 1850s, he had supported the American (Know Nothing) Party, the Independent Party, and the Constitutional Union Party—whatever instrument was available to counter the secessionist Democrats.

In 1860, the state was evenly divided on whether to secede from the Union. Most farmers and poor whites in north Georgia and the “piney woods” or “wiregrass” areas of south and south-central Georgia were opposed. But at the 1861 convention called to decide the issue, Governor Joseph Brown and the planter leadership of the secessionist wing of the Democratic Party were able to stampede the ‘cooperationist’ leaders into voting for secession. When fighting began, as Brown and his allies had expected, white Georgians were swept up in war fever. Almost all cooperationist leaders “went with the state.”³⁸

In the secessionist heartland of coastal Georgia, Hopkins stood firm in his support for the Union. Unlike his close political associates, his brothers, and even his eldest son Charles Jr., all

³⁸ In 1860 and 1861, cooperationists called for a convention of all the southern states to decide whether or not to secede from the Union. In case of a yes vote, all southern states would secede together.

of whom volunteered to serve in the Confederate army, he resigned his long-standing position as colonel in the state militia and actively campaigned against the war. He suffered social ostracism and vicious personal attacks, including death threats, because of this stand.

Hopkins had lived all his life in McIntosh County. At the age of 50, he was forced to start anew. He had to find another place to live for his “helpless and exiled family, fugitives from their comfortable home, with only a chair to sit upon.” He moved far from the coast to the tiny town of Blackshear in Pierce County.³⁹

Two other families of Unionist relatives moved to Blackshear with Hopkins and his family. M. B. Holland, a 30-year-old timber merchant from Fernandina, Florida, was married to Hopkins’s daughter Mary. Rumor had it Holland took a shot at the Confederate flag when it was first raised in Darien in 1861. The Holland family joined Hopkins. Also moving to Blackshear were Holland’s older sister Georgiana and her family.⁴⁰

Hopkins was familiar with the county. It was part of Georgia’s first district, and he had campaigned there many times beginning with his days as a Whig politician in the 1840s. Pierce County was worlds removed from the impressive rice and sea island cotton plantations which dominated the coast. In 1860, Hopkins’s home county of McIntosh had a population of 5,546, of whom 4,063 were slaves (73 percent). The 156 slaveholders in the county averaged 26 slaves

³⁹ *Savannah Republican (SR)*, September 25, 1863. Nothing is known about what happened to Hopkins’s slaves after the burning of Belleville.

⁴⁰ Nellie Stewart, *Recollections of Blackshear, Georgia 1857–1913-14* (Tampa: V.W. Edwards & Co., 1915), 8-9; 1860 Census; Lieut. Alfred Prescott to Lieut. P. Looney, February 27, 1865, in *Bible Records, Military Rosters and Reminiscences of Confederate Soldiers, Vol. IX* (Georgia Division, United Daughters of the Confederacy, 1942), 296.

each. Pierce County, on the other hand, had a similar number of whites (1,740), but only 55 slaveholders and 233 slaves (12 percent of the population). There was one large planter in the county: James Walker with 55 slaves. The county was described by a Union soldier imprisoned there during the war as “one of the poorest counties of a poor section of a very poor state.” Many families survived by growing meager patches of corn and sweet potatoes and raising pitiful looking cows and “gaunt and thin” razor-back hogs in the woods. Blackshear, the county seat, owed its existence to the arrival of a rail line linking it to Savannah in 1859. In 1864, Blackshear had over three hundred households, a courthouse, a hotel, at least one store, a Methodist congregation, and a two-story “Academy.”⁴¹

In 1860, the majority of Pierce County residents supported secession. As representatives to the secession convention, they chose Enoch Hendry and John Stephens, two young men who moved to Blackshear to make their fortunes as merchants shortly after the railroad reached the town. In late 1860, Hendry was commissioned as captain in the Atlantic & Gulf Guards. In April 1861, he volunteered to lead a cavalry company. An owner of 5 slaves himself, in a letter to Governor Brown written at the time, he noted that many members of his company were “very poor men and would if they were taken from the farms lose their crops . . . still they are ready to make any sacrifice and go at once into service if their country needs them.”⁴²

In April 1862, as the number of men willing to volunteer for military service slowed, the Confederacy adopted the first Conscription Act, which made all able-bodied white men between the ages of 18 and 35 liable for a three-year term of service in the army and extended the terms

⁴¹ Dean Broome, *History of Pierce County, Georgia, Volume 1* (Blackshear, Ga.: Broome Printing and Office Supplies, 1973), 271, 198, 225-28; Stewart, *Recollections of Blackshear*, 6, 9, 12, 13.

⁴² Broome, *History of Pierce County*, 225, 256, 260-61.

of enlistment of all one-year soldiers to three years. In September 1862, the maximum age of conscription was raised to 45. Planters who owned 20 slaves or more were exempted. Rich men were able to hire substitutes to take their place. With male breadwinners drafted into the army, women and children were left to fend for themselves. Georgia Civil War historian T. Conn Bryan observes that “[f]rom the beginning, serious opposition to the [conscription] act was manifested in Georgia, and in some of the northern counties it was not executed.”⁴³

Georgia planters could earn big profits from raising cotton so they grew cotton rather than corn and other foodstuffs. Merchants profited from shortages of food and other essentials by raising prices. Historians Teresa and David Williams note that the cost of “meat, salt, flour, coffee, cotton, yarn, leather, and even firewood” rose to unaffordable levels. In December 1862, “the wholesale price index was already seven times higher than it had been in the spring of 1862.” By 1863, “grain could not be found within a hundred miles of Savannah. Little beef was available anywhere in the state.”⁴⁴

To make matters worse, in 1863 the Confederate Congress imposed an “impressment” tax of ten percent on Georgia farmers. Impressment officers confiscated food crops as well as livestock from farm families who were struggling to survive. They frequently took much more than ten percent. The impact of conscription, inflation, and impressment on poor white families was devastating. Hunger and destitution were widespread. In the spring of 1863, poor women raided stores for food or cloth in Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus, Milledgeville, and other towns.⁴⁵

⁴³ T. Conn Bryan, *Confederate Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1953), 85.

⁴⁴ Teresa Crisp Williams and David Williams, “‘The Women Rising’: Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia’s Rioting Women,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly (GHQ)*, 86, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 54, 55, 61.

⁴⁵ Bryan, *Confederate Georgia*, 90-94; Williams and Williams, “Women Rising,” 62-63, 69-74.

Conscripted soldiers suffered from lack of food and clothing as well as abusive treatment by the officer corps. The meager pay they received was totally inadequate to meet the needs of their families. When word of family hardships reached Confederate troops, some deserted the army and returned home. According to Bryan, “late in 1862 the northeastern counties of the state became the refuge of a band of deserters and Union sympathizers.” In January 1863, Brown sent the cavalry under the command of Atlanta Colonel George W. Lee to round up deserters. In the spring of 1863, there was an increase in deserters south of the Ocmulgee River.⁴⁶

In April 1863, shortly after arriving in Blackshear, Hopkins was invited to a party to honor soldiers home on furlough. Among those present were Captain Hendry and Lieutenant Stephens. Had Hopkins met these men in 1861 his reception would probably not have been a friendly one. But conscription, growing numbers of Confederate dead, and the difficult plight of soldiers’ families had changed a lot of minds.⁴⁷

Two months later, a particularly egregious incident involving the death of a local draftee outraged community leaders. The Crawford family were long-time residents of Pierce County. Reuben Crawford was a respected preacher. Reuben’s brother John had been conscripted into the army as a private. Like a growing number of others in the area, he deserted his post. Persuaded by an offer of amnesty, he returned to his post in coastal Georgia. But when he surrendered, in

⁴⁶ Bryan, *Confederate Georgia*, 144; David Williams, Teresa Crisp Williams, and David Carlson, *Plain Folk in a Rich Man’s War: Class and Dissent in Confederate Georgia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 166; David Carlson, “The ‘Loanly Runagee’: Draft Evaders in Confederate South Georgia,” *GHQ*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (Winter 2000), 602.

⁴⁷ Stewart, *Recollections of Blackshear*, 8-9, 13-14.

the presence of family members, he was shot and killed by a guard under the command of Major Edward C. Anderson, as an example for other deserters.⁴⁸

On July 7, 1863, a large number of county residents met to discuss the murder of John Crawford. The meeting gave Hopkins the opportunity to meet not only the county elite, but also yeomen farmers and their families. Most of these families had men serving in the Confederate army. County leaders, including many small slaveholders, officiated. Joseph Winn, a former justice of the inferior court, chaired the meeting. The secretary was Dr. Silas Overstreet, the clerk of both Superior and Inferior Courts of the county, first lieutenant of the Pierce Mounted Volunteers, and a county representative in the General Assembly. A five-person committee was proposed to investigate the case, including Berrien Henderson, a member of the Georgia House of Representatives, and Hendry. “On motion of Captain Hendry, Col. C. H. Hopkins was added to the cttee.” The committee found that the killing of Crawford was “not in strict conformity with either military, civil or divine law.” While disclaiming “any desire to encourage disloyalty to the government, or insubordination in the army,” they “asked that Major E. C. Anderson and the said guard be held amenable to the civil authorities of Pierce county for the offence.”⁴⁹

This was a big step to take in a country at war. Leaders of the plain folk in the piney woods were demanding that Confederate soldiers and officers be held accountable to them. The man they were calling to account was not some low-level officer. A prominent businessman and planter, Anderson had been elected mayor of Savannah in the 1850s on the Know Nothing ticket. A successful blockade runner of a ship loaded with arms for the Confederacy in the early days of

⁴⁸ *SR*, July 10, 1863.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*; Broome, *History of Pierce County*, 422, 219, 427.

the war, he was the Confederate naval officer responsible for the defense of Savannah and a wartime hero on the coast.⁵⁰

As 1863 wore on, the Confederate army suffered big defeats. In June 1863, Hopkins's hometown of Darien was burned to the ground by Union troops. In July, the Union army scored huge victories in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and Vicksburg, Mississippi. A big battle was brewing between opposing armies near Chattanooga on Georgia's northern border.

In north Georgia, the number of deserters from the Confederate army grew dramatically. In the fall of 1863, Brown sent Colonel Lee back to the area to apprehend deserters. In Columbus, West Point, and Meriwether County in west Georgia, growing numbers of white men were joining a "Peace Society." Historian David Carlson notes that "isolated from the main theaters of the war, south Georgia was a welcome refuge for those evading military service. . . . The swamps and cypress hammocks dotting the region allowed draft evaders to 'run from swamp to swamp & from one locality to another so quickly & easily that it is almost impossible to catch [them]'. "⁵¹

This was the context for Georgia's elections in the fall of 1863. The biggest contest statewide was the Georgia governor's race. Governor Brown was running for an unprecedented fourth term. He first won the office in 1857, campaigning as a Democratic Party candidate from

⁵⁰ Jacqueline Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 41-42, 60, 145. See also Hatel D. Desai, "A Biographical Sketch of Edward Clifford Anderson, Sr.," November 15, 1991, Savannah Biographies Volume 21, Special Collections, Lane Library, Armstrong Atlantic State U, Savannah GA., accessed March 14, 2021, http://libweb.lib.georgiasouthern.edu/armstrong/SavBio/Anderson_Edward%20Clifford.pdf, and Lisa L. Denmark, *Savannah's Midnight Hour: Boosterism, Growth, and Commerce in a Nineteenth-Century American City* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), Chapter 4.

⁵¹ Bryan, *Confederate Georgia*, 146-47; Carlson, "The 'Loanly Runagee'," 597-98.

north Georgia who would fight on behalf of the plain folks against the aristocratic coastal planters who traditionally dominated the government. After engineering Georgia's secession arm-in-arm with the planters, Brown was acutely aware of the weak support for the war among the non-slaveholders, particularly those in north Georgia. From the beginning of the war, he tried to deflect growing class antagonisms by blaming the hardships of the war on the Confederate government in Richmond. He denounced slaveowners who insisted on growing cotton rather than corn and supported legislation for state distribution of salt, state assistance in the production of cloth, provision of clothing for the troops, and limited financial assistance for poor families. After verbally opposing both conscription and impressment, he soon began implementing these unpopular policies. In a message to the legislature in March 1863, he insisted that "we should not only sustain the Confederacy at all hazards, but we should sustain the Administration."⁵²

By late-1863, Brown's demagoguery was beginning to wear a bit thin. He faced two opponents in the race for governor. Some Georgia planters supported Timothy Furlow, a slaveholder from southwest Georgia who defended Jefferson Davis and proposed even more strenuous efforts in support of the war. More significant opposition came from Joshua Hill, a lawyer from North Georgia. An opponent of secession, Hill had reluctantly resigned his seat from the US Congress in 1861 and, unlike most cooperationist leaders, took no position in either the Confederacy or the state during the war. Hill was viewed as a "peace" candidate because of his stance in 1861 and was strongly supported by many yeomen and poor whites in north Georgia and elsewhere in the state. Despite his reputation, he was a strong supporter of the Confederate aims. "So far as Mr. Lincoln and the Abolitionists are concerned," he insisted,

⁵² William Alexander Percy, "Localizing the Context of Confederate Politics: The Congressional Election of 1863 in Georgia's First District," *GHQ*, 79, no. 1 (Spring 1995), 209.

“there is nothing left us but to resist to the last, by all the means at our command, their efforts to destroy and despoil us.”⁵³

The other major Georgia races were for seats in the Confederate Congress. In all ten districts, opposition candidates presented themselves as alternatives to the fire-eating Democrats who had been elected to the legislature at a time when enthusiasm for the war was strong. Most of the oppositionists were former Whigs or American Party members who had opposed secession but had “gone with the state” in 1861. Reflecting the change in public sentiment since then, all candidates expressed their support for an “honorable peace” and more pay for the soldiers. They were all opposed to profiteering and in favor of planting more corn and less cotton. The main difference between the incumbents and the challengers revolved around Brown’s opposition to CSA President Davis and his policies. Oppositionists tended to support Brown. Incumbents generally supported Davis, conscription, and impressment, and criticized Brown for opposing these policies. Whether incumbent or challenger, they all opposed any attempt to ‘reconstruct’ the Union and insisted on continuing the war till the bitter end.

In the First District, incumbent Julian Hartridge of Savannah, a strong supporter of Jefferson Davis and the war effort, was opposed by William Butler King. King, a wealthy planter, had waged victorious campaigns as a Whig candidate for Congress in the 1840s, campaigns in which Hopkins had played a major role. King joined the Democrats in the 1850s, supported the war, and served as Georgia’s wartime commissioner to England, France and Belgium. As a historian of the campaign has noted, “Thomas Butler King was every bit the secessionist and the ardent Confederate his opponent was.”⁵⁴

⁵³ *SR*, September 4, 1863.

⁵⁴ Percy, “Localizing the Context,” 209.

Hendry, Overstreet, and a number of other prominent Blackshear men supported King. But for a growing number of plain folks in the First District, Hartridge vs King offered a choice without a difference. In July 1863, days after the Pierce County meeting protesting the murder of John Crawford, a committee of citizens from the First District headed by the Honorable John McRae of Montgomery County sent a letter to Charles Hopkins. Addressing him as “a statesman of enlarged views, and believing you a suitable person to represent us at this particular time,” they requested his “views in relation to the war, which is now desolating our land, and on the affairs of the country generally.”⁵⁵

Hopkins wrote back immediately, assuring them that “I am in favor of an honorable peace, and of increasing the soldiers pay to fifty dollars per month, and of exempting their wives from postage. I would advise a separate and distinct organization upon these three important principles.” He wanted to “arouse the slumbering embers of humanity, and dry up the tears of our wives, our mothers, our sisters and our daughters.”⁵⁶

Hopkins requested some time to consider whether to run for office. The decision for a Unionist to run for office in 1863 against William Butler King was not one to be taken lightly. The *Savannah Republican* warned that “in Georgia, even a suspicion of disloyalty, or lack of zealous devotion to the Confederate cause, is fatal to the political prospect of any aspirant for office.” Moreover, Hopkins would be campaigning under conditions which amounted to martial law. Any perceived opposition to the Confederate army or state institutions could be considered treason and punished accordingly.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *SR*, July 10 and 13, 1863.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Savannah Daily Morning News (SDMN)*, Sept. 26, 1863.

Hopkins visited property he owned in Whitfield County in northwest Georgia. As he travelled across the state, he saw first-hand how the impact of the war was changing the views of ordinary Georgians. On his return to Blackshear in late August, he agreed to run for office in Georgia's "hour of affliction" in order to fight for "an honorable peace." He emphasized once again the "three honorable measures" in support of soldiers and soldiers' families he had proposed in his earlier letter. He called for "additional taxation" on the wealthy to "increase the miserable pittance" due the "brave and patriotic soldier." He pointed out his opposition to the war from its beginning. Have I not "told you of the burning of our cities, of the slaughter of our sons, and the devastation of our land?" But that didn't matter now: "let us ignore past opinions and past opposition, and ask not how we got here" but how we can unite to save the country.⁵⁸

A large number of men from Pierce and surrounding counties were members of the 4th Cavalry Regiment commanded by Colonel Duncan L. Clinch. Clinch and the other regiment commanders were planters from the coast. Cavalry privates were generally better-off farmers, some with one or two slaves, as they had to provide their own horses in order to join the cavalry. From May through September 1863, several companies of the Fourth Georgia were assigned to scour the area for deserters.⁵⁹

Hopkins's support for the troops hit a nerve among these men. In August, eighty-two enlisted men of the 4th Cavalry Regiment at Camp Lee, near Waynesville, Georgia, sent a letter of support for Hopkins which was published in the *Savannah Republican*. The signers noted that

⁵⁸ *SR*, Sept. 25, 1863.

⁵⁹ The class status of members of the 4th Cavalry was established by reviewing 1860 census records of the men who signed the petition supporting Hopkins in *SR*, September 4, 1863.

“several hundred names would have been signed to the call had it been deemed necessary.”

G. M. T. Ware, a young lawyer from Blackshear, was the first name on the list of signers.⁶⁰

Support from the soldiers emboldened Hopkins to address more sharply the growing class inequalities exposed by the war. In response to a query posed to all candidates in the First District, he contrasted the “young men” who “are doing the fighting” to “the old men who are making their millions by the war. . . . It will not do for such patriots to cry war, war, war and make other people do their fighting at \$11 per month. Should I be elected, I will immediately introduce a bill to increase the pay of the army largely, and make this class of old gentlemen pay it.”⁶¹

Hopkins did not run as an opponent of the Confederacy. He dodged the question of what he meant by his support for an “early, permanent and honorable peace,” and he affirmed his continued opposition to abolition, evoking “the history of the St. Domingo massacre.” But the fact that such a prominent Unionist was able to run in the First District, Georgia’s bastion of secessionism, with public support from area leaders as well as members of the 4th Cavalry, was a testament to the change in sentiment about the war among whites in the piney woods.⁶²

Brown won his fourth term as governor. Georgia’s ruling class rejected the candidacy of their fellow planter Furlow. They believed Brown’s anti-Davis rhetoric and populist policies would be more effective in containing the growing opposition to impressment and conscription from Georgia’s yeomen and poor whites. Hill came in second. But he got over eighteen

⁶⁰ Williams, Williams, and Carlson, *Plain Folk*, 171; *SR*, Sept. 4, 1863.

⁶¹ *SR*, Sept. 15, 1863.

⁶² *SR*, Sept. 15 and 25, 1863.

thousand votes and won a majority in twenty-one counties and a plurality in six others, mainly in north Georgia—an ominous sign for Georgia’s ruling class.⁶³

In the elections for the Confederate Congress, oppositionists defeated incumbents in every district of the state except for the First District. When the votes were counted in that district, Hartridge defeated King by a narrow margin: 3,077 for Hartridge versus 2,909 for King. King received the largest number of votes in the wiregrass and piney woods areas, but these were offset by huge majorities for Hartridge in Savannah and along the coast.⁶⁴

Despite a near press blackout about his campaign, Hopkins managed to get 766 votes, or 11% of the total. He topped the vote count in Pierce County and came in second in the nearby counties of Clinch and Appling. He won significant support from active duty soldiers, coming in first among soldiers from McIntosh and Tattnall counties with strong support from men in the 4th and 5th regiments of Georgia Cavalry.⁶⁵

Historian William Percy dismisses Hopkins’s candidacy by arguing that he “was not a factor at any time in the election.” But Hopkins was criticized during the race for taking away votes from King. Hopkins’s vote total was over four times Hartridge’s margin of victory. Had Hopkins not run, King would almost certainly have won the election. The vote count for Hopkins showed growing radicalization among yeomen and poor whites in the First District. Unlike the votes for Hill, King, and the other opposition candidates running for Senate seats, votes for

⁶³ James Horace Bass, “The Georgia Gubernatorial Elections of 1861 and 1863,” *GHQ*, 17, no. 3 (September 1933), 187.

⁶⁴ Percy, “Localizing the Context,” 202.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*; *SR*, Sept. 4, 1863; *SDMN*, Oct. 8, 1863.

Hopkins were votes for a program which took the side of the poor men fighting in the rich man's war.⁶⁶

The elections did nothing to halt a growing number of desertions from the Confederate army throughout the state. Reports reached the Confederate War Department that Clinch's troops of the Fourth Georgia stationed below the Altamaha River were calling for an early peace and spreading dissatisfaction with the war. In January 1864, these cavalrymen, many of whom had supported Hopkins in the elections, were given more restricted duties. The job of chasing deserters and draft evaders in southeast Georgia was taken on by cavalry from Atlanta under Colonel Lee, the same officer who had led the hunt for deserters in north Georgia in 1863.⁶⁷

On May 15, 1864, General William Tecumseh Sherman began his march on Atlanta with 100,000 men. Sherman's invasion provoked a full-scale military crisis. In an appeal "To the People of Georgia," Brown called on the Georgia militia to defend the state. Clinch's 4th Cavalry were ordered to Atlanta to help. The Battle of Atlanta raged all summer. Support for Brown and for the war deteriorated. More and more Georgians avoided enrollment officers. Desertions rose from Confederate General Johnston's defending army. The food situation throughout the state, already bad, became worse. While most whites in the plantation districts continued to support the war, plain folks and poor whites in the piney woods districts increasingly turned against it.⁶⁸

These growing class divisions were registered in Pierce County. In June 1864, Major-General L. McLaws reported that there was

⁶⁶ Percy, "Localizing the Context," 202; *SR*, Oct. 1, 1863.

⁶⁷ Carlson, "The 'Lonely Runagee'," 603, 604, 607; Bryan, *Confederate Georgia*, 90.

⁶⁸ *SDMN*, July 21, 1864; Mark V. Wetherington, *Plain Folk's Fight: The Civil War and Reconstruction in Piney Woods Georgia* (Chapel Hills: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 202, 203, 220.

considerable excitement a few days ago in Pierce County, caused by a number of women armed with guns and pistols, who broke open a store-house of one of the tithes [impressment] collectors, and carried off several wagon-loads of bacon, and burned some houses. A prominent citizen who came up to inform me of it, stated that the people of property were much alarmed, as the women boasted that they had plenty of men to back them if resisted, and they stated that there were a number of deserters in the Okefenokee Swamp who, they said, would soon commence carrying off the negroes, as the Yankees had offered them \$50 in gold for every negro they run off.⁶⁹

The fall of Atlanta on September 2 secured the victory of Abraham Lincoln and his new vice president, the Union Democrat Andrew Johnson, in the federal elections on November 8. A week after Lincoln's victory, Sherman began his march to the sea. "As Sherman's troops marched across the state," notes Bryan, "many Georgians were ready to submit to almost any terms in order to prevent the devastation of the country. . . . Desertions increased and many soldiers went home to stay. . . . [I]n October 1864, probably not more than one-third of the men fit for duty were in the field." Companies of the 4th Georgia Cavalry and the Twenty-ninth Georgia Battalion (cavalry), patrolling the piney woods, roamed "blindly," made no attempt to arrest deserters, and "vowed to ignore any orders that required them to leave the area."⁷⁰

Frightened by the possibility that Sherman's troops might turn south to free Union prisoners at the Andersonville POW camp, in November 1864 the Confederate army hurriedly transferred 5,000 prisoners to a temporary camp a mile north of Blackshear. Though they only remained in the camp for five weeks, their presence was a vivid illustration that the Confederacy had lost the war and further fighting was useless.

⁶⁹ *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (OR)*, ser. 1, 35(2), 544.

⁷⁰ Bryan, *Confederate Georgia*, 150; Carlson, "The 'Loanly Runagee'," 613-14.

On December 21, 1864, Sherman, having met little real resistance from Confederate troops, completed his successful march across the state with the capture of Savannah. The city's mayor and Confederate army officers, unwilling to see the city destroyed, accepted the Union troops' entry into the city without a fight. Union troops soon controlled all of Georgia's coastal counties.

Though his army freed the slaves, Sherman's aim was not to foster any type of social revolution in southern society. The Union army's first order of business on entering Savannah was to put down what one officer described as "a lawless mob of low whites and negroes" intent on seizing stores of food from the city's merchants to save themselves from starvation. Rather than replacing the city's mayor and aldermen, hardcore secessionists all, with Union supporters, Sherman's Special Field Order N. 143 on December 26 confirmed them in their positions to maintain order.⁷¹

Savannah's ruling class moved quickly to reestablish its authority over the population. Executing a 180-degree turn, the original secessionist fire-eaters reinvented themselves as supporters of peace. A week after the Union occupation, with Mayor Richard Arnold in the chair, the Savannah elite held a public meeting. Acknowledging Sherman's help in protecting "them and their property from insult and injury," they called for "laying aside all differences and burying by-gones in the grave of the past." Once again reclaiming all "the immunities and privileges" accorded US citizens, they "respectfully requested" Governor Brown call a

⁷¹ Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 207; Jonathan M. Bryant, "'We Defy You!' Politics and Violence in Reconstruction Savannah," in *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah*, eds. Leslie M. Harris and Daina Ramey Berry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 165.

convention of the people of Georgia to see “if they wished the war between the two sections of the country to continue.”⁷²

The significance of the meeting was double-edged. On the one hand, it put pressure on Brown to end the war from an important layer of Georgia’s ruling class. On the other hand, Savannah’s rulers took no responsibility for secession, with the loss of life and devastation that resulted from that. And they argued that they should suffer no consequence for their actions.

As the Union army neared Savannah, Hopkins “was one of the first men to greet Gen Sherman’s advances.” He quickly realized the danger posed by the “peace” initiatives of the ruling class coastal elites. This was no time to let bygones be bygones. What was needed was to bring together the leading men of the piney woods counties as an alternative to the coastal planters.⁷³

Charles Hopkins took the initiative. On February 3, 1865, a “Meeting of the People of the First Congressional District of Georgia” took place in Blackshear. It was attended by fifty delegates representing nine south Georgia counties. The meeting was chaired by Captain John C. Nicholls, a prominent Clinch County lawyer and captain of I Company of the 4th Georgia Cavalry. Captain John Overstreet was secretary. Other prominent individuals included Senator Rowan Pafford of Coffee County and Hon. Jonathan B. Mallard of Liberty County. Hopkins presided.⁷⁴

⁷² *Daily Loyal Georgian*, Dec. 28, 1864.

⁷³ Lt Col Thompson to Maj Gen Gillmore, July 15, 1865, Applications for Positions and Internal Revenue Collectors and Assessors, 1863-1910, Assessor, Ga., 1st Dist., Charles H. Hopkins, RG56, NA.

⁷⁴ *Augusta Chronicle*, Mar. 1, 1865; Broome, *History of Pierce County*, 253.

The war, delegates concluded, had brought nothing but “ruin and desolation.” Now they were “about to be abandoned by the Confederate authorities, without any provision being made for our protection from famine or the sword, by those who involved us in the war.” Delegates demanded that Governor Joseph Brown and the Georgia legislature organize a “convention of the people of Georgia” to decide what to do. These were not very radical resolutions. The local dignitaries were not prepared to give open support to the Union or to challenge the authority of the Brown government. But if the Georgia legislature did not organize a people’s convention, they authorized Hopkins, a Unionist, to call such a meeting, raising the possibility of an alternative center of political power in the state where anti-Confederate and pro-Union sentiments could be expressed.⁷⁵

When Savannah fell, support for the war collapsed in south Georgia. In Liberty and Tattnall counties, citizens expressed their approval for Federal army occupation. A citizens meeting in the town of Abbeville in Wilcox County vowed that the men of the county would defend themselves against raiding parties of the Confederate military. In counties still under Confederate control, battles sometimes erupted between those suing for peace and those who supported fighting until the bitter end. Unionists in Thomaston who vowed “to pay no more Confederate taxes” were assaulted and beaten by Confederate supporters. In February 1865, Unionist William Bone, accompanied by a “large body of deserters,” convened a meeting in Irwin County. The meeting passed numerous resolutions, “including one calling for the Confederacy’s surrender. When a militia lieutenant tried to break up the meeting, Bone knocked

⁷⁵ *Augusta Chronicle*, Mar. 1, 1865.

the officer down with his musket and led three cheers for Abraham Lincoln. The assembly then drove the lieutenant, and every other pro-Confederate, out of town.”⁷⁶

In February 1865, Alfred Prescott, the Confederate inspector of the Conscript Service in the First District, reported that “nearly every man here, who belongs to the army, has deserted and come home.” Deserters were no longer confined to small bands of men hiding in the swamps. “Every one of them is well armed,” warned Prescott, “and in the counties of Pierce, Appling, Coffee, Clinch and Ware, and probably in all the other Counties they are evidently leagued together in a general association. . . . [T]hey have not only the assistance of their wives, children & other relatives, who are always on the alert but the sympathizers and secret aid no doubt of many of the citizens, who are, to a greater or less extent, disloyal.” The Confederate army troop patrolling the area under the command of a Captain Crosby were “an object of merriment among the Deserters, who hold it in supreme contempt.”⁷⁷

The majority of deserters were farmers without slaves and poor whites. What had once been a “rich man’s war, but a poor man’s fight” (a protest against inequality of sacrifice) was increasingly becoming a poor man’s war against a rich man’s army and state. “They have sworn to shoot or hang any En[rolling] Officer, who ventures in any manner to enforce or execute the law,” complained Prescott. Enrolling officers “stand in constant peril of their lives, and dare not leave the villages, in which they are quartered.” And he added, “Not only the Deserters but a

⁷⁶ Bryan, *Confederate Georgia*, 153; Wetherington, *Plain Folks Fight*, 213; Williams, Williams, and Carlson, *Plain Folk in a Rich Man’s War*, 183-84.

⁷⁷ Prescott to Looney, 293-94, 297.

number of the citizens of Blackshear, during my stay there, when called on by the C. S. Tax Assessor, refused to give in their taxes, and some of them loudly cursed the Govt.”⁷⁸

The old social hierarchies were beginning to fray. Deserters raided merchants for food for themselves and their families. Prescott noted that “seven times within 2 weeks they visited Blackshear, in bands of 25 to 75 men thoroughly armed and provided with wagons or carts, and deliberately breaking open the Stores & other buildings robbed them of their contents and carried them off whilst not one citizen dared to show his face or say a word.” “In several of the Counties North of [the Altamaha], it is *no better*,” continued Prescott. “I fear things will culminate in a state of general insurrection and revolt. Even now, all law, both civil and Military seems to be overthrown and there is no safety here for either property or life.”⁷⁹

Prescott noted that Unionists fostered and encouraged “this feeling of disaffection and disloyalty among the people and the boldness of these Deserters.” There are “2 or 3 prominent Union men at Blackshear, who since the success of Sherman in Georgia, have become quite bold and free in the expression of their sentiments,” Prescott noted. “One of these men is a Capt M. B. Holland. . . . He is said to have a great deal of influence with the Deserters.” He accused Holland, “a most treacherous man,” of organizing deserters to assassinate him in Blackshear. The most prominent Unionist in Blackshear was Holland’s father-in-law, Charles Hopkins.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Prescott to Looney, 294, 296.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 295, 297. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁰ Lt Col Thompson to Maj Gen Gillmore, July 15, 1865, Applications for Positions and Internal Revenue Collectors and Assessors, 1863-1910, Assessor, Ga., 1st Dist., Charles H. Hopkins, RG56, NA.; Prescott to Looney, 296.

In March 1865, Colonel Clinch returned to leadership of the 4th Cavalry after being sidelined through most of 1864 because of battle injuries. He was outraged by the reports of Prescott and others on the rampant disloyalty and attacks on the Confederate government officials in the piney woods counties and by the deserters' raids on Blackshear merchants. Thanks to Prescott, he had the names of the leaders of those forces in Blackshear. He would himself lead Crosby's company, arrest the deserters and especially their ringleaders, and bring them to justice.⁸¹

Clinch's account of what transpired was contained in a letter written from his command post on the Savannah and Gulf railroad to Major General Howell Cobb, the commander of Confederate forces in Georgia, on April 4, 1865, the day of the attack:

I have the honor to report that Capt Crosby [commanding] a supporting force was cut to pieces today by the deserters, and his company killed wounded and taken prisoners. I had sent out about 200 men to arrest a band of deserters, but the company was waylaid by them. I know positively that they are in full force, not only the deserters, but almost the entire population of Appling County, as well as Coffee, Pierce, Berrien, Clinch, Ware, Wayne and adjacent countys are banded together. 200 are reputed to be crossing the river at Nails Ferry today to join them, and I know they effect aid from the enemy. They are determined to drive me out of the country. My force is so small, as I have no arms, and my men are all from this section of the country, and I must watch the coast. I will however assume the offensive, as soon as I can collect my men. I have but 17 guns in my camp here tonight. . . . I assume it not improper to notify you in hopes you may be able to lend some forces to assail them in rear by the way of Coffee or Laurens County.⁸²

⁸¹ O. J. Hickox, Jr., "A Brief History of Clinch's Regiment, 4th Georgia Volunteer Cavalry (The Wiregrass Fourth), Provisional Army of the Confederate States, 1860 – 1865," March 2011. Accessed at <http://www.glynngen.com/military/civilwar/4thga/DLClinch.htm> on January 11, 2020.

⁸² Col. Duncan L. Clinch to Maj. Gen. Howell Cobb, April 4, 1865, Cobb Papers, UGA.

In 1867, in response to questions raised about his Union credentials, Hopkins solicited an account of an incident in which he had been involved during the war. The following letter to Hopkins was published in the *Savannah Daily News and Herald*:

There is a man here named J. T. Crawford, who was a Confederate Commissary, who stated that he went with Col. Clinch's command of fifteen hundred men to capture you [Hopkins] and the deserters that you had with you in 1864, that you had the culverts of the railroad destroyed, and that when they arrived at the point of attack, Col. Clinch's men disembarked from the train and went into ambush to fight your men, and that your command captured one whole company of Clinch's Confederate soldiers, and when they heard that you were at the Church rallying the men to fight, that Clinch sent a body of men round to capture you and that you escaped.⁸³

These appear to be two accounts of the same battle. Both Clinch and Crawford reported that Confederate forces led by Clinch came via rail to apprehend a group of deserters in piney woods Georgia. Clinch's forces were waylaid by the deserters, and one company of his men was taken prisoner. Clinch reported no similar attack by deserters on his forces in either 1864 and 1865 and no other account of an entire unit being taken prisoner by deserters.

Testifying nearly three years after the event, Crawford erroneously placed the incident he described in 1864, rather than 1865. Such pitched battles between deserters and the Confederate army only took place in piney woods Georgia after Sherman took Savannah. Nor could Clinch himself have led such an attack in 1864. He only returned to action in March 1865. Crawford also greatly exaggerated the number of forces under Clinch's command in the final year of the war.

One of the unique aspects of this battle was the taking of Confederate army prisoners. Why would deserters take prisoners? If the goal was purely defensive, there would be no need to

⁸³ Letter dated Dec. 15, 1867, originally published in the *Macon Telegraph*, reprinted in *SDNH*, Dec. 21, 1867.

take prisoners. You would either fight off the troops or escape. But if the goal was to undermine the Confederate army, you would try to win the ‘farmers in Confederate uniforms’ to your side. You would take prisoners and explain to them that the planters had launched the war to protect their slaves and their properties; that the soldiers, who owned no slaves, were being used as cannon fodder by the planters; that the secessionists had lost the war; and that they should leave the Confederate army and join the opposition to it.

This carefully planned attack was a major escalation of the fight of piney woods citizens against the Confederate army. It was also a major step for Hopkins. By leading deserters in a military engagement resulting in the wounding and death of Confederate soldiers, he had burned all his bridges with the secessionist leadership.

After the battle, Hopkins was a wanted man. He could well have hidden in Pierce or a neighboring county, but he headed instead to Union lines. The end of the war was rapidly approaching. Hopkins knew that what happened next in Georgia and throughout the South would depend on the actions of the Union Army. Would they support leading Confederate secessionists in the name of “order” as they were doing in Savannah? Or would they turn to the forces in the piney woods who were fighting against the Confederate Army and taking their distance from the planter aristocrats?

Hopkins fled to Hilton Head Island. This was no accidental destination. Hilton Head was the command center of all Union forces in the area. Hopkins was there on April 9 when Lee surrendered to Grant, on April 15 when Lincoln was assassinated, and on April 26 when Johnston surrendered to Sherman. In a letter written to Charles Sumner in 1867, Hopkins noted that “Genl. Gillmore and Lieut Gov Woodford of New York know that I was with them at Hilton Head a reffugee from my persecutors in Georgia when Lee and Johnson surrendered.” Major-

General Quincy Gillmore was the commander of the Department of the South, based on Hilton Head. Colonel Stewart L. Woodford was his chief of staff.⁸⁴

Once the Confederacy was defeated, state and local authority disappeared. Ten thousand mainly well-to-do secessionists fled the US for Cuba, Brazil, or Mexico. Mary Chesnut vividly described the morale of the southern aristocracy at the end of the war: “Shame, disgrace, beggary, all have come at once and are hard to bear — the grand smash.” And later, “We are scattered and stunned, the remnant of hearts left alive within us filled with brotherly hate.”⁸⁵

Popular hostility toward the planter “aristocrats” who had led the southern war effort was widespread. Hopkins could testify to this from his years in Pierce County and Georgia’s First District. But such sentiments extended far beyond Georgia’s piney woods. When Northern reporter Whitelaw Reid visited Charleston, the heart of the rebellion, he noted that “of the leaders of those days, scarcely one remains to receive the curses which, even in the midst of their hatred of the Yankees, the people pour out upon the men who converted their prosperity into desolation.” Reid observed that “the public mind was so despondent that if readmission at some future time under whatever conditions had been promised, it would then have been looked upon as a favor.” The Union army held all the power; it could do what it wanted.⁸⁶

Preoccupied though he was with the final stages of the war, Gillmore would have been quickly notified of Hopkins’s arrival on the island. He was deeply concerned about the lack of

⁸⁴ C. H. Hopkins to Charles Sumner, December 19, 1867, Papers of Charles Sumner, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Stewart Woodford was elected as Lieutenant Governor of New York in 1867.

⁸⁵ Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905), 350-51, 390.

⁸⁶ Whitelaw Reid, *After the War: A Southern Tour, May 1, 1865 to May 1, 1866* (London: Sampson Low and Son, 1866), 66, 296-98. Available online at quod.lib.umich.edu, accessed 2 November 2015.

support for the Union among Georgia's whites. In a February letter to Major General Henry Halleck, the US Army's chief of staff, he complained that "the Union sentiment in Georgia is in danger of dying out for want of nourishment." Nor did he have any illusions about the character of the former rebels the army was working with in Savannah. In a May 1865 letter to Brevet Major-General C. Grover, the commanding officer in Savannah, he noted that "the white inhabitants, including nearly all the prominent men, have generally been disloyal during the rebellion, and many of them are avowedly so at the present time, while the colored people, with rare unanimity, have been true to the national flag and the national authority." A Georgia Unionist of Hopkins's stature was someone of interest.⁸⁷

Hopkins brought with him a transcript of the February meeting of First District notables as an indication of the character of the men he proposed as Georgia's future leaders. The transcript was forwarded to Grover. On April 20, Woodford, on behalf of Gillmore, requested to see a copy of the transcript, likely following a face-to-face interview with Hopkins.⁸⁸

Hopkins made the acquaintance of several leading officers on Hilton Head, including Brevet Brigadier General Henry Washburn, head of the 2nd Division, 19th Army Corps stationed in Savannah, and Lt. Col. Benjamin W. Thompson, Provost Marshall General and the officer in charge of the 32nd Corps United States Colored Troops. He knew that many, perhaps most Union officers considered poor southern whites as backward, "white trash," unredeemable rebels. Hopkins brought with him the experience of a lifetime of working with these men. He could testify to their initial opposition to secession, their willingness to confront the Confederate army

⁸⁷ Q. A. Gillmore to Maj. Gen. H. W. Halleck, February 17, 1865, *OR*, 47(1), 464; Q. A. Gillmore to Bvt. Maj. Gen. C. Grover, May 10, 1865, *OR*, 47(3), 466.

⁸⁸ Stewart L. Woodford to Brevet Major-General Grover, Apr. 20, 1865, *OR*, 47(3), 262.

in 1864-65, and their deep desire for good land, land now hogged by the secessionist slaveholders.⁸⁹

Hopkins also learned a lot from his experience on Hilton Head. Many of the Union officers had participated in the Port Royal experiment or, like Thompson, had led black troops. Hopkins saw first-hand the impact of emancipation. Hundreds of former slaves were on the island, farming their own land, attending school, and serving in the First Regiment of South Carolina Volunteers. The experience was to have a profound impact on Hopkins's views of emancipation and the freedmen, views which he would share on his return to Blackshear.

⁸⁹ Some Army commanders were aware of growing support for reconstruction from white Georgians. See Major-General J. G. Foster to Major-General Halleck, January 9, 1865 in *OR*, vol 47, pt 2, page 31. On the hope of poor southern whites to receive the planter's abandoned land, see Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict & Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 180.

3 1865, FREEDMEN IN COASTAL GEORGIA: ‘THE WAY WE CAN BEST TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES IS TO HAVE LAND’

Savannah was Georgia’s major cotton and rice port, second in importance only to New Orleans in the southern states. It was the largest and richest city in in the state. The area’s rice and sea island cotton planters were among the wealthiest southerners and had an outsized influence on politics in the state. Planter families, many of them going back generations, were connected by property and bloodline to the planters in South Carolina. Rice planters led the fight for secession in that state, with strong support from their Georgia counterparts.

Before the war, a third of Savannah’s 1860 population of 22,000 were slaves. Around 700 free blacks also called Savannah home. A huge influx of former slaves to Savannah at the end of the war brought the number of blacks to near equality with the whites. Unlike Charleston and New Orleans, Savannah’s free blacks, mostly mixed race or mulatto, did not form a distinct caste. Most had been born as slaves and maintained ties with the freedmen in city and countryside. Slaves and free blacks worked alongside whites in the ports, in construction, as artisans, laborers, and house servants. They were members of the city’s fire-fighting companies. Savannah’s free blacks owned small businesses and land. The city also hosted five black churches, including the First African Baptist Church, the oldest independent black church in the country.⁹⁰

Coastal South Carolina and Georgia constituted an area with a distinctive culture and history. Savannah was surrounded on all sides by large plantations. On the sea islands just off the coast, slaves cultivated sea island (long staple) cotton. Along the Savannah, Ogeechee, and Little

⁹⁰ Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 164.

Ogeechee rivers, slaves cultivated rice. In the countryside, blacks far outnumbered whites. Health conditions were atrocious, particularly on the rice plantations. Toiling in swamps, rice workers suffered extraordinarily high death rates from malaria, yellow fever, and intestinal diseases.

Many of the planters were absentee owners. They lived most of the year in Charleston or Savannah or took lengthy vacations to escape the unhealthy conditions on their plantations. Stable populations of enslaved blacks lived in a largely black world for much of the year, overseen by black drivers. Most coastal blacks communicated in Gullah or Geechee, a creole dialect unique to the area. Task labor was the rule. As a result of years of struggle, many slaves had won the right to tend private gardens and sell produce on their own time. Coastal blacks enjoyed a greater degree of “intermittently independent management of their working time and community life” than slaves in the (short staple) cotton plantations which dominated the rest of the South.⁹¹

Early in the war, the Union fleet took control of the South Carolina and Georgia islands and established bases on Port Royal and Hilton Head, about forty miles north of Savannah.

⁹¹ Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 12. Saville’s book is the best guide to the distinctive economy and culture of black life on the Georgia and South Carolina coast during Reconstruction. Other texts I have found useful include William Dusinger, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Lawrence S. Rowland, “Alone on the River”: The Rise and Fall of the Savannah River Rice Plantations of St. Peter’s Parish, South Carolina,” in *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (July 1987), 121-50; Jeffrey R. Young, “Ideology and Death on a Savannah River Plantation, 1833-1867: Paternalism amidst ‘a Good Supply of Disease and Pain’,” in *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (November 1993), 673-706; and Karen B. Bell, “‘The Ogeechee Troubles’: Federal Land Restoration and the ‘Lived Realities’ of Temporary Proprietors, 1865-1868,” in *GHQ*, Volume 85, No. 3 (Fall 2001), 375-97.

Union gunboats constantly raided Georgia coastal areas. In 1862, the *New York Times* gloated that “the sea island cotton planters are rich and proud, very aristocratic and fiercely traitorous; and in their expulsion and by the confiscation of their slaves, the original and worst secession element in the South is humiliated, if not ruined.”⁹²

It was not only the coastal planters’ lives which had forever changed. The life of coastal slaves was also turned upside-down by the war. Slaveowners fled to safer interior areas, evacuating their slaves with them. Slaves were hired out to work on railroads or Confederate fortifications. Thousands of slaves from the coast fled to Union-occupied areas. Many joined or were forced into Union military service.

Agents of the US Treasury Department did their best to introduce wage labor on wartime plantations in South Carolina and islands along the Atlantic coast which the Army now controlled. It did not go well. Freedpeople wanted land of their own. They opposed the imposition of individual wage labor. They planted food crops rather than cotton. They “attempted to farm in extended family networks.” “They tried to retain possession of the ginned cotton their families had raised; disputed what they would plant, where they would plant it, and in what amounts; and demanded higher rates for task work.” In short, they “refused to work as capital at the service of their employers.”⁹³

Brigadier General Rufus Saxton, an abolitionist from Massachusetts, had command of Port Royal beginning in 1862. His experience there convinced him that the “sure basis for the substantial freedom and permanent improvement of the negroes” was that “they should be owners of the land they cultivate.” In 1863, he convinced the Lincoln administration to guarantee

⁹² *NYT*, Apr. 3, 1862.

⁹³ Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 43, 67, 68.

freed families the right to farm and eventually purchase twenty acres or more of forfeited plantation lands.⁹⁴

When Union troops conquered Savannah in December 1864, a decision had to be made about what to do with the thousands of blacks who had followed Sherman's army through Georgia as well as with the additional thousands who remained on plantations in the area. On January 11, 1865, Sherman and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton met with twenty black leaders from Savannah. Reverend Garrison Frazier told the Secretary of War that "the way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land, and turn it and till it by our own labor." Asked whether they wanted to be "scattered among the whites or in colonies by yourselves," Frazier responded, "I would prefer to live by ourselves, for there is a prejudice against us in the South that will take years to get over." It was the only time in the entire war that Republicans asked representatives of the newly freedpeople in the South what they wanted.⁹⁵

Four days later, Sherman's Special Field Order Number 15 reserved the sea islands and the rice-growing areas "for thirty miles back from the sea" from Charleston to the Georgia-Florida border for the settlement of the freedmen. "No white person whatever, unless military officers and soldiers detailed for duty, will be permitted to reside; and the sole and exclusive management of affairs will be left to the freed people themselves." "To enable them to establish a peaceable agricultural settlement," freedmen were to be given a "possessory title" to not more

⁹⁴ Paul A. Cimballa, *Under the Guardianship of the Nation: The Freedmen's Bureau and the Reconstruction of Georgia, 1865-1870* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 3; Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 40, 41. The classic text on the Port Royal experiment is Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1964).

⁹⁵ *New York Daily Tribune*, Feb. 13, 1865.

than “forty acres of tillable ground” and provided with assistance from the federal government. The area selected for black settlement encompassed the heart of the rice and sea island cotton plantation area in South Carolina and Georgia.⁹⁶

Saxton was placed in charge of the Sherman grants in Georgia and South Carolina. On February 2, he and Reverend Mansfield French met with an enthusiastic crowd of one thousand blacks at the Second African Baptist Church to explain Sherman’s Special Field Order. French encouraged them to take advantage of this offer and move to the islands off the Georgia coast. In another meeting days later, French promised that the freedmen’s title to the land “will have the faith and honor of the United States.”⁹⁷

A month later, strongly influenced by the Sherman land grants, Congress passed the Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands Act establishing what became known as the Freedmen’s Bureau. The Bureau was to provide provisions, clothing, fuel and shelter for suffering refugees and freedmen and their families. But the Bureau was also authorized to

set apart, for the use of loyal refugees and freedmen, such tracts of land within the insurrectionary states as shall have been abandoned, or to which the United States shall have acquired title by confiscation or sale, or otherwise, and *to every male citizen, whether refugee or freedman . . . there shall be assigned not more than forty acres of such land . . . for the term of three years. . . . At the end of said term . . . the occupants of any parcels so assigned may purchase the land.*

⁹⁶ *OR*, series 1, 47(2), 60-62.

⁹⁷ *Savannah Daily Herald*, Feb. 3, 1865; Byrne, William A. “‘Uncle Billy’ Sherman Comes to Town: The Free Winter of Black Savannah,” *GHQ*, 79, no. 1 (Spring 1995), 112.

There was no unclarity in the wording. The US government, by legislative act approved by Congress and signed by President Lincoln, made a formal commitment to provide forty acres of abandoned or confiscated land to all “loyal refugees and freedmen” in the southern states.⁹⁸

In May 1865, Saxton became Assistant Commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Aided by Saxton and local agents of the Freedmen’s Bureau, blacks quickly took advantage of the offer of land. Sherman's order had a huge impact on tidewater rice plantations in the Ogeechee district, ten miles southwest of Savannah. In 1860, the district had a population of 2,435 slaves and only 413 whites. The thirty-one tidewater rice plantations alongside and between the Ogeechee and Little Ogeechee rivers were the most profitable and productive in Chatham County. Most of the freedpeople remained on the plantations where they had worked in slavery times. During April and May 1865, former slaves on abandoned plantations secured “possessory titles to plots ranging from five to forty acres.” On John Cheves’s Grove Point plantation, thirty families “received possessory titles to 245 acres of his land. On nearby Grove Hill plantation, owned by William and Robert Habersham, fifty families received title to 641 acres.”⁹⁹

Reverend Ulysses Houston, pastor of Savannah’s Third African Baptist Church, helped establish a freedmen’s colony of 362 on abandoned plantation land on Skidaway Island, a few miles south of Savannah. Freedmen also received title to the land on Wilmington Island southeast of Savannah and on both sides of the Savannah River north of the city. In March,

⁹⁸ “Freedmen’s Bureau Bill, March 3, 1865” in *The American Nation: Primary Sources*, ed. Bruce Frohnen (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008), accessed January 16, 2018, https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/frohen-the-american-nation-primary-sources#lf1515_head_079. Emphasis added.

⁹⁹ Bell, “Ogeechee Troubles,” 376-80.

Saxton named Tunis Campbell, a black abolitionist minister from New York, Military Governor of the Georgia sea islands. He settled 200 adults and 117 children on St. Catherine's Island. Over 1,000 settled on Sapelo and other islands south of St. Catherine's. By April, some twenty thousand freedmen had established themselves within the Sherman grant area in South Carolina and Georgia. "In June Saxton estimated that his efforts had settled forty thousand ex-slaves on four hundred thousand acres."¹⁰⁰

Owning their own land for the first time, the freedmen worked hard, and many were well on their way to being self-supporting. In the Ogeechee, the freedmen farmed rice plantations collectively rather than on individual plots. In "areas of the Ogeechee neck where plantation lands had not been subdivided under Sherman's order, emancipated men and women rented the lands, paying one-quarter of the crop to the Freedmen's Bureau. This arrangement occurred at both Wild Horn and Vallambrosia plantations." On Skidaway, "by summer several hundred acres of vegetables and cotton were under cultivation. [Freedmen] were confident of a prosperous future." On St Catherine's, where seed was in short supply and it was too late to plant crops, freedmen hunted, fished, tended small gardens, and traded or hired themselves out on the mainland. In September, Bureau agent Reverend William H. Tiffany observed that "the people, not being driven by master or overseer, go to their work early and gladly, and the body shares the healthfulness of the mind."¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 225-26; Cimbala, *Under the Guardianship*, 167. Cimbala's book provides the best short overview of the distribution of Sherman tract land in Georgia on pages 166-72.

¹⁰¹ Bell, "Ogeechee Troubles," 380-81; Byrne, "Uncle Billy Sherman," 112-13; Cimbala, *Under the Guardianship*, 169-70.

Freedmen “organized governments and mustered militias to protect their freedom and the common good.” On the Ogeechee, “representatives elected by the freedmen from their neighborhoods formed a board of advisers” to agent Tiffany. “They also formed their own militia, the Ogeechee Home Guard, which at its most active mustered a strength of about forty men.” Houston became the governor on Skidaway Island. Tunis Campbell set up government on St. Catherine’s Island, established schools, and organized a militia company of 275 citizen-soldiers. On Edisto and St. Helena in South Carolina, freedmen organized councils, committees, and police forces “formed principally of ex-slave soldiers.” They held “public drills and ceremonies.” “From the many discussions and meetings generated during the movement to hold sea-island lands emerged a historically informed consciousness that plantation spokesmen now acted on behalf of a larger collectivity.”¹⁰²

“The expectation that land would accompany emancipation was not restricted to ex-slaves on the coast,” notes Saville. “Virtually all former slaves expected the possession of land to be the material basis of their emancipation.” Knowledge that land for the freedmen had not only been promised but had become a reality along the Georgia and South Carolina coast spread far and wide throughout Georgia and throughout the South. Rather than sign contracts with rebel planters, elemental justice called for the freedmen—the most faithful supporters of Reconstruction in the South—to become owners of land on the plantations they had built with their blood, sweat and tears. For the federal government to fulfill its promise of 40 acres and a

¹⁰² Cimbala, *Under the Guardianship*, 168-69; Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 89, 91; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 253-54.

mule. “Such goals set freedpeople on a collision course with Northern emancipators and former slaveowners alike.”¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 20, 24, 86.

4 MAY-NOVEMBER 1865, CHARLES HOPKINS: “THE POLICY OF CONFISCATION SHOULD BE RIGIDLY CARRIED OUT AT ONCE”

After four years of bloodshed, the war was over. In the North as well as the South, everyone was happy for the end of the fighting. But there the similarities ended.

For the North, what beckoned was a booming economy and a quick return to normal functioning. Most northerners believed that reconstruction in the South would be equally painless. Deceived by their own propaganda, Republicans were convinced that the majority of southerners were really Unionists at heart, and that these reluctant secessionists could quickly be won to support the end of slavery, civil rights for blacks, and the free labor (wage labor) system. Few northerners had any idea of the degree of devastation of the southern economy, even fewer an understanding of the social forces they had unleashed with the end of slavery and black emancipation.

These beliefs were on full display at big rally celebrating the Union victory on April 14 in Charleston, South Carolina. The Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, a renowned abolitionist, was the chief orator at the ceremony. The war, Beecher declared,

was not legitimately a war between the common people of the North and South. The war was set on by the ruling class, the aristocratic conspirators of the South. They suborned the common people with lies, with sophistries, with cruel deceits and slanders, to fight for secret objects which they abhorred, and against interests as dear to them as their own lives.

The reign of this “armed band of pestilent conspirators” was now over, he said. “*Few of them are left alive.*” Their “deadly doctrines have been purged in blood. . . . The sword has ended that danger *All further agitation is ended.*”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ *New York Times (NYT)*, Apr. 18, 1865. Emphasis added.

Abraham Lincoln, along with most of his cabinet, believed that with the Confederacy defeated, the “prominent and influential men” of the South could be counted on to lead their states back into the Union. Beecher appealed to those men, particularly the former Whigs who had reluctantly gone along with secession, to treat the freedmen well. “It is better for religion, it is better for political integrity, it is better for industry, it is better for money, if you have that motive,” he argued, “that you should educate the black man, and by education make him a citizen.” All that was needed was a brief period of transition to put down the remnants of the traitorous aristocracy and provide temporary relief to the destitute freedmen. “*We do not want your cities nor your fields,*” insisted Beecher. “The only condition of submission is to submit. There is the constitution, there are the laws, there is the government. . . . *On this basis reconstruction is easy.*”¹⁰⁵

Lincoln was assassinated the day after the Charleston rally. Hopkins had great hopes in the new President Andrew Johnson. In the speech Johnson gave on his nomination as vice president in 1864, he outlined a radical plan for reconstruction: “Treason must be made odious, and traitors must be punished and impoverished. Their great plantations must be seized and divided into small farms, and sold to honest, industrious men. The day for protecting the lands and negroes of these authors of rebellion is past.” Article Four of the Freedmen’s Bureau Act had established the legal basis for confiscating planters’ land and distributing it to “freedmen and

¹⁰⁵ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 729; *NYT*, Apr. 18, 1865. Emphasis added.

loyalist whites.” All Johnson had to do was to implement his proposals of 1864 by expanding potential land recipients to all poor whites and the transformation of the South could begin.¹⁰⁶

Hopkins’s hopes that Johnson would act on his words of 1864 were not rewarded. In his proclamation of May 29, 1865, Johnson made no provision for trials of rebel leaders and said nothing about civil rights or suffrage for the freedmen. Most southerners who had participated in the rebellion would be given amnesty and full pardon, “with restoration of all property, except as to slaves.” In order to vote or assume office, all they had to do was pledge “loyalty to the Union and support for emancipation.” Leading Confederate officials and “owners of taxable property valued at more than \$20,000 were required to apply individually for Presidential pardons.”¹⁰⁷

Northern reporter Whitelaw Reid, who had been traveling through the southern states since early May, noticed a “marked change in tone” following Johnson’s announcement. “The moment they heard of that proclamation, the late Rebels began to take courage on the question of suffrage, and to suspect that they were not so helpless as they imagined.” Despite the fact that the \$20,000 clause affected almost the entire southern ruling class, they began to “imagine that the President was willing to concede to them more power than they had dared to hope. It was the old

¹⁰⁶Andrew Johnson, “Speech on Vice-Presidential Nomination, June 9, 1864,” in Leroy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Johnson: Volume 6, 1862-1864* (Nashville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 726.

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Johnson, “Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction,” May 29, 1865, in James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the President 1789-1897, Vol. 6* (Washington, D.C.: Authority of Congress, 1902), 310-12.

maxim illustrated once more. They had been offered an inch; they were soon to be seen clamorous for ell[s].”¹⁰⁸

It took a while for Johnson’s about-face to sink in. On June 17, a union meeting in Blackshear asked the President to appoint Hopkins provisional governor of Georgia. Summing up his credentials, the meeting noted that

Col Hopkins has been known throughout the State for the past fifteen years, as the most untiring and uncompromising advocate of the Union of the States. . . . [D]uring the late ruinous and bloody war when others entertaining similar views and principles, but with less nerve and stamina, stood by as it were with mute and pallid lips, he alone presented a political boldness and firmness unsurpassed only by his Excellency, the President of the United States.¹⁰⁹

Instead of selecting Hopkins, President Johnson named James Johnson provisional governor of Georgia. James Johnson had served with the president in the House of Representatives in the 1850s. Like Hopkins, James Johnson was a former Whig and American Party member who had opposed the war. But he had been inactive during the war and had played no role in the 1863 peace movement. Governor Johnson quickly made it know he was not going to make any major changes. In his first public utterance, he “stated that his policy would not be to punish but rather to restore every one to his rights as a citizen. . . . [N]o one would ever be prosecuted for treason after taking the oath.”¹¹⁰

A further indication that no radical changes were in the offing came from former Georgia Governor Brown. Detained by Union authorities, he held a number of discussions with President Johnson in Washington. On June 30, 1865, in a widely publicized letter to the people of Georgia,

¹⁰⁸ Reid, *After the War*, 219-20. See also Hans Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 232-33.

¹⁰⁹ *SDR*, July 10, 1865.

¹¹⁰ Olive Hall Shadgett, “James Johnson, Provisional Governor of Georgia,” *GHQ*, 36, no. 1 (March 1952), 4.

Brown argued that if southerners “act prudently,” “the present Chief Magistrate of the United States . . . will leave the States when re-organized, the undisturbed management of their own internal affairs, including the questions of suffrage, police, the regulation of labor, etc.” He recommended that citizens “take the oath and qualify themselves as voters” and give the Andrew Johnson administration “a generous support.”¹¹¹

By the end of June, the brief window of opportunity that existed for the federal government to tap the anger of many Georgia yeomen and poor whites against the Confederate leadership in April and May had passed. All that government officials offered were much needed provisions of food and clothing. Had they combined that with distribution of land from confiscated plantations to poor whites as well as blacks, sanctions against the top Confederate leaders, and punishment for mistreatment of the freedmen, they stood a chance of beginning to bring disgruntled yeomen and poor whites as well as the freedmen and Georgia’s few real Unionists to their side.

Johnson’s opposition to these measures completely changed the whole class dynamic. But this was not just the policy of the Johnson administration. The northern capitalist class as a whole, including the leadership of the Republican Party, rejected any further assaults on property rights in the South. The brief period of radicalization at the end of the war which had led to grants of forty acres was over.

The change in direction in the North was immediately recognized by planters and their allies in the South. They pushed back hard against any idea of confiscation or punishment of Confederate leaders. They took the offensive against any hope of civil rights or suffrage for

¹¹¹ Joseph E. Brown, “To the people of Georgia,” June 30, 1865, in Allen D. Candler, ed., *The Confederate Records of the State of Georgia, Volume II* (Atlanta: Chas. P. Byrd, 1909), 889, 890.

blacks. Middle-class Georgia “unionists,” pleased with Johnson’s policies, quickly affirmed their support for planter interests and white supremacy. Joshua Hill wrote President Johnson asking that slavery be continued in Georgia for at least another year in order to get in the crops. Emancipation, he argued, should be introduced at a more convenient time for the planters. Addressing a meeting of “Loyal Residents of Savannah,” future Republican leader Colonel Amherst W. Stone, while continuing to demand punishment for the secessionist “fire-eaters,” insisted that “this country was destined by God for the white man” and called for deporting 400,000 blacks to Mexico.¹¹²

In late June the US Army made tiny Blackshear its headquarters in south Georgia under the leadership of Brigadier General Henry Washburn. Hopkins’s stay on Hilton Head undoubtedly played a role in this decision. On July 4, a large crowd from the piney woods counties gathered in Blackshear to take the oath of allegiance and welcome Washburn to his new post. Hopkins chaired the meeting and gave the keynote address. Given the change in sentiment since President Johnson’s announcement at the end of May, he had to be careful in what he said.

Hopkins appealed to Georgia’s patriotic past, its support for “the Constitution, the laws, and the dignity of the Union—which you, and I and most of us loved and defended so well, until treason trampled it in the dust.” He reminded them of the cost of the war: “one million of our countrymen have been slain or died of camp diseases; a large portion of our territory has been desolated; and we incurred a debt of many millions.” Hopkins reminded them that he had “warned you against this trouble.” But, he said, “nothing would satisfy our ambitious and deluded leaders but secession and revolution.” “Where are our leaders now?” he asked. “They

¹¹² Lucien E. Roberts, “The Political Career of Joshua Hill, Georgia Unionist,” *GHQ*, 21, no. 1 (March, 1937), 64-66; *SDH*, June 2, 1865.

have abandoned us in our misfortunes. . . . When I speak of leaders, I allude to the very few seditious bad men, who deceived the generous and confiding masses, and made them unwilling instruments to destroy their country, and enslave us.”¹¹³

In his interview with Sidney Andrews five months later, Hopkins added other details of his speech which were not included in the “verbatim” account published in Savannah newspapers. “We had always boasted of our country as the land of the free and the home of the oppressed,” he said, “while in fact it had been the land of the oppressed and the home of the slave.” He “hoped the war had made it possible for men to be free without regard to color, so that we might boast more truly than England that our flag floats over no slave.” ‘Treasonous’ leaders of the secession movement, freedom for all men “without regard to color”: these were fighting words in Georgia in the summer of 1865. As Hopkins noted in November, “I spoke very cautiously, but what little I said was enough to kill me politically” in the area.¹¹⁴

The threat of violence against those proclaiming support for the Union and black rights in Georgia was amply demonstrated in the July 4 celebration in Savannah. A parade of white and black Union troops, black fire companies, and 250 members of the recently formed Colored Union League was attacked by whites with clubs and stones. One of the black soldiers was critically wounded.¹¹⁵

Hopkins still owned Belleville plantation in McIntosh County. But he had no intention of trying to reestablish himself as a sea-island cotton planter. As the most prominent Unionist on

¹¹³ *SDH*, July 17, 1865.

¹¹⁴ Andrews, *The South Since the War*, 372.

¹¹⁵ Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 238-39.

the Georgia coast, he could play a much more important role and have more influence on government policies—as well as a more secure income—in a federal government post.

He wanted the post of Tax Assessor for Internal Revenue of the First Congressional District, a position which would enable him to maintain and expand contacts throughout the area. The country's first income tax was passed in 1862 to finance the Union war effort. Incomes of \$600 and above were taxed from five to ten percent. In addition, duties were collected on a wide variety of other items; monthly taxes were collected on many business transactions; annual license fees were charged for businesses; and stamp duties were imposed on various documents. With the end of the war, Georgians became liable for this complicated set of taxes, fees, and duties. The tax assessor, along with the assistant assessors and collectors whom he hired, was responsible for compiling lists of all individuals and businesses liable for taxes and then collecting them.¹¹⁶

To win the appointment, Hopkins drew heavily on the contacts he had made on Hilton Head. General Washburn wrote a letter to President Johnson recommending Hopkins for the position. "Colonel Hopkins is one of the few influential men of this State who have remained true to the Government," he said. "Though assailed by persecution and his life threatened, he has been, throughout this contest, an unflinching Union man. . . . He has rendered great assistance to the Federal authorities, and from his high social position, has been enabled to influence largely the restoration of Union sentiment." Similar letters of commendation were written by Lt. Col.

¹¹⁶ Cynthia Fox, "Income Tax Records of the Civil War Years," *Genealogy Notes*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Winter 1986), accessed October 9, 2018 at www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1986/winter/civil-war-tax-records.html.

Thompson and by Wylly Woodbridge, recently appointed Collector of Customs at the Port of Savannah. The recommendations were endorsed by Major General Gillmore.¹¹⁷

Armed with these letters of recommendation, on July 21 Hopkins left for Washington. In order to assume the office, he had to take the ironclad oath (also called the test oath). Adopted by Congress in July 1862, it required that all candidates for federal office swear that they had “never voluntarily borne arms against the United States” or supported the Confederacy. Hopkins discussed the question with long-serving Supreme Court Justice James Wayne, a Union Democrat from Savannah. As Hopkins noted later, “It was under the advice of Judge Wayne that I took the test oath.” Hopkins’s appointment was ratified by President Johnson. He returned on August 14 and opened a tax assessor’s office inside military headquarters at Blackshear.¹¹⁸

Over the summer and fall of 1865, the Rebel revival picked up speed. Planters used force and violence to keep the freedpeople at work on their plantations. Whipping and other forms of corporal punishment were widespread. They began evicting the disabled, the elderly, and single women with children, “all those whose labor they doubted would turn a measurable profit.” Planters kidnapped preteen and teenage boys from their parents for years-long “apprenticeships,” under “codes leftover from slavery or reworked under freedom.”¹¹⁹

Southern newspapers were filled with letters of opposition to “negro suffrage and negro equality.” This was a “white man’s country,” they insisted. Articles defended the right of

¹¹⁷ Applications for Positions and Internal Revenue Collectors and Assessors, 1863-1910, Assessor, Ga., 1st Dist., Charles H. Hopkins, RG56, NA.

¹¹⁸ *SDR*, July 22 and Aug. 15, 1865; Hopkins to Sumner, Dec. 19, 1867.

¹¹⁹ Susan E. O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 155, 157.

secession in the name of state's rights and opposed the imprisonment of Confederate President Davis and other leaders. By early August, the *Savannah Daily Republican*, a paper which strongly supported President Johnson's policies, was lamenting the turn in the situation. "Within the last six weeks considerable open insolence has been manifested in the public places of our city towards loyal people," complained editor John Hayes. "It is almost impossible of late for a Unionist to frequent a public place without receiving an insult." A follow-up article bemoaned "the almost universal hostility to the United States Government, a feeling of bitter hatred and revenge pervading throughout the South."¹²⁰

President Johnson began removing black troops from southern cities and town. By September, he was granting pardons wholesale to wealthy southerners, sometimes dozens in a single day. He replaced Republican and career military officers with Union Democrats who shared his views. The Army of the South on Hilton Head and the army command in Blackshear were both eliminated. In late June, he placed Brigadier General James Steedman, a Union Democrat from Ohio, in charge of the newly created Department of Georgia. Washburn mustered out of the Army in August, Gillmore in December.

The political shakeup quickly extended to the Freedmen's Bureau. General Saxton had vigorously carried out the distribution of Sherman grants to the freedmen on the coast as well as beginning land distribution under the provisions of the Freedmen's Bureau Act. One of Saxton's assistant commissioners, Brigadier General Edward A. Wild, pursued a similar agenda in central Georgia, including confiscation of the estate of Georgia's leading fire-eater, Robert Toombs in Wilkes County. Under pressure from Georgia planters, from Steedman, and from Lt. Col. Joseph Fullerton, a Johnson supporter and the adjutant general of the Freedmen's Bureau, Commissioner

¹²⁰ *SDR*, July 8, Aug. 5 and 8, 1865.

O. O. Howard removed Wild and reduced Saxton's role in Georgia to oversight of the barrier islands. Brigadier General Davis Tillson, who had imposed labor contracts on reluctant freedmen in Tennessee, became the new Georgia director of the Freedmen's Bureau.¹²¹

The Bureau, which had tilted in the direction of the freedmen under Saxton, tilted in the direction of the planters under Tillson. In October, he began recruiting civilian agents, many of them planters, to represent the Bureau at the local level. To force unemployed freedpeople to work, Tillson slashed all forms of public assistance. He shut down government camps and "reduced the number of government rations issued to Savannah's black poor by more than half in less than a month." "By early December," Susan O'Donovan points out, "Bureau agents were busily sweeping out of the state's cities and up-country neighborhoods any black people with no visible means of employment. Doubling as labor brokers on behalf of planters to the south and the west . . . they forcibly transported hundreds of out-of-work former slaves to Mississippi, Alabama, and elsewhere." In Georgia as in South Carolina, by the end of the year Tillson had pieced together "a contract labor code enforced by written passes to authorize travel or trade, vagrancy punishments, armed pickets, and military arrests."¹²²

On July 13, in his first proclamation to the people of Georgia, Governor Johnson declared that there would be no distribution of private property and any attempt to seize Rebel property would be met by "speedy and merited punishment." In early August, he ruled out any purge of city and county officials. All civil officers who had taken the oath were allowed to remain in

¹²¹ For more on Edward Wild's actions in Georgia, see Frances H. Casstevens, *Edward A. Wild and the African Brigade in the Civil War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2003), Chapter XIII.

¹²² O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 168; Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 78.

office, so the wartime power structure of rebel officials would remain in place at the local level.¹²³

Governor Johnson's main task was to organize a constitutional convention. Only white men who had taken the oath of allegiance were eligible to vote or serve as convention delegates. Delegates were tasked with acknowledging the end of slavery, repealing the ordinances of secession, and repudiating payment of the Confederate debt. Once these three tasks were accomplished, Georgia would hold elections for state as well as federal offices. If all went well, Georgia's newly-elected senators and representatives would be accepted into Congress and the state would be returned to full powers within the Union.

Voting for Georgia's convention delegates took place in early October 1865. The state's top Rebel leaders had not yet received their pardons and could not run. Delegates included many former Whigs who had opposed secession in 1861 but supported the Confederacy once the war began. When the convention opened on October 25, Herschel Johnson was elected president. A former governor of Georgia, he had served in the Confederate Senate during the war. Charles Jenkins was made chairman of the steering committee of the convention. A prominent judge, Jenkins had been appointed justice of the state Supreme Court during the war. Ex-Governor Brown continued to live in the executive mansion in Milledgeville and was an honored guest on the floor of the convention throughout.

This was not a convention which would entertain a discussion of confiscation of planters' estates or civil rights for the freedmen. The main difference from Georgia's 1861 secession convention was that in 1865 the state was a conquered territory under the control of the Union

¹²³ James Johnson, "Proclamation. To the People of Georgia," July 13, 1865 and "Proclamation. To the People of Georgia," Aug. 7, 1865, in Candler, ed., *Confederate Records, Volume IV*, 16, 19-20.

army. Union military officers and other federal officials along with northern journalists were at the convention reporting every detail of the proceedings to their respective audiences in the North.

Hopkins retained considerable support in the First District. He and a close ally, G. M. T. Ware, were elected as delegates from Pierce County. Hopkins vowed that despite all the threats against him, he was “as unyielding as ever” in his support for the Union. He hoped that the presence of Union officials would stiffen the spines of some members, particularly the twenty-five percent of delegates from north Georgia and the piney woods, to take a stand against the rebel leaders who were responsible for the war. He spoke early on the second day of the convention. Taking advantage of his new post as federal tax assessor, he presented a resolution requesting the state make a full accounting of cotton it had purchased during the war. This was a controversial issue. Brown and his friends were widely suspected of using their political offices for personal gain in the war, and the files of the state government’s large wartime cotton purchases had disappeared.¹²⁴

Rebel delegates were not about to let issues like Confederate wartime irregularities or Unionist “traitors” like Hopkins dominate the convention. Shortly after Hopkins spoke, Edward Anderson—the Savannah war hero accused of a war crime by Hopkins and other Pierce County citizens in 1863—presented a resolution asking President Johnson to pardon Jefferson Davis and Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens, a native Georgian. The motion was immediately amended to include pardons for all Confederate political prisoners. By making

¹²⁴ *SDR*, Sept. 22, 1865; “Journal of the Convention of 1865” in Candler, ed., *Confederate Records, Volume IV*, 143; Joseph H. Parks, *Joseph E. Brown of Georgia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 174, 350-55.

Confederate prisoners a major issue at the convention, Anderson and his cohorts aimed to squelch any notion of secessionist responsibility for the war and isolate Hopkins.¹²⁵

Hopkins was placed in a tough spot. Anderson's resolution was a challenge he had to take on. He had accused Davis and other Confederate leaders of responsibility for the war and treason, notably in his July 4 speech in Blackshear. If delegates demanded that Davis be pardoned, he feared that any hope of mounting serious opposition to the rebel leadership at the convention was lost. He was alone once again, confronting the rebel leaders on a terrain of their choosing.

Hopkins was up to the challenge. He began by arguing that the ex-Confederate president should answer for his actions: "Let us not attempt to rescue Jefferson Davis from the penalty of the law, if he be guilty. Rather let him prove his innocence before the courts, or let him stand convicted of the highest crime known not only to the laws of the United States but to the laws of the world." That put the question of treason on the table.¹²⁶

He then addressed the hope of the secessionist leadership to suppress an open discussion of the disasters which resulted from secession and war. "I would forget all the past," said Hopkins. He continued: "I would not remind you of the blood that has been shed, the sacrifices that have been made, the property that has been lost, nor of the widows and orphans that overflow the land. No, sir let all that pass." That put the disaster caused by the war on the table.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Candler, ed., *Confederate Records, Volume IV*, 144.

¹²⁶ *SDR*, Nov. 2, 1865.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

Hopkins insisted he was not a vindictive man and pointed to his willingness to sign a petition for the release of lesser officials like General Hugh Mercer or Alexander Stephens. But he would not sign a petition for the release of Jefferson Davis. “He was the head of the Confederate Government of this country,” Hopkins pointed out. “We have been called traitors. He stood as the representative of that principle, and I wish him to be tried by the law of the country, in order that it may be known whether it is treason to secede or not.” If he were Jefferson Davis, added Hopkins, “I would demand a trial and be satisfied with nothing else.” Hopkins was throwing down a challenge to Davis and the secessionist leaders: if you insist that secession is right, you should welcome a trial. That was the manly, the honorable thing to do.¹²⁸

“Unfortunately,” Hopkins concluded, “we followed the advice of able statesmen who deceived us. They told us there would be no war, no bloodshed; twenty men could whip one hundred! Where are they now in this hour of our affliction?” As for attempting to shield Jefferson Davis from justice, “I will never do it so long as I have power to say no, no.”¹²⁹

Hopkins was immediately answered by Confederate Colonel J. T. Matthews, a diehard secessionist crippled in Confederate service. The past, “with all its griefs, its calamities, its sorrows,” said Matthews, is “gone forever.” President Johnson “has shown himself to be in favor of mercy and pardon.” “The gentlemen whose pardon is sought,” he insisted, “have been guilty of no higher offence that we have been. . . . We have, in a struggle of four years, endeavored to maintain what we thought was the right, and illustrated Southern valor.” Now “the struggle has

¹²⁸ *SDR*, Nov. 2, 1865. General Mercer had been in charge of the defense of Savannah.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

been given up. We have illustrated Southern manhood by returning in good faith to the Union of our fathers.”¹³⁰

Matthews’s comments were repeatedly interrupted by loud applause on the floor and in the gallery. Savannah delegate Solomon Cohen quickly added his voice in favor of pardoning Davis. Anderson’s resolution passed by voice vote. Four days later, Anderson read the statement requesting executive clemency for Davis and the other Confederate leaders. “Jefferson Davis was elevated to his high position by our suffrages, and in response to our wishes,” it read. “He became the exponent of our principles and the leader of our cause. He simply responded to the united voice of his section. If he, then, is guilty, so are we.” The resolution was adopted “without debate or objections.”¹³¹

Though Hopkins was isolated on the question of prosecuting Davis, the opposition of many yeomen whites to the rebel leadership was expressed in a lengthy debate over the Confederate debt. Delegates, many of them Confederate bondholders, spent much of the convention trying to figure out a way for the state to assume the debt. North Georgia lawyer Josiah R. Parrott promised to “resist here and everywhere all efforts to tax the poor people of the State for the benefit of the Shylocks who hold it.” “There are hundreds of men who were in the bullet department of the war, whilst others were in the speculating or stay-at-home departments,” he noted. “Those in the bullet department had their houses burnt, their fencing all destroyed, their

¹³⁰ *SDR*, Nov. 2, 1865. In his speech against pardoning Davis, Hopkins had referred hopefully to President Andrew Johnson as “another Andrew Jackson,” who “has manifested his iron will on many occasions.” Matthews’s assessment of Johnson was far more accurate.

¹³¹ *SDH*, Nov. 1, 1865; Andrews, *The South Since the War*, 250, 252; Candler, ed., *Confederate Records, Volume IV*, 198.

horses, cows, mules, hogs, and other property taken from them.” The state, said Parrott, should never “pay a dollar of the debt created in the effort to debase the old flag.” Under pressure from President Johnson, after days of failed resolutions on the question, delegates eventually declared Confederate war debts null and void.¹³²

Having fulfilled the minimum requirements President Johnson had laid down, Governor Johnson announced that new statewide elections would be held in one week’s time. Charles Jenkins ran unopposed for governor. Two days before the vote, Hopkins announced his candidacy for Congress from the first district, running against the fire-eating secessionist Solomon Cohen. Cohen won by an overwhelming margin. Votes for Hopkins were in the single digits in several counties.¹³³

It had been only six months since the rout of the Confederacy, only half a year since deserters had roamed the state, cursing the secessionist leaders. Six months later, and the Johnson-Seward policy of restoration was reaping its fruits.¹³⁴

In a widely publicized speech in September 1865, Thaddeus Stevens, the Radical Republican leader in the House of Representatives, argued that “the Southern States have been despotisms, not governments of the people. It is impossible that any practical equality of rights can exist where a few thousand men monopolize the whole landed property. . . . How can republican institutions, free schools, free churches, free social intercourse, exist in a mingled community of nabobs and serfs: of the owners of twenty thousand acre manors with lordly

¹³² Andrews, *The South Since the War*, 273.

¹³³ *SDH*, Nov. 13, 1865; *SDR*, Nov. 16, 1865; *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, Nov. 22, 1865.

¹³⁴ Secretary of State William H. Seward had been Abraham Lincoln’s closest advisor; he played the same role in the Andrew Johnson cabinet.

palaces, and the occupants of narrow huts inhabited by low white trash?” Stevens proposed “to confiscate all the estate of every rebel belligerent whose estate was worth \$10,000, or whose land exceeded two hundred acres in quantity. . . . Divide this land into convenient farms. Give, if you please, forty acres to each adult male freedman.”¹³⁵

Reframing an expression used six months earlier by Reverend Beecher, Stevens argued that

If a majority of Congress can be found wise and firm enough to declare the Confederate States a conquered enemy, reconstruction will be easy and legitimate; and the friends of freedom will long rule in the councils of the nation. If restoration prevails the prospect is gloomy, and the new ‘lords will make new laws’. . . . Under ‘restoration’ every rebel State will send rebels to Congress, and they, with their allies in the North, will control Congress, and occupy the White House.¹³⁶

After Georgia’s Constitutional Convention of 1865, Hopkins had little hope that change in the status quo would come from within the South. Everything depended on whether or not the Republicans listened to Stevens and adopted a policy of confiscation and land distribution. He was anxious to add his voice to the discussion. His chance came in the form of an interview with northern reporter Sidney Andrews.

Andrews had been sent by the Boston *Daily Advertiser* and the Chicago *Tribune* to report on the constitutional conventions held in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. He looked at the South through the middle-class lens of most Radical Republicans of the period. He judged the negro to be “lazy” and “improvident,” prone to thievery. He deemed the rice plantation blacks in coastal Georgia “the most degraded specimens of the race I have anywhere

¹³⁵ Thaddeus Stevens, “Address Delivered to the Citizens of Lancaster, Sept. 6, 1865,” in *NYT*, Sept. 10, 1865.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

found.” As for the poor whites, he considered them ignorant and bestial, the “lowest in the scale of human existence.” The future of the South, he believed, depended on educated, well-to-do whites, men like Georgia’s newly elected governor Charles Jenkins.¹³⁷

Hopkins came to Andrews’s attention at Georgia’s constitutional convention. In his article dated October 31, 1865, he paraphrased Hopkins’s speech against pardoning Jefferson Davis. He was clearly impressed by Hopkins, whom he described as one of the few “out-and-out Union” men at the convention. In late November 1865, while travelling in coastal Georgia, Andrews sought Hopkins out to learn more about his views.¹³⁸

Hopkins was not identified as the person being interviewed. His reasons for anonymity were obvious. As he explained to Andrews, “If I should say what I honestly believe, I should be killed if it ever got out that I wrote it.” Hopkins’s identity was disguised with two misleading references. The interviewee was described as “a lawyer by profession, and . . . among the leading members of the bar in his section.” Also that he “was in the Rebel army about three years.” It is possible Hopkins was licensed to practice as a lawyer. In the 1870s, after assuming the office of Ordinary (probate court judge) in McIntosh County, he listed his profession as lawyer. But he was certainly not a “leading member of the bar” in 1865. As for Hopkins being “in the Rebel army,” his only military service in the war was his mandatory membership in the Georgia militia from 1862 to 1865.¹³⁹

But there were sufficient clues in Andrews’s description and the interview itself to clearly identify Hopkins. The interviewee was described as a middle-aged gentleman, a native Georgian,

¹³⁷ Andrews, *The South Since the War*, 382, 369, 325-26.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 248-49.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 369.

and a Union man. A former member of the Georgia legislature, he was a well-known public speaker who had shared platforms with leading Georgia politicians Howell Cobb, Ben Hill, and Lucius J. Gartrell. Andrews noted that his interviewee's "advice is found of value by the officer in command in his city." And in the interview itself, the anonymous gentleman referred to his "speech of last Fourth of July," noting that "what little I said was enough to kill me politically in this county." There was only one man in coastal Georgia in November 1865 who fitted that description. That man was Charles Hopkins.¹⁴⁰

Hopkins's interview was extraordinary in a number of ways. A white southerner and former slaveowner, speaking during a period of heightened animosity against blacks, he described the conditions faced by the freedmen with great detail and empathy:

I tell you he's not got his freedom yet, and isn't likely to get it right away. Why, he can't even live without the consent of the white man! He has no land; he can make no crops except the white man gives him a chance. He hasn't any timber; he can't get a stick of wood without leave from a white man. We crowd him into the fewest possible employments, and then he can scarcely get work anywhere but in the rice-fields and cotton plantations of a white man who has owned him and given up slavery only at the point of the bayonet. Even in this city he can't get a pail of water from a well without asking a white man for the privilege. He can hardly breathe, and he certainly can't live in a house, unless a white man gives his consent. What sort of freedom is that? . . . 'T isn't such whippings as he told you

¹⁴⁰ Andrews, *The South Since the War*, 369-73. Howell Cobb was Constitutional Union (CU) candidate for governor of Georgia in 1850; Hopkins was CU candidate for Senate in the First District. They attended statewide CU conventions and campaigned together. Benjamin Hill was the American Party candidate for governor in 1856. Hopkins was a delegate to American Party conventions and campaigned for Hill in the First District. Lucius J. Gartrell was a prominent Whig member of the Georgia House of Representatives from 1847 through 1850 and supported CU candidates in 1850. Hopkins was one of the most prominent Whig politicians on the coast during the 1840s. He and Gartrell attended statewide meetings together. On Gartrell, see Wendy Hamand Venet, *A Changing Wind: Commerce & Conflict in Civil War Atlanta* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 17. The "officer in command of his city" was, of course, General Henry Washburn in Blackshear.

about that most wrong the negro; it's the small, endless, mean little injustice of every day that's going to kill him off.¹⁴¹

Andrews, like most northern Radicals, was enamored with the notion of “free labor,” the idea that the blacks, now free, would be able to negotiate contracts as equals with the planters. Both the planters and the freedmen would profit from the system. The freedmen could save up, begin buying land, and eventually hire laborers of their own. With the addition of the ballot, blacks could “secure that freedom.”¹⁴²

Hopkins argued that Andrews's notions of black freedom and equality were totally illusory in the postbellum South of 1865. “Our capital is all in the hands of a few, and invested in great plantations. Our labor is all in the hands of a race supremely ignorant, and against whom we all have a strong prejudice. In my opinion, you can't reconcile these two interests unless you put the labor in subjection to the capital, that is, unless you give the white man control of the negro.”¹⁴³

The freedmen had no land, no timber, not even a house. “In many respects he is worse off than he was before you made him free, for then the property interest of his master protected him, and now his master's hand as well as the hand of everyone else is against him.” As for the freedmen's right to vote, “What does he want of a vote? He wouldn't know how to use it, and 't wouldn't bring him anything to eat or wear if he had a dozen.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Andrews, *The South Since the War*, 370. For the full text of the interview, see Appendix A.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 371.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 372.

There was no hope that “capital and labor will reconcile themselves” in the postwar South, Hopkins insisted. “You Northern men can't see much of the real feeling here.” “There isn't one planter in a thousand who would sell” a freedman any land. With their control of the state, the planters “can establish any system of crimes and punishments they please,” Hopkins explained. They will “make the penal code take [the negro] back into the condition of slavery. It'll be called ‘involuntary servitude for the punishment of crime,’ but it won't differ much from slavery.” “The landed aristocracy have always been the curse of the State,” Hopkins continued. “Till that is broken down there can be no real freedom here for either the negro or the poor white. *The result of the war gave you a chance you never will get again to overthrow that monopoly.*”¹⁴⁵

In the American republican tradition, land ownership was the key to genuine freedom and democracy. Hopkins and Stevens both ascribed to that point of view. “Give a man a piece of land, let him have a cabin of his own upon his own lot, and then you make him free. Civil rights are good for nothing, the ballot is good for nothing, till you make some men of every class landholders,” Hopkins pointed out.¹⁴⁶

Hopkins called for confiscation of the leading rebels’ estates and selling the land to the “highest and best bidders. That would have thrown some of the land into other large plantations, but it would have been fair, and would have given the negroes and the poor whites a chance to live.” He knew that relying on only the freedmen or the freedmen plus the southern loyalists would not unite sufficient numbers to have a chance of replacing the rule of the planter aristocracy. Union supporters had to win the white majority to their side, a majority which included hundreds of thousands of small farmers and poor whites who had fought for the

¹⁴⁵ Andrews, *The South Since the War*, 371-72. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 372.

Confederacy. His work with the deserters in the piney woods had shown him the fighting capacity of these men. The common desire of poor whites and freedmen for land would, he hoped, begin to overcome the whites' racial prejudices. What Hopkins drew was a class line—freedmen plus poor whites should receive access to land—rather than exclusions based on racial or political criteria.¹⁴⁷

For a similar reason, Hopkins was opposed to enforcing blanket sanctions on all Rebel officeholders. “Your test oath is a bad thing. It sets an ugly precedent, and it will keep our best men out of Congress. I wish you could have reached your ends in some other way.” He could not have imagined how the oath would be turned against him in a few months' time.¹⁴⁸

Hopkins appealed to northern Republicans and the Union army as the only hope for bringing genuine freedom to the blacks. “There's an almost impassible gulf between the negro and freedom unless the government aids him,” he insisted. “Take the troops away, and off the great lines of travel there would be a reign of terror in a month.” Or again, “take the troops away, and his chance wouldn't be as good as a piece of light-wood in a house on fire.” Federal government action was also the only hope for eliminating the planter aristocracy: “You should have carried out your confiscation policy,” he insisted. “Mercy to the individual is death to the State; and in pardoning all the leading men, the President is killing the free State he might have built here.”

¹⁴⁷ Andrews, *The South Since the War*, 372. Hopkins's views about who should receive the land were broader than those of other advocates of confiscation and land distribution. In 1864, Vice President Johnson had argued that confiscated land be given to “honest, industrious men,” by which he meant white men. Article Four of the Freedmen's Bureau Act called for selling confiscated land to “freedmen and loyalist whites.”

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 373.

Hopkins's views certainly impressed Sidney Andrews. He quoted them "almost word for word" and gave them more space than any other interview in his four-hundred-page book. Despite his apparent agreement with some aspects of Hopkins's *analysis* of the South—the pervasive anti-black racism, the aims of the planter aristocracy—he disagreed completely with Hopkins's *solutions*: confiscation of the planters' property and distribution to the blacks and poor whites. In the paragraph immediately following the interview, Andrews declared himself surer than ever "*of the opposite policy, that the ballot in the hand of every man white and black, is the only method of securing the rights of the humbler classes of all colors in the South. . . . The citizen, with the ballot in his hand, is a king in his own right, to whom all things are possible.*" The next few years would see which of these counterposed solutions was more realistic.¹⁴⁹

At the moment Hopkins gave the interview, he believed the freedmen to be powerless and too ignorant to be much of an independent factor. One of his arguments for dismissing suffrage for the black man was that "I know too well how he can be wound round the finger of a plausible white man." Hopkins saw the freedmen as the beneficiaries of Republican policies and northern troops, but not as leading participants in their own liberation. The revolution he envisioned would be made for freedmen but not by them. As for his own role, he now felt

¹⁴⁹ Andrews, *The South Since the War*, 370, 373. Emphasis added. A few months later, in Washington DC, Andrews addressed Congress's Joint Committee on Reconstruction hearing testimony on the situation in the South. He emphasized the importance he attached to his interview with Charles Hopkins by reading almost all of it into the Congressional Record. See testimony of Sidney Andrews, April 19, 1866, in *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction, at the First Session, Thirty-Ninth Congress, Part III: Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), 174-75.

confident enough to present his views, but only anonymously and to a northern audience, not openly in his own name in Georgia.¹⁵⁰

Following his interview with Andrews, Hopkins retreated from direct involvement in politics for over a year. The revolutionary possibilities which existed at the end of the war had passed. In Washington, Stevens's confiscation proposals were rejected by his Republican colleagues. In Georgia, former secessionists were in full control of the Georgia legislature. Saxton, Washburn, and Gillmore were gone, replaced by Tillson who was recruiting planters and rebels into the Freedmen's Bureau. Hopkins focused instead on his work as federal tax assessor. He moved his family and his tax assessor's office from Blackshear to Savannah.

Hopkins continued to support blacks' fight for land. In a letter to General Tillson in January 1866, he offered to sell his Belleville plantation to the Freedmen's Bureau. He cited section 6 of the Freedmen's Bureau bill: "The Commissioner shall purchase lands required for support of dependent freedmen and refugees and build asylums and schools; Congress to provide appropriations for the same, and the lands not to be sold at less than cash." He noted that Belleville was "not occupied by any freed men," and that "it is one of the most healthy and beautiful places in the South and peculiarly adapted to the wants and habits of the colored people." Up and down the coast, planters refused to allow the freedmen to buy or lease any land at all (since they were needed for labor) and instead sold or leased their rice or sea island cotton plantations to northern capitalists. Hopkins's offer to sell Belleville to the Freedmen's Bureau for

¹⁵⁰ Andrews, *The South Since the War*, 370.

the benefit of deserving freedmen was an act of solidarity as well as possibly providing him some income.¹⁵¹

Hopkins's views of the freedmen would evolve over the course of the next two years. Within weeks of his interview with Andrews, a central figure in that evolution, Aaron A. Bradley, a former slave, landed in Savannah.

¹⁵¹ C H Hopkins to Brig Gen D. Tillson, 30 Jan. 1866 Unregistered Letters Received, ser. 632, GA Asst. Comr., RG 105. On the planters' refusal to lease or sell land to the freedmen, see Manuel Gottlieb, "The Land Question in Georgia," in *Science & Society*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Summer, 1939), 383-87.

5 DECEMBER 1865–FEBRUARY 1866, AARON BRADLEY: ‘MOVE OFF YOUR LAND ONLY AT THE POINT OF A BAYONET’

On August 1, there was a “general gathering of the colored people” from Provincetown, Fall River, and Boston in Myrick’s Grove, Massachusetts to celebrate emancipation in the US and the West Indies. The 1,500 people in attendance listened to speeches from black leaders from the area. Their central theme was the demand for black suffrage. The main speaker in the afternoon was Robert Hamilton, editor of the *Anglo-African*. The newspaper, published in New York City, was the most important African American journal of the time, full of debate and discussion on the burning issues of the day. Hamilton “disapproved of censuring the President . . . believing that he intended to do right.” Aaron A. Bradley, a resident of Boston, “combated Mr. Hamilton’s position, and spoke in severe terms of the President’s course.”¹⁵²

Hamilton asked Bradley to elaborate on his views in the *Anglo-African*. Bradley submitted an article titled “The Elective Franchise” to the newspaper. The title attributed to the article by the editor was misleading. Bradley’s focus was not on black suffrage. The article was an all-out attack on Johnson and a call for Congress to take control of Reconstruction away from the President.¹⁵³

Bradley began by contending that, based on the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution, people irrespective of color were automatically full citizens of the United States,

¹⁵² *New Bedford Evening Standard*, Aug. 2, 1865; *The Christian Recorder*, Aug. 19, 1865.

¹⁵³ *Weekly Anglo-African*, Aug. 12, 1865. It is possible that this is the only article Bradley ever submitted for publication in his own name. In an introductory note, Hamilton described Bradley as “a colored gentleman we have known for years.”

with the right to vote, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and the right to bear arms. As early as 1850, Frederick Douglass had quoted the Constitution to make many of the same points.

Bradley insisted that by seceding and waging war against the United States, the belligerent states had lost all rights held by states in the Union and should now be treated as conquered territories. The Constitution authorized Congress, not the president, to determine the disposition of such territories. Here Bradley aligned himself with the positions of Radical Republicans Stevens, Sumner, and Wendell Phillips.

In appointing state officials and organizing state conventions, Bradley argued, President Johnson had usurped the “legislative and judicial powers of the free people, Congress, and the Supreme Court.” The Confiscation Act of 1862 disqualified secessionist leaders from ever holding “any office under the United States.” Why then was Johnson appointing these men — “drenched with loyal blood from the hearts of our first born white and black sons”— as governors, legislators, judges, and sheriffs in the secessionist states? Bradley accused Johnson of violating the Constitution and laws of the United States, of “gross neglect and usurpation,” of providing “aid and comfort to persons whose hands are yet red with the best loyal blood of the United States,” of “ignominiously humiliating a great and powerful nation.”¹⁵⁴

Bradley took no position on the question of confiscation or land for the freedmen. But he interpreted the Second Confiscation Act (adopted by Congress in July 1862) as meaning that “all the cotton, sugar, corn, wheat, etc produced by the freed men and women since July 17th, 1862 belongs to them.” He also argued, like Stevens, that “the whole war debt can be paid by the territory we have conquered by war.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ *Weekly Anglo-African*, Aug. 12, 1865.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

This was powerful stuff. Bradley's constitutional arguments for black citizenship and treating the secessionist states as conquered territories were as compelling as those of other prominent Radical Republicans of the time, white or black. An introductory note by Hamilton took his distance from Bradley's arguments, calling them "too harsh," and objecting to Bradley's characterization of Johnson using words like "usurp" and "plot." Nevertheless, he hoped that "Mr. Bradley's arguments will reach every Congressman and Federal officer." The article was widely circulated in the black community, including in *The Elevator*, an African American weekly published in San Francisco.¹⁵⁶

Bradley's "Elective Franchise" article in the *Anglo-African* was not a work of journalistic commentary. It was a manifesto, a revolutionary program. In it, Bradley moved beyond purely legal arguments into the political arena. While the leaders of the middle-class black community and most Republicans in the North were holding their fire on President Johnson, hoping for the best, Bradley launched an all-out attack on the President. The stance adopted in this manifesto would guide his actions in the days and years to come. Bradley knew the risks he ran in putting such extreme positions in print, but he was not one to bow to political expediency. He would follow the logic of his arguments through to the end. He was, in short, a dangerous man.

Aaron was born in Edgefield County, South Carolina, the son of a slave mother and a white father. Trained as a shoemaker in Augusta, Georgia, he escaped slavery at the age of 19. He wound up in the early 1830s in Williamsburg, New York, across the East River from New York City, and took Bradley as his surname. Self-educated and ambitious, Bradley was determined to become a lawyer as his entrée into the black upper class. He insisted on

¹⁵⁶ *Weekly Anglo-African*, Aug. 12, 1865; *The Elevator*, Sept. 9, 1865. *Elevator* editor Philip Bell wrote that "we have known Mr. Bradley for years; he is a thorough-bred lawyer and a well educated man."

succeeding on his own, without help from the nascent black-rights organizations of the time. But Williamsburg and neighboring Brooklyn were strongholds of the openly racist Democratic Party. Bradley's failed attempt to parachute himself into a case with the help of a white colleague brought him to their attention. His persistence in following his dream made him a target. In the early 1850s, he was framed up on the newly criminalized charge of "seduction" and served two years doing hard time in the already notorious Sing Sing prison in upstate New York.

Once released from Sing Sing, Bradley moved to Boston, a more favorable location for realizing his dream of becoming a lawyer. In 1856, still operating on his own, he was admitted to the bar in Suffolk County, Massachusetts, becoming only the third black lawyer to be certified in the state. Consigned to representing an impoverished clientele, Bradley's financial accounting left a lot to be desired. Accused of theft by a client, racist lawyers and policemen affiliated with the Democratic Party demanded he be disbarred. When his conviction for seduction and time served in Sing Sing were brought up during the trial, Bradley responded in an emotional and irrational manner and signed an affidavit swearing he had never served time in prison. He lost his license. Disbarred and disgraced, harassed by the police, Bradley spent the next five years unsuccessfully trying to reverse his disbarment.

The outbreak of the Civil War and especially the Emancipation Proclamation changed Bradley's outlook. He decided to use his legal training to support the cause of equal rights for blacks. In November 1863, he submitted a carefully researched petition to the Massachusetts Legislature to allow blacks to become officers in the state militia. In January 1864, the Massachusetts Senate amended the state statutes by striking out the word "white." Bradley was given full credit for the change.

As the war came to an end, Bradley followed closely the discussion and debates in Congress and the press about what was to become of the South after emancipation. He studied the Articles of Confederation, the US Constitution, the Dred Scott decision, and Congress's Second Confiscation Act of 1862. He made himself into an expert on the legal questions surrounding Reconstruction. A former slave himself, he read with alarm the newspaper accounts of the growing violence against the freedmen in the South. The result of these studies was the "Elective Franchise" article.

Bradley's attacks on President Johnson and his characterization of the southern secessionist leaders as traitors did not go unnoticed by his political opponents and police in Boston. They let him know they were still in charge by charging him with assault and throwing him in jail. On October 28, 1865, he was sentenced to pay \$25 and to remain in jail until paid.¹⁵⁷

Bradley decided to leave Boston and move to Savannah. He would continue his fight to be recognized as a lawyer. He would use his legal skills to help blacks defend their rights. For income, he would open a school for freedmen. He spent his last weeks in Boston collecting letters of introduction from prominent black leaders.¹⁵⁸

Bradley was fifty years old. In appearance, he was described as a "diminutive," "freckled," mulatto with a light complexion ("a saffron hue"). His hair was "bushy" or "curly"

¹⁵⁷ *Boston Evening Transcript*, Oct. 28, 1865.

¹⁵⁸ Bradley may have been encouraged in his decision to open a school by an *Anglo-African* article entitled "The Southern Field and the Proper Agents," which called on northern blacks to go south and open schools for the newly freed slaves. Most white teachers, however well meaning, did not believe in racial equality, said the article. Educated abolitionist blacks from the North were needed to provide the proper education for their southern brothers and sisters. See *Weekly Anglo-African*, Sept. 9, 1865.

and already turning gray. He often wore spectacles. He was “sharp-faced, quick-eyed, restless.” Though he had still not accomplished his goal of becoming a lawyer, he considered himself the equal of any white man, an attitude which most whites, and not a few blacks, interpreted as being “impertinent, self-important and insolent.”¹⁵⁹

Bradley himself had only a vague idea of what awaited him in Savannah. It had been 30 years since he had fled the South and slavery. He had spent the last 10 years in a tiny black community in Boston, constantly harassed by the courts and the cops, with little chance of ever regaining his license as a lawyer. One thing he did know. In 1865, the center of the fight for black rights was no longer in the North, but in the South. Bradley was confident that he could help lead that fight.

Bradley could not have picked a better spot to fight for his revolutionary ideas. Historian Karen Bell notes that

President Andrew Johnson's Amnesty Act on May 29, 1865, reversed Sherman's order by allowing the original proprietors to return and claim rights of ownership in change for swearing an oath of allegiance to the Union. Planters began returning to the Ogeechee district in the summer of 1865 during the flooding and draining of rice fields. . . . [Dr. John] Cheves, whose estate consisted of 2,014 acres, applied for restoration to his land in July 1865. By the end of 1865, most of the planters received a presidential pardon and regained “informal possession” of their confiscated lands.¹⁶⁰

Freedmen refused to give up their land to the planters. In some areas they refused to allow their former owners to return to their plantations. Under pressure from the planters, President Johnson ordered Freedmen’s Bureau Commissioner O. O. Howard to go to South

¹⁵⁹ *SDNH*, Dec. 20, 1865 and Dec. 14 and 20 1867; *Athens Southern Watchman*, Jan. 19, 1870, citing the *Augusta Weekly Constitutionalist*, Jan. 19, 1870.

¹⁶⁰ Bell, “Ogeechee Troubles.” 380-81.

Carolina and tell the freedmen they had to return the land to the planters. On October 19, 1865, Howard, accompanied by other military officers and a representative of the planters, met with the freedmen on Edisto Island south of Charleston. Sixty-six plantations on the island were now the property of nearly 550 freedmen families. Some freedmen had wartime certificates, some held title, but most held Freedmen's Bureau leases. Howard told them the land was not theirs, that they had to give it up to the rebel owners or to the northern capitalists to whom it was leased or sold.¹⁶¹

Less than a year earlier, the first-ever meeting of the government with representatives of the freedmen had resulted in the government giving them rebel land. Now the Freedmen's Bureau, the organization entrusted to help the freedmen gain access to the land, was in charge of forcing them to give it up! This betrayal opened a division between the freedmen and the Freedmen's Bureau, as well as between the freedmen and the government, which would be hard to heal. Three Edisto freedmen accused the government of befriending "[i]ts late enemies" and neglecting "to observe the principles of common faith between Its self and us Its allies," leaving the freedmen "in a more unpleasant condition" than before the war. "We have not been treacherous," they insisted, and "we shall not be slaves." On South Carolina islands, freedpeople's police forces took "direct action" with a "military flavor" to prevent planters from taking back their confiscated estates.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ William S. McFeely, *Yankee Stepfather: General O. O. Howard and the Freedmen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 140-43.

¹⁶² Protest of the Freedmen of Edisto Island to General Howard, October 20 or 21, 1865 in O. O. Howard to Committee of the Colored People of Edisto Island, October 22, 1865, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, RG 105, NA; Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 98.

On November 19, a white man, Jonathan Holtzclaw, was intercepted by an armed group of fifteen freedmen when he tried to enter an occupied plantation on the Savannah River. The freedmen told Holtzclaw that “they did not intend to let any white men come on ‘their premises’”. They said they understood that the former owners of river plantations intend to reclaim them, but . . . they would never give them up.” Colonel Hiram F. Sickles, sub-assistant commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau in the District of Savannah, arrested the freedmen who had stopped Holtzclaw and ordered them tried before a military commission. He issued a circular demanding that the freedmen living in abandoned properties either reach a settlement with property owners or leave the properties before December 20.¹⁶³

Urban black workers were also inspired by emancipation and the freedmen’s gains in the countryside. In September 1865, forty to sixty black dockworkers in Savannah struck for a wage increase. Earning only \$1.50 a day (compared to the \$3.00 earned by their white counterparts), they demanded a half-dollar increase in pay. A Union Army squad promptly arrested the leaders and dispersed the strikers. The *Savannah Republican* attacked the “ignorant,” “contemptible and dishonorable” freedmen for violating the terms of their contract and argued that “strikes of all kinds are pernicious.” Middle-class leaders of the Savannah Colored Union League also condemned the strike. They appealed to the strikers to join the League and seek other methods of remedying their problems.¹⁶⁴

As the end of the year approached, encouraged by support for confiscation and land voiced by Stevens and others, freedmen across the South became convinced that the new Congress would reverse the positions of the Johnson administration and give them the land they

¹⁶³ *SDH*, Nov. 21, 22, and 24, 1865.

¹⁶⁴ *SDR*, Sept. 5 and 6, 1865; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 241.

believed was theirs by right. Freedmen's yearly contracts were supposed to begin on January 1, 1866. Throughout the South, huge numbers of freedmen refused to sign the contracts being foisted on them by the combined forces of the Union Army, Freedmen's Bureau representatives, and the planters. "Insistently, if quietly, they waited for a superior authority to demonstrate its justice by granting them land."¹⁶⁵

Southern whites looked to the coming of the new year with growing trepidation. Stories of armed freedmen confronting white owners on the sea islands, as well as rumors of militia training and secret meetings of freedmen in the countryside, became magnified into widespread fears of a black insurrection. In Savannah, both daily newspapers printed articles to combat the "popular delusions of freedmen as to ownership of lands." The *Savannah Daily Herald* promoted white fears of black insurrection by publishing long articles on the "terrible atrocities" committed against whites in the recent revolt by negroes in Morant Bay, Jamaica.¹⁶⁶

It was into this charged and increasingly polarized atmosphere that Bradley arrived in Savannah in late November 1865. Bearing letters of introduction from prominent black leaders in Boston, he made the rounds of Savannah's black leaders. His stated purpose was to open a school for the freedmen. He spoke at some of the freedmen's schools already open in the city and found a building suitable for his school. On November 27, Bradley spoke at the First African Baptist Church. He raised money to help repair and furnish his school building. Within a week, he hired four teachers and opened a "Peoples High School" offering day and night classes for

¹⁶⁵ Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 86.

¹⁶⁶ *SDH*, Nov. 21 and 22, 1865.

whites as well as blacks. Bradley claimed 200 students had signed up to attend at a cost of twenty-five cents per week.¹⁶⁷

A week later, Bradley visited the Houston plantation on Skidaway Island where he “addressed the people in large numbers.” The militancy of the freedmen and their insistence on keeping the land convinced Bradley of the importance of this question. Freedmen’s Bureau agents present at the meeting reported that “he counselled resistance to any of the old owners trying to dispossess them—the colored people of occupancy of the lands; stating that they had a right to them.” He raised money to travel to Washington and lobby Congress and “secure for them the lands.” Bradley’s message brought immediate results. “As one result of his teaching,” noted a Bureau official, “the people and Committee on Huger Plantation say that they will not pay tax or toll to us.”¹⁶⁸

In Savannah for only a week, Bradley began advertising a “grand mass meeting of freemen” to be held at the Second African Baptist Church on December 5. The location of the meeting was symbolic. This was the church where General Saxton and Reverend French had met with the blacks less than a year earlier to encourage them to establish black colonies on abandoned lands. The topics to be discussed at the meeting, announced the poster, were “the elective franchise, the homestead, the right of trial by jury and to testify in state courts . . . and

¹⁶⁷ *National Baptist*, Jan. 4, 1866; Aaron A Bradley to his Hon E M Stanton, [late Dec. 1865], B-2 1866, Letters Received, ser. 15, Washington Hdqrs., RG 105 in Steven Hahn, Steven F. Miller, et al, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861 – 1867: Series 3, Volume 1: Land and Labor, 1865* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 473.

¹⁶⁸ W. H. Tiffany to Col H. F. Sickles, 8 Dec. 1865, filed as G-53 1865, Letters Received, ser. 15, Washington Hdqrs., RG 105, in Hahn, *Land and Labor, 1865*, 467-68. Huger was the owner of a plantation along the Savannah River.

that all citizens be equal before the laws of the several states and the United States.” An afternoon and an evening session were planned.¹⁶⁹

News that Bradley was the main speaker traveled fast. Both afternoon and evening meetings were packed, drawing hundreds of freedmen from the countryside as well as black workers from the city. The meetings also attracted the attention of whites working with the freedmen, including leaders of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the American Missionary Association (AMA) and several teachers.

The afternoon meeting began with a sermon by Reverend Frazier, who had been the spokesmen for the blacks at the January meeting with Sherman and Stanton. Frazier, like other middle-class blacks, had begun to adopt Savannah whites’ criticisms of the freedmen. He said he was upset by the sight of “freedmen marching along the streets of Savannah under guard.” He criticized the freedmen for “stealing, falsifying and evil practices.” The freedmen “would not work,” he said, “and were not worthy of the elective franchise.”¹⁷⁰

Bradley begged to differ. Blacks weren’t stealing. “When a man gives his whole services to another, and was hungry, and he took what was necessary to feed himself, he was not a thief.” “All that has been raised within the last few years has been cultivated and produced by you,” he insisted. “The property of the South was the product of their labor.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Aaron A Bradley to The Honorable Mr Speed, 24 Dec. 1865, B-2 1866, Letters Received, ser. 15, Washington Hdqrs., RG 105 in Hahn, *Land and Labor, 1865*, 471.

¹⁷⁰ There is no transcript of Frazier’s or Bradley’s speeches at these meetings. Quotes from the meeting are citations from people who were there, as reported in the *Savannah Daily Republican*. “stealing”: Brinckerhoff, *SDR*, Dec. 13, 1865; “franchise”: Porter, *SDR*, Dec. 15, 1865.

¹⁷¹ “his whole services”: Porter, *SDR*, Dec. 15, 1865; “raised”: Brinckerhoff, *SDR*, Dec 13, 1865.

In the afternoon meeting, Bradley read a resolution appealing to the national government for black suffrage. As freedmen, blacks were citizens, he asserted, and “we had a right as citizens to appeal to the Government for the right to vote.” The resolution was approved by the meeting and \$158 raised in a collection to send a delegate to Washington to present it to Congress. In the evening meeting, \$60 or \$70 was raised for help in renovating Bradley’s school.¹⁷²

But black suffrage and education, however important, were not the key issues confronting the freedmen. Bradley’s visit to the Houston plantation had convinced him that the main concern of the freedmen was the land question. When he spoke on this, he added new planks to the program he had announced in his *Anglo-African* article.

“The Southern States had by their secession abolished their constitution and laws, and were in the condition of Territories,” he insisted. “Persons who had settled down on abandoned lands were squatter sovereigns . . . no power had the right to remove them save Congress.” And he added, “the coming Congress ought to set off a portion of lands to colored people—they had a right to expect such to be done.”¹⁷³

The freedmen were being asked to give up their lands, said Bradley, “because their former owners had been pardoned by the President.” But the President “had no right to pardon these men . . . every pardon was an act of usurpation . . . Congress alone had power to grant a pardon.” Bradley “advised those who had claims in writing to hold on to them,” “not to move at the orders of the owners of the lands. . . . [T]hey should only move when ordered by a Government officer, and only then at the point of a bayonet.” As for contracts, he said, “they

¹⁷² “citizens”: Porter, *SDR*, Dec. 15, 1865; collection: Lynch, *SDR*, Dec. 13, 1865.

¹⁷³ “secession”: Cooley, *SDR*, Dec. 13, 1865; “squatter”: Lynch, *SDR*, Dec 13, 1865.

should if they could, make good contracts, and that if they could not do so, not to leave the lands they were on unless Congress removed them.”¹⁷⁴

Bradley’s defense of the freedmen’s right to the land “created quite a sensation in the audience.” For months all the freedmen had heard were the arguments of white men—planters, Freedmen’s Bureau officials, and other “friends” —telling them they had to work for their former owners and give up any hope of land of their own. Now Bradley, a former slave himself, was openly defying these powerful white men and supporting their fight with arguments based on the law and the Constitution. He affirmed that the land was their right and that they should only give it up at the point of a bayonet.¹⁷⁵

Tillson was quickly informed of Bradley’s opposition to contracts and agitation around the land question. The day after Bradley’s meetings, he telegraphed Colonel Sickles to have him arrested. On December 7 Sickles shut down Bradley’s school. Bradley shot a telegraph to President Johnson protesting the closure of his school “because I was called on to speak at a mass meeting for the suffrage and spoke against your reconstruction. Sir, will you please open my School?” Sickles summoned Bradley to a meeting and, in the presence of Reverend Cox and other colored clergymen, questioned him about his views. When Bradley refused to recant, Sickles arrested him. His “incendiary and bad teachings,” wrote Sickles, made him “a dangerous person here at this time.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ “owners”: Brinckerhoff, *SDR*, Dec. 13, 1865; “claims”: Mobley, *SDR*, Dec. 14, 1865; “contracts”: Lynch, *SDR*, Dec. 13, 1865.

¹⁷⁵ *SDR*, Dec. 13, 1865.

¹⁷⁶ Hahn, *Land and Labor*, 1865, 467, 466; A. Braudley to Prest Johnson, 7 Dec. 1865, *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 9, 490; *SDR*, Dec, 14, 1865.

Col. Sickles drew up a lengthy indictment against Bradley. The indictment charged him with using “insurrectionary” and “seditious” language, “inciting lawlessness and disturbance of the public peace,” counselling negroes “not to make contracts to work for others,” claiming that President Johnson was “drunk,” and “defrauding” negroes by taking “large sums of money” from them under false pretenses.¹⁷⁷

Bradley was arraigned on December 11 before a military commission convened by order of General James Steedman, commander of the Department of Georgia. Bradley moved that the complaint be dismissed. He argued that everything he had said was protected by his constitutional right to freedom of speech, and that the government alleged no illegal actions as a consequence of his words. The Constitution protected freedom of assembly “to petition the government for a redress of grievances.” He insisted that any trial for charges of sedition should be heard by a civil court, not a military tribunal. Bradley’s motion for dismissal was not granted.¹⁷⁸

Bradley’s court martial for seditious language began on December 12 before a military commission. The commission was composed of five white officers and three officers from the 103rd Regiment of South Carolina, US Colored Infantry.

This was not going to be an ordinary trial. In town only three weeks, Bradley had galvanized the opposition of the black population in and around the city to the government’s policy of returning the land they had promised the freedmen to the rebel “owners.” Outside the

¹⁷⁷ *SDR*, Dec. 13, 1865; General Orders, No. 40, Head-Quarters District of Savannah, 1st Division, Department of Georgia, 16 Dec. 1865, Orders & Circulars, ser. 44, RG 94 in Hahn, *Land and Labor, 1865*, 468-69.

¹⁷⁸ *SDR*, Dec. 15, 1865.

court there was a “large attendance of the friends of Mr. Bradley,” who expressed the “liveliest interest in his behalf.”¹⁷⁹

The first two witnesses against Bradley were AMA Superintendent Reverend Edwin A. Cooley and Congregational Minister I. W. Brinckerhoff, soon-to-be cashier of the Freedman’s Savings and Trust Company. Both of these northern “friends of the negro” had attended Bradley’s meeting at the Second African Baptist Church. AMA officials had tried for months to close down the black-run schools of the Savannah Education Association. The last thing they wanted was another school run by blacks! Still worse in their eyes, Bradley was fomenting violence in the countryside.¹⁸⁰

Hayes of the *Savannah Republican* spelled out the significance of the case from his point of view. “The black man is now on trial before the world,” he proclaimed. He called on all “reasonable, intelligent colored men” to repudiate Bradley and all he stands for. “Never talk of defying the orders of those appointed by government to protect you. . . . Be kind and respectful to [your] former master . . . strive to forget the times of slavery,” he warned.¹⁸¹

The “reasonable, intelligent colored men” who could normally be counted on to support the Freedmen’s Bureau, the Army, and other “friends of the negro” were the same black ministers who had participated in the historic meeting with Sherman and Stanton less than a year

¹⁷⁹ *SDR*, Dec. 13, 1865.

¹⁸⁰ When he arrived in Savannah in mid-January, AMA leader S. W. Magill was appalled to find that Savannah’s black Baptist churches had already set up schools for most of the black children. “There is a jealousy of the white man in this matter,” he complained. “What they desire is assistance without control.” Attempts of the AMA to poach Black parishioners from the Baptist and Methodist churches also met with little success. See Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 218, 237.

¹⁸¹ *SDR*, Dec. 12, 1865.

before, a meeting which had led to the Sherman land grants. Bradley's first meeting in Savannah was held at the church of Reverend William Campbell; his meetings on December 5 at the church of Reverend John Cox. Reverend James Lynch had been president of the meetings at Cox's church, and James Porter had been secretary.¹⁸²

Pressured by their constituents on one side, and Hayes and the US Army on the other, the ministers did not perform as expected. The prosecution's next witness, Reverend Lynch of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, pedagogically explained the main ideas Bradley had presented at the meeting: the South as a territory, freedmen's squatter rights, the petition to Congress. Lynch denied that Bradley had counseled the freedmen against making contracts. At the end of the first day, Bradley "was followed by a large crowd of sympathizing colored people. . . . anxious to learn the result of the examination."¹⁸³

On the second day of the trial, the prosecution called Reverend Cox of Second African Baptist. Cox was the model of the "intelligent colored man" the *Savannah Republican* was counting on to support the government's case. But Cox couldn't remember much about the meetings, and denied that Bradley supported the freedmen stealing, or called on them to disobey orders from officers, or discouraged them from signing contracts. "Is your memory sound and reliable?" the exasperated prosecutor asked his own witness. The next witness was AMA Pastor Hardy Mobley from Brooklyn, heartily disliked by Savannah's black Baptist leaders for his attempts to steal away their parishioners. His testimony was no more favorable to the prosecution than Cox's. With his case against Bradley crumbling, Sickles himself took the stand. Since he

¹⁸² *SDR*, Dec. 13, 1865.

¹⁸³ *SDR*, Dec. 12 and 13, 1865.

had not himself attended the meetings on the 5th, he recounted his discussion with Bradley in the presence of Reverend Cox. To which Bradley answered, “the truth half told is a lie.”¹⁸⁴

Bradley called eight witnesses (seven black men and one white man) in his defense. One by one, they tore apart the government’s case. James Wallace explained the purpose of the suffrage petition and the collection to raise money for the freedmen’s school. James Porter defended Bradley’s criticism of Frazier. He noted that he had sent “a copy of the proceedings of and resolutions adopted” at Second African Baptist to the *Savannah Republican*, but the newspaper had refused to publish them. He offered to read them to the court, which the court denied. Additional testimony disproving the allegations that Bradley had sanctioned seditious or unlawful actions was offered by five other black men—cotton shipper, laborer, cook, bricklayer, and black teacher Louis B. Toomer—as well as a white teacher. At the end of the third day, the defense rested, with Bradley noting that he could bring a hundred more people to testify on his behalf.¹⁸⁵

In his summary to the court, Bradley turned the tables on the prosecution. After noting that the witnesses, including the government’s own witnesses, had disproven the argument that he had sanctioned illegal actions, Bradley accused the court and President Johnson of denying freedmen their constitutional rights. He quoted the Constitution to prove that negroes, now free, were citizens with full constitutional rights, including freedom of expression and the right to petition for the elective franchise. Even the virulently hostile *Savannah Republican* was forced to

¹⁸⁴ *SDR*, Dec. 14, 1865.

¹⁸⁵ *SDR*, Dec. 14 and 15, 1865.

note that Bradley “conducted his own defence with unabated zeal and manifested considerable ability,” “tact and shrewdness.”¹⁸⁶

Meeting as a military commission, with testimony for conviction from their commanding officer, it was a foregone conclusion that Bradley would be found guilty. But the testimony at trial, the support for Bradley both inside the courtroom and outside, and the presence of three officers of the South Carolina Colored Infantry in the jury resulted in the jury dropping the most damning allegations. They found him not guilty of telling the freedmen to disobey orders from army officers, not guilty of advising negroes not to make contracts, and not guilty of collecting money from negroes with an intent to defraud. In the end, Bradley was basically found guilty of nothing more than “seditious” language: defending freedmen’s right to the land and being critical of President Johnson.¹⁸⁷

The widely publicized trial was a disaster for the planters, the Freedmen’s Bureau, the Army, and the *Savannah Republican*. Bradley’s message of holding onto the land deeds and not accepting bad contracts, his defense of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, had spread far and wide. His able defense had made him a hero in the eyes of the freedmen in the area, and he had won the support of key leaders of the black community in Savannah. Thaddeus Stevens was no longer the only nationally known figure supporting confiscation and land for the freedmen. News of the charges, the trial, and the verdict spread Bradley’s name around the country. Truly “a dangerous man.”

Sentenced to one year’s hard labor at Fort Pulaski, Bradley wrote to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, Attorney General James Speed, and President Johnson calling for their

¹⁸⁶ “summary”: *SDR*, Dec. 16, 1865; “zeal”: *SDR*, Dec 14, 1865; “tact”: *SDR*, Dec 16, 1865.

¹⁸⁷ *SDR*, Dec. 19, 1865. See also Hahn, *Land and Labor*, 1865, 469-70.

intervention against his unjust conviction. His appeals to Stanton and Speed included a mix of legal and political arguments. The charge that he encouraged the freedmen to refuse contracts was denied by several witnesses. The government alleged that Bradley counselled “freedmen.” But the call for the meeting was for “free men,” not freedmen, and the government had not proved that any freedmen were present at the meetings. The complaint that he had called the President a “drunk” was denied by several witnesses. Even if true, this was not a treasonous act and should be tried in civil court. His appeals for funds were for his school. The AMA witnesses against him were jealous of the popularity of his school, now closed by the government. The meetings adopted a petition for black suffrage. “Have we the freedom of speech in Georgia or not—that is the question.” If peace exists in Georgia as the President insists, then military courts martial of civilians are illegal. Why are loyal blacks, like himself, now being tried in military courts, while treason goes unpunished? ¹⁸⁸

Bradley’s appeal to Secretary of War Stanton was well placed. Congress was back in session. Both House and Senate refused to seat the recently elected congressmen from the southern states. Instead, they elected a Committee of Fifteen to review the status of Johnson’s Reconstruction. Stanton and many other Republicans were opposed to Johnson’s policies of taking lands from the freedmen and returning them to the unrepentant rebels. Stanton had counseled Bureau Commissioner Howard to delay returning these lands pending a new Freedmen’s Bureau Bill, which he and Howard were jointly drafting. Thaddeus Stevens was demanding confiscation.

Bradley was able to use the growing rift between Republicans in Congress and the President to his advantage. On December 29, 1865, he was released from Fort Pulaski and

¹⁸⁸ Hahn, *Land and Labor, 1865*, 470-75.

paroled by Stanton pending the President's evaluation of his case. Under the terms of his parole, Bradley agreed not to leave Savannah without permission, to report daily to the provost marshal, and not to "converse with any person, relative to [his] late arrest and imprisonment," except his four "Counsellors." Bradley immediately wrote Senator Charles Sumner protesting the terms of his parole.¹⁸⁹

Sickles and Tillson were infuriated at Bradley's release from prison. In a letter to Tillson, Sickles complained that Bradley was "very defiant, to any authority. . . . His presence here is doing great mischief among the blacks. They seem to think, that Bradley is in the favor of the Govt and that officers of the Bureau as well as all other officers are 'Humbugs,' as some of them say." Tillson forwarded Sickles's note to Howard, adding that Bradley's "influence has already produced very mischievous results among the freedpeople—some of whom, acting under his advice, are refusing to make contracts for next year." He demanded that Bradley not be "allowed to remain in Savannah where his presence is doing vast mischief to his own race, and undoing the work of the Bureau."¹⁹⁰

Bradley, for his part, had no intention of laying low on parole. Two days after his release from Fort Pulaski, he posted an advertisement in the *Savannah Republican* for students interested in attending a "neat, convenient and commodious" school now open in Savannah. He immediately received a letter from Col. Sickles telling him he did not have the "privilege of opening schools." A few days later, Bradley requested that he be allowed to go to Augusta to see his mother, whom he had not seen for many years. Colonel William Kimball, commanding officer for the District of Savannah, agreed to the request. Bradley used his leave to attend the

¹⁸⁹ Hahn, *Land and Labor*, 1865, 474.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 474-75.

four-day Freedmen's Convention, which took place at the Springfield Colored Baptist Church in Augusta from January 10 through 13, 1866.¹⁹¹

The main organizer of the Freedmen's Convention was a white man, John E. Bryant. An abolitionist teacher from Maine, Bryant had been stationed at Port Royal during the war, where he had become a recruiter and organizer of black troops under General Saxton. In May 1865, the 30-year-old Bryant was made general superintendent of the freedmen in Augusta. He immersed himself in contract disputes between the freedmen and the planters. He was considered a radical by white planters because he sometimes decided cases in favor of the freedmen. Dropped from the Freedmen's Bureau like many other Saxton appointees by Tillson in January 1866, this self-proclaimed "friend of the freedmen" looked to the conference as a step toward a new career: becoming president of a freedmen's equal rights organization and editor of a freedmen's newspaper.¹⁹²

Bryant found an ally in Henry McNeal Turner. Turner, born a free black in South Carolina, had made his name as an evangelist of the AME Church. He spoke in black churches throughout the South in the 1850s. As the war approached, he fled to the North, where he befriended powerful Republican politicians as pastor of the AME Church in Washington, D. C. In 1863 he became a chaplain in the Union army. He returned to Georgia in December 1865 with

¹⁹¹ *SDR*, January 1, 1866; H. F. Sickles to A. Bradley, Jan. 1, 1866, and Davis Tillson to O. O. Howard, Jan. 4, 1866, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Letters Received, File No. W91.

¹⁹² Ruth Currie-McDaniel, *Carpetbagger of Conscience: A Biography of John Emory Bryant* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 52-53.

a commission as a regular army chaplain on assignment to the Freedmen's Bureau. In January 1866, he resigned his commission and devoted himself to building the AME Church.¹⁹³

Turner's views about Reconstruction were clearly expressed in a speech he gave at the Emancipation Day celebration in Augusta on January 1, 1866. "Let us love the whites," he said, "and let by-gones be by-gones, neither taunt nor insult them for past grievances; respect them; honor them; work for them; but still let us be men. Let us show them we can be a people, respectable, virtuous, honest and industrious, and soon their prejudice will melt away, and with God for our father, we will all be brothers."¹⁹⁴

Thirty-eight black educators, mainly AME preachers from the larger cities and towns in the state, attended the meeting. In recognition of their respect for the black leaders in Savannah, the delegates selected James Porter as president, with L. B. Toomer as assistant secretary. Both men had testified for Bradley at the military tribunal a month earlier. They were most likely the ones who invited Aaron Bradley to attend the convention as an honored guest, seated alongside Captain Bryant and Chaplain Turner.

Bryant organized the convention to highlight what the white "friends of the freedmen" expected from the freedmen in return for their support. Three white men were featured speakers. Reverend Edes of Boston addressed the gathering on the second day; Major Gilbert Eberhart, the Freedmen's Bureau education superintendent for Georgia, spoke on day four.

¹⁹³ Stephen Ward Angell, *Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and African-American Religion in the South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 68.

¹⁹⁴ Henry McNeal Turner, "On the Anniversary of Emancipation," in *Respect Black: The Writings and Speeches of Henry McNeal Turner*, ed. Edwin S. Redkey (New York: Arno Press, 1971), 11-12. Originally published in the Augusta *Colored American*, Jan. 13, 1866.

The keynote speaker at the convention was the Davis Tillson. One can only imagine his anger when he saw Bradley seated as a guest of honor at the convention. Tillson's message to the delegates at the convention was to "forget and forgive the past and to become honest, humble and faithful workers." In order to do that, you must cultivate "kindly relations between yourself and the white people," he insisted. "This cannot be too strongly stated or too often reiterated. Nothing could be so fatal to your happiness and prosperity as a people, as the growth of suspicion, hatred, and animosity between yourselves and the whites."¹⁹⁵

The ignorant poor whites may beat and berate you, he said, but you will just have to "bear with them patiently" as an "unavoidable evil." Never forget that "everywhere the educated, refined and responsible people are your friends," Tillson said. These "friends" included agents of the Freedmen's Bureau as well as the members of the Georgia State Legislature. "Thousands of our noblest and best" lost their lives to emancipate you, he noted. The educated people of Georgia will grant you rights such as jury rights and voting rights once you have become "useful, prosperous, self-reliant citizens."¹⁹⁶

The problem, proclaimed Tillson, is that since your emancipation, freed people have been guilty of "idleness and laziness." The planters are not convinced that freedmen's "labor could be made reliable and profitable." The Freedmen's Bureau, he observed proudly, is now leaving "nothing undone . . . to induce and *if necessary to compel the freed people to observe their contracts, to work cheerfully and faithfully.*"¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ *Proceedings of the Freedmen's Convention of Georgia* (Augusta: Loyal Georgian, 1866): "forget," 14; "kindly," 9.

¹⁹⁶ *Proceedings of the Freedmen's Convention*: "bear," 11; "educated," 9; "noblest," 15; "useful," 9.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*: "idleness," 12; "reliable," 13; "nothing undone," 14. Emphasis added.

“You are on trial before the country,” Tillson concluded, echoing the *Savannah Republican*’s words about the black response to Bradley’s trial in Savannah. “You are to demonstrate this year that the statement that you will not work for good wages is not true, or you are to bring shame and mortification upon your friends, and sorrow and suffering upon yourselves.”¹⁹⁸

To make sure no delegate missed the meaning of his carrot and stick message, General Tillson returned the next day with “General Orders” which he insisted the delegates accept. They did so, and shortly after sent an “Address to the [Georgia] Legislature” which adopted the submissive tone requested by Tillson, Bryant, and Turner. “We appeal to your wisdom, sense of justice, and magnanimous generosity,” it read. “We shall expect to be employed by you, and to do our work as dutiful servants.”¹⁹⁹

For Bryant and Turner, the main aim of the convention was to form a new organization, the Georgia Equal Rights Association (GERA) with Bryant as president. Delegates approved the formation of the new organization, but then the unexpected happened. The Committee on State Officers divided over who should be president. The majority wanted Bryant, but a minority supported James Porter, arguing that the organization should be run by a black man! After “considerable discussion,” Bryant was elected.²⁰⁰

On the last day of the convention, the new president praised the delegates, saying “I believe that you acted wisely in choosing your President from among your white friends.” And he repeated Tillson’s message: “if you shall be industrious . . . it will be for the interest of men of

¹⁹⁸ *Proceedings of the Freedmen’s Convention*, 14.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, “General Orders,” 15; “appeal,” 18; “employed,” 20.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 23; *The Loyal Georgian*, Jan. 20, 1866.

property to retain you. . . . If you are not industrious . . . not only will Southern men drive you from their midst, but Northern men will not interfere on your behalf.”²⁰¹

By the last session of the convention, the delegates had had enough. Bullied for hours by Tillson and Bryant, their spines stiffened by the willingness of James Porter to run against Bryant for president, this handpicked group of conservative, mainly small town black religious leaders took a stand. They were aware that most rural blacks had worked over the past year for little or no income, that many had been cheated of their wages and evicted from their homes. They knew that at year’s end policemen and civilian posses in southwest Georgia and elsewhere had “prowled their way through the region’s plantations, pried into black people’s cabins, roughed up unauthorized visitors, seized whatever weapons they happened to find, and brutally savaged those who stood in their way.” They understood that there was no justice to be had for freedpeople in the rebel-dominated town councils and grand juries. That the labor code adopted by the Georgia general assembly in December legislated “workdays that stretched from daylight to dark, unquestioned obedience, and an uncontestable authority to determine all causes for dismissal.” They knew that many Georgia blacks were refusing to sign contracts. That what they wanted most of all was their own forty acres and a mule.²⁰²

On the last day of the convention, delegates discussed two resolutions proposed by Bradley that the “revolted States are territories and are under the rule and regulation of Congress.” Discussion on these points was a heated one: “several gentlemen kept rising to their feet, till the convention become quite excited.” These two resolutions were defeated, but the delegates proceeded to adopt a number of resolutions—many of them bearing distinct hallmarks

²⁰¹ *Proceedings of the Freedmen’s Convention*: “wisely,” 23; “industrious,” 26.

²⁰² O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 153, 154.

of Bradley’s ideas and wording—totally at odds with the views that Tillson and Bryant had promoted in the previous three days.²⁰³

Tillson said the freedmen were too uneducated and irresponsible to have the right to vote. The delegates resolved that they “can more rightfully complain of the denial of the right of suffrage than can those lately in arms” against the Union.²⁰⁴

Tillson and Bryant said intelligent white men would defend the freedmen’s interests. The delegates resolved “that the interests of our race can be represented and defended fully only by our own chosen delegates, and that it is unreasonable to suppose that those who once deprived us of our natural rights will now pursue or advocate and sustain a policy commensurate to our necessities.”²⁰⁵

Tillson said they had to prove themselves worthy before they could qualify as jurors. The delegates claimed “the right . . . to be tried, for all offenses, by a jury of our peers, and . . . the white man is not our peer.”²⁰⁶

Tillson said they should live up to the expectations of the white men who had given them their freedom. The delegates resolved that blacks who had served in the military in the Civil War “are entitled to all the rights, privileges, and immunities” of other servicemen.²⁰⁷

Tillson said to trust the planters to pay them fair wages. The delegates demanded “compensation for services rendered” since their emancipation in 1863 and “all that has been

²⁰³ *Proceedings of the Freedmen’s Convention*, 28.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

produced by any person occupying lands under the authority of the United States.”²⁰⁸

Tillson had complained about the freedmen on the Islands and along the Coast who were refusing labor contracts. The delegates demanded the government “dispose of any lands it may own to the freed people” at reasonable rates, “and thus to secure to themselves and their children permanent homes.”²⁰⁹

These were not the most radical stances. But compared to the speeches of Tillson and Bryant and the convention’s “Address to the Legislature,” they were testimony to the growing influence of Bradley and the revolutionary impulses stemming from the Ogeechee marshes and Savannah docks.²¹⁰

Tillson had had enough. On January 26, he wrote a letter to Major General Howard and Secretary Stanton demanding that Bradley be expelled from Georgia. Bradley, he said, was “exceedingly active on the streets and in the Convention, denouncing and misrepresenting the

²⁰⁸ *Proceedings of the Freedmen’s Convention*, 30.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Historians have failed to recognize the radical character of these resolutions when viewed in the context of the speeches and resolutions of the first three days of the convention. As a result, they have underestimated the impact of the militancy of coastal blacks and Bradley on the convention. See Edmund Drago, *Black Politicians and Reconstruction in Georgia: A Splendid Failure* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 27-28; Ruth Currie-McDaniel, *Carpetbagger of Conscience: A Biography of John Emory Bryant* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 57-60; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 250; and O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 211-13. It is noteworthy that at the October convention of the Georgia Equal Rights Association which adopted Bryant’s vision for the organization and abjured any interest in politics, there were no delegates from coastal Georgia. See *Proceedings of the Convention of the Equal Rights and Educational Association of Georgia*, October 29, 1866 (Augusta: The Loyal Georgian, 1866), accessed August 9, 2020 at <https://www.loc.gov/item/91898972/>.

officers of the Bureau and its actions. . . . The best friends of the freedpeople in the State are united” in demanding his ouster. He added that “Capt. Bryant and some others are of the opinion that he is slightly deranged.” Secretary Stanton had more pressing issues in Washington to deal with than the status of Bradley. On February 7, he instructed General J.M. Brannan to give Bradley the option of either leaving Georgia or returning to confinement in Fort Pulaski. Bradley left Savannah for the North on February 10, 1866.²¹¹

The events of December 1865 and January 1866 constituted a dramatic turnaround for Bradley. This was no longer Aaron Bradley, the forlorn would-be lawyer from New York and Boston. Bradley’s constitutional studies had led to revolutionary conclusions. His willingness to go it alone had provided him with the fortitude not to bend to the pressures exerted by the Georgia’s civil authorities, the Johnson administration, and the US army. The defrocked lawyer was now debating and scoring points in military tribunal. The isolated eccentric from Boston was an honored guest at meetings of conservative church leaders.

Summing up Bradley’s impact in Savannah and Augusta in 1865-66, historian Jacqueline Jones wrote that “when Bradley went north, he left in his wake a trail of rattled officials, northern and southern whites united in their fear of this swaggering provocateur.” But this is looking at Bradley from the perspective of Tillson and Bryant. When viewed from the lens of James Porter or a freedman in the Ogeechee or southwest Georgia, the view is completely different.²¹²

²¹¹ Davis Tillson to O. O. Howard, Jan. 26, 1866, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, Letters Received, File No. W91.

²¹² Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 250.

What Bradley left when he went north were freedmen occupying plantations around Savannah, strengthened in their determination to fight for better contracts and land of their own. What he left were blacks with six months of unequal contracts and planter abuse under their belts, freedpeople who decided that in their first full calendar year of freedom they would fight back. What he left was an alternative to dependence on the leadership of the white man, imposed through generations of slavery and newly channeled by the “friends of the freedmen” like Tillson, Bryant, and Turner. He left behind a sense of pride, a growing determination among the newly freed men and women to take charge of their own destiny. Bradley had come to the right place at the right time. The revolutionary masses of freedmen in Georgia had found their champion, the former jailbird Aaron A Bradley.

During the same period, Savannah’s ruling class was putting into place the men who would confront Bradley, Hopkins, and the freedmen over the next four years. In the city’s municipal elections in December 1865, the whites-only electorate chose rebel stalwart General Edward Anderson—Hopkins’s nemesis—as mayor along with a city council to match. Philip M. Russell Sr continued as clerk of city council and his son Waring Russell as city jailer. Other Russells would soon fill posts in the “justice” apparatus.²¹³

Neither Charles Hopkins nor Aaron Bradley were born revolutionaries. Hopkins was the scion of a rich, slave-owning planter family and began his political career as a conservative Whig. Bradley was trained as a shoemaker. His greatest ambition was to be certified as a lawyer. But the two men were born in revolutionary times. The growing polarization in US society over

²¹³ Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 242-43. Jones erroneously states that Waring Russell was Phillip Russell Sr’s brother.

the question of slavery in the 1850s and especially the outbreak of the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation transformed their lives as it did the lives of everyone who lived through those years.

The next two chapters discuss the lives of Hopkins and Bradley in these formative years before 1865.

6 CHARLES HOPKINS, MCINTOSH COUNTY, 1812–1863: ‘HE USED HIS UTMOST ENDEAVORS TO CRUSH THE INFLUENCE OF THOSE WHO WERE STRUGGLING TO OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT’

The forebears of Charles Hopkins were prominent South Carolina property owners at the time of the American Revolution. Like many other coastal slaveholders in South Carolina and Georgia, they were Loyalists who fought for the maintenance of royal rule.

Charles Hopkins’s grandfather was a British naval officer, Francis Hopkins. In 1767, Francis married Mary Martinangel in Beaufort, South Carolina. The Martinangels were recipients of a royal land grant and original settlers of Daufuskie Island. The new family moved nearby. In 1772, Charles’s father, Francis Hopkins Jr., was born near Bluffton, S.C. When the American Revolution began, Francis Hopkins Sr. and the Martinangel clan on Daufuskie Island took the side of the crown. Early in the fighting, he took his family to the West Indies for safety. In 1780, Francis Sr. died, and Mary and her young son returned to Daufuskie Island.²¹⁴

Fighting was particularly savage between the Loyalists on Daufuskie and the Patriots on nearby Hilton Head Island. Mary Martinangel Hopkins’s brother-in-law, Richard Pendarvis, a Loyalist leader called “Bloody Dick” by Patriots, was killed in April 1781 by Hilton Head Patriots known as the “Bloody Legion.” Another brother, Loyalist militia Captain Phillip

²¹⁴ Thomas Gamble, *Savannah Duels and Duellists, 1733-1877* (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Company, 1923), 137. Other texts give the name of Charles Hopkins’s grandfather as Stephen Hopkins, a rear admiral in the British Navy. See *Memoirs of Georgia: Containing Historical Accounts of the State’s Civil, Military, Industrial, and Professional Interests, and Personal Sketches of Many of Its People, Vol. II* (Atlanta: The Southern Historical Association, 1895), 499. The founder of the Martinangel clan in South Carolina was Philipppo Martinangelo, soon shortened to Martinangel. Other spellings of the name include Martinangle and Martinangele.

Martinangel, was killed by members of the “Bloody Legion” while sick in bed at his home on Daufuskie Island in December 1781. The Pendarvis and Phillip Martinangel families were plundered of most of their possessions. Mary’s older brother, Francis Martinangel, died while serving in the Royal Militia in Granville County, S.C. So within a year of the death of her husband, Mary lost two brothers and one brother-in-law in the fighting.²¹⁵

Like most Loyalist families, the Hopkins and Martinangel families elected to stay in South Carolina after the war. After declaring their support for the newly independent nation (and in some cases paying fines and having voting rights temporarily suspended), repentant Loyalists were fairly rapidly reintegrated into the new independent nation. But it took a generation for the scars of this first “civil war” to heal, and in some Loyalist as well as Patriot families the memories remained long afterward.

By the turn of the century, Francis Jr. had become a prominent planter, the owner of a large rice plantation and many slaves on May River near Bluffton, S.C. A terrible storm in September 1804 caused severe damage to his property and the loss of 12 slaves. His friend Thomas Spalding, a prominent planter and former Loyalist who owned much of Sapelo Island, Georgia, suggested Francis move to Sapelo. In 1805, he left South Carolina and moved his wife, mother, and five children to the “Chocolate” plantation on Sapelo, where he was introduced to the growing of sea island cotton. Three years later, after another bad storm and the death of his daughter Mary, Francis bought the Belleville plantation near Darien, Georgia and moved his family there.

²¹⁵ *The Royal Gazette*, Charles Town, SC, Jan. 30, 1782, cited in *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, 5, no. 1 (January 1904), 59; *Royal Georgia Gazette*, Apr. 19, 1781.

The Belleville plantation had been home to several other prominent early coastal Georgia families (McIntoshes, Leakes, Troups, and Spaldings) before becoming the property of Francis Hopkins. Over time Hopkins acquired other plantations on the mainland as well as on Sapelo. A prominent lawyer as well as planter, he served for eight years as Justice of the McIntosh Inferior Court and became a commissioner of the McIntosh County Academy. He joined the McIntosh County militia as a lieutenant in 1810. Politically ambitious, Francis was elected as a McIntosh County representative in Georgia's general assembly from 1807 to 1814 and served from 1815-16 in the state senate.²¹⁶

At the time of the revolution, Georgia consisted of a wide strip of land along coastal Georgia and another wide strip of territory between the Savannah and the Oconee Rivers in eastern Georgia, comprising only about a third of Georgia's current territory. The balance of the state was mainly Creek territory, with Cherokees in the far northern part of the state. Florida, to the south, was still owned by Spain. For the forty years following the American revolution, the driving force in Georgia history was Indian removal and the expansion of the Georgia frontier and of slave-grown cotton.

For Georgians, the War of 1812 was an opportunity to seize land from the Creeks and the Spanish. When the war broke out, Francis resigned his seat in the general assembly to enter military service. Georgians invaded Spanish Florida three times. Serving on the Florida front, Francis Hopkins rose to the rank of Brigadier General. The war against the Creeks in 1813-14, led by General Andrew Jackson, ended in the Treaty of Fort Jackson and the cession of the southern fifth of the state to white settlers. Many Georgians were also involved in the First

²¹⁶ Gamble, *Savannah Duels*, 137-38; Buddy Sullivan, *Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater: A New Revised Edition* (BookBaby, 2016), 282.

Seminole War in 1816-19. Generous land grants enticed frontier settlers to the newly opened territories, followed soon after by planters and their slaves, eager to take advantage of virgin soil on which to grow their cotton.

For these early generations of frontier Georgians, valor and honor had been proved on the battlefield, with land grants and political office as the reward. Violence in the fighting often carried over into peacetime, with families vying for the most productive land and for political office. Planters throughout the state were in agreement on the big political questions. All favored Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson; all supported Indian removal and the extension of slavery. But with the big questions off the table, political factions developed over secondary questions. These differences were frequently accompanied by personal insults. In a society where a man's honor was his most prized possession, personal insults led to family feuds and often resulted in physical confrontations. Planters' sons were expected to learn how to fight with sword and pistol and to join the militia. Insults, questions of honor, quickly led to weapons being drawn, particularly when hot-blooded young planters' sons and alcohol were involved.

According to Thomas Gamble, "In the first three decades of the last century it is said that only two men in McIntosh and Camden counties . . . appeared in public at any time unarmed." He was definitely not referring to the men of the McIntosh or Hopkins families. Captain William R. McIntosh and Colonel John L. Hopkins were hot-headed planters' sons. The McIntoshes were original settlers of McIntosh County and had been prominent Patriot leaders in the American Revolution. The McIntosh family had been involved in several celebrated duels, beginning with General Lachlan McIntosh, who killed Button Gwinnett, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, in a celebrated duel in 1777. John L. Hopkins, the oldest son of Francis Hopkins, joined the Navy at a young age to fight in the Barbary Wars, rising to the post of colonel.

Insulted by a Lieutenant Keith while stationed in New Jersey, he resigned his commission and challenged Keith to a duel in which the young lieutenant was killed. Returning to McIntosh County, Colonel Hopkins was elected to the legislature; Captain McIntosh also represented the county, but in an opposing faction.²¹⁷

Bad blood between the two young men began when Colonel Hopkins drew a pistol on Captain McIntosh after an alleged insult. It escalated as elections approached. Captain McIntosh and Senator Allen Powell, the county leader of the opposing faction, began a campaign against the reelection of Colonel Hopkins to the legislature. They alleged that he had opposed free schools in the legislature, denounced him as a drunkard, a fool, and a coward, and also disparaged his father.

The quarrel soon involved both fathers (General Hopkins and General McIntosh) as well as other McIntosh family members (Dr. John McIntosh and McQueen McIntosh) and became a full-fledged family feud between the Hopkinses and McIntoshes. The feud included fights in restaurants, notes posted in Darien, lengthy screeds in coastal newspapers by the aggrieved parties, and challenges to duels, followed by temporary truces. It became a cause célèbre up and down the coast. One threatened duel between Colonel Hopkins and McQueen McIntosh was brought to a halt by the intervention of three civic leaders who travelled to Darien from Savannah—a prominent judge, the state’s solicitor general and an attorney—along with the mayor of St. Mary’s.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Gamble, *Savannah Duels*, 136.

²¹⁸ Gamble devotes a full chapter to the McIntosh-Hopkins feud in *Savannah Duels*, 136-48. For an example of contemporary newspaper postings by feud participants, see the note to John L. Hopkins by William R. McIntosh in *SR*, Sept. 29, 1818.

After over two years of public insults and threats, challenges, fights, and temporary truces, in March 1819, General and Colonel Hopkins confronted McQueen and Dr. John McIntosh on the highway in Darien. In the shootout that followed, Colonel Hopkins left McQueen McIntosh lying dead in the street; Colonel Hopkins's arm was shattered by a bullet fired by Dr. McIntosh.

Colonel Hopkins and his father were arrested and jailed in Savannah for five months. At the trial in October 1819, charges were dropped against General Hopkins, but Colonel Hopkins was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to three years in prison. During the trial, Colonel Hopkins's wife and newborn twins died in childbirth. Temporarily released from jail because of this tragedy, Colonel Hopkins took advantage of the situation by fleeing the country with the aid of family friends. Georgia's Governor John Clark put a \$500 bounty on young Hopkins's head. Two years later, with his eldest son still a fugitive in Europe, General Hopkins died, "broken in body and spirit."²¹⁹

Francis's and Mary's seventh son, Charles H., was born in 1812. He was seven years old when his oldest brother and father were arrested and jailed, nine years old when his father died. The memory of these tragic events was burned into the young boy's mind. As he grew to adulthood and entered on his own political career, he would remember what happens when

²¹⁹ *SR*, Dec. 23, 1819; Gamble, *Savannah Duels*, 146. John L. Hopkins returned to Georgia in 1822, was pardoned by Governor Clark, and moved to Tennessee where he resumed the practice of law and became a judge. He was killed in 1828 at age 33 by men he was preparing to prosecute for illegal activities. Edward Hopkins, another brother of John L. and Charles Hopkins, was wounded in another famous duel, the "Three Weapons Duel," in 1837 in Camden County, Georgia.

political differences and heated words turn into physical violence. And he would never forget what happens in a civil war, for his own forebears had already suffered through one.²²⁰

In 1830, McIntosh County was one of the richest counties in Georgia, if not the United States. Rice and sea island cotton plantations dotted the county and commodity prices were high. The Altamaha River emptied into the Atlantic at the county seat of Darien, putting its port at the center of the lucrative cotton and lumber trade from central Georgia. The Bank of Darien was the leading financial institution in Georgia, with branches in six Georgia towns.²²¹

Power in Darien rested in the hands of the wealthy planter families. One of the most prominent was the Hopkins family. When he came of age, Charles Hopkins inherited the Belleville plantation, its sea island cotton fields on 1,350 acres of land, and 41 slaves. In 1834, at the age of 22, he married Mary Givens, “a wealthy young lady of Beaufort, S.C.” In 1836, Hopkins became a major in the 2nd Georgia Regiment of the militia; in 1838 he was promoted to colonel in the 1st Georgia Regiment.²²²

Hopkins’s father and two older brothers had served in the Georgia legislature, so for him to enter politics was not unexpected. In August 1838, Charles Hopkins was one of the leaders of large meetings in Darien protesting newspaper articles written by C. MacArdell, the editor of the

²²⁰ In his obituary, Charles Hopkins’s middle name is listed as “Harris.” See *Savannah Morning News (SMN)*, Dec. 12, 1886. Accounts by Buddy Sullivan and Robert Myers give his middle name as “Horrie.” See Sullivan, *Early Days*, 283; Robert Manson Myers, ed., *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 1553.

²²¹ Sullivan, *Early Days*, 168.

²²² “acres,” 1837 McIntosh County Tax Digest, Georgia Department of Archives and History, cited in Sullivan, *Early Days*, 302; “young lady,” *SMN*, Dec. 12, 1886; “Regiment,” Sullivan, *Early Days*, 282-83.

Darien *Telegraph*. A prominent member of the Union/Democratic Party, MacArdell was assailed for writing articles “impugning the character of private citizens.”²²³

This campaign for moderation in political discourse was a personal matter for the young Hopkins. The attacks by the McIntoshes and Hopkinses on each other printed in newspaper articles in his youth had led to years of violent confrontations, culminating in the death of McQueen McIntosh and the imprisonment of Hopkins’s father and older brother. Major Hopkins was a prominent speaker at the meetings—which *The Georgian* called the largest ever held in the county—and one of the authors of resolutions calling on MacArdell to cease his attacks. Hopkins’s first political initiative met with success. A few months after the meetings, the *Telegraph* ceased publication and MacArdell left the county.²²⁴

Joining Hopkins in leading these protests was James Troup, brother of former Georgia governor George Troup and the owner of the Hofwyl-Broadfield plantation. The Troup faction of Georgia’s Democratic-Republican Party was favored by the established families of the cotton belt and plantation area. Recently rechristened the States Rights party, it boasted proven pro-slavery credentials. Governor Troup had led Georgia’s defiance of the federal government in support of accelerated Indian removal and against the 1828 “tariff of abominations.” It was a conservative party, opposed to the nullifiers and secessionists as well as to the plebeian demagoguery of the Clark faction, which had strong support in the mountains and wiregrass areas of the state where non-slaveholding voters were a big majority. The Clark faction, which had supported President Andrew Jackson in the tariff dispute, had recently renamed itself the Union

²²³ *SR*, Aug. 27, 1838.

²²⁴ *The Georgian*, Aug. 28, 1838. On the protests against MacArdell, see also E. Merton Coulter, *Thomas Spalding of Sapelo* (Kingsport, Tennessee: Louisiana State University Press, 1940), 183-88.

Party. In the 1830s the Union Party was becoming the Georgia wing of the Democratic Party of Andrew Jackson and Martin van Buren.²²⁵

In December 1838, Hopkins joined James Troup on the board of directors of the Bank of Darien. Founded by the prominent McIntosh County planter and MacArdell supporter Thomas Spalding in 1819, the bank had engaged in over-lending and speculation in the 1830s and was hard hit by the Panic of 1837. As director, Hopkins criticized numerous “irregularities” in the operations of the bank under its president and chairman, both supporters of the Union Party. The bank closed in 1842.²²⁶

Hopkins’s prominence in the county rapidly propelled him into electoral politics. In May 1839, Hopkins and Troup were elected from McIntosh County to a state convention in Milledgeville called “to reduce and equalize the representation of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia.” In November, at the age of twenty-five, Hopkins was elected to the state Senate from McIntosh County on the States’ Rights ticket, defeating his Union opponent by four votes.²²⁷

In the 1836 presidential elections, the conservatives of Georgia’s States Rights party joined South Carolina nullifiers and the newly formed, and conservative, northern Whig Party in opposing the Democratic Party candidate Martin van Buren. In Milledgeville, Hopkins became part of a new generation of conservative political leaders in Georgia who were making the

²²⁵ On the evolution of Georgia’s States Rights and Union parties, I am indebted to the analysis of Ulrich Phillips, *Georgia and States Rights* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 110-40, and Lynda Worley Skelton, “The States Rights Movement in Georgia, 1825-1850,” *GHQ*, 50, no. 4 (December, 1966), 391-412.

²²⁶ *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, Dec. 25, 1838; *The Georgian*, Nov. 16, 1841.

²²⁷ *SR*, Apr. 30 and Oct. 10, 1839.

transition from Georgia's States Rights party into the Whig Party. Several were destined to play a prominent role in Georgia and national politics for decades to come, including young lawyers Alexander Stephens of Crawfordville, Robert Toombs of Washington, and Charles Jenkins of Augusta.

Southern Whigs saw no contradiction between support for slavery and support for the Union. They believed that slavery and the southern economy as a whole depended for its success on being part of the Union. They supported the pro-business American Plan of slaveholder Henry Clay of Kentucky, the central leader of the Whig Party. They preferred to focus on tariffs and internal improvements rather than stirring up sectional conflicts by raising the issue of slavery's expansion into new territories. They believed that economic progress and political compromise were the keys to both the South and the North moving forward together.

Whig supporters in the North and West—including the young Whig Abraham Lincoln of Illinois—were not as pro-slavery as their Southern counterparts. Many northern Whigs believed slavery to be morally wrong and were opposed to slavery's expansion. To hold the party together, Whigs often nominated as their presidential candidate a prominent individual, preferably a war hero, of indeterminate political positions on the expansion of slavery. In the 1840 elections, their candidate was General William Henry Harrison, a former Virginia slaveholder and hero in the wars against the Indians. Georgia Whigs rallied around Harrison. Charles Hopkins called him "a patriot, a soldier, and a statesman." Hopkins ran in the elections as the "anti-van Buren" candidate for state senator in McIntosh County. Harrison won and

became the first Whig president. Toombs and Stephens were elected to the state legislature, but Hopkins lost to a Democrat in McIntosh County.²²⁸

In the 1840s Hopkins became one of the best-known Whig politicians in coastal Georgia. He was a perennial delegate to county, regional, and state Whig conventions. He was Whig candidate for the Senate in 1847. An indefatigable campaigner, he travelled throughout coastal Georgia in support of other Whig candidates. In several elections he championed the campaigns of Thomas Butler King, a lawyer and sea island cotton planter from Brunswick, Georgia who was elected to the US House of Representatives from the 1st Congressional district. Several of Hopkins's brothers were also Whig stalwarts on the coast: his younger brother Octavius Caesar (O. C.), who owned the Baisden Bluff plantation adjacent to Belleville, Thomas in Glynn and Wayne counties, and Benjamin and Edward in Camden County. Charles Hopkins's efforts did not go unnoticed. In 1845, he was "unanimously nominated by a Convention of the Whigs of Glynn and McIntosh" for the post of Brigadier General for the "noble and successful efforts" he had made on behalf of the Whig party.²²⁹

Whigs on the coast faced a different situation from that confronting Whigs in middle Georgia. Slaveholders in middle Georgia were buttressed by a large number of white yeomen farmers they could count on to defend their human property. Slaveholders in coastal Georgia did

²²⁸ *SR*, July 15, 1840 and Oct. 2, 1840. In 1848, the Whig Party's winning presidential candidate was General Zachary Taylor, Mexican War hero and Kentucky slaveholder with vague views on the expansion of slavery. In 1852, Whigs nominated General Winfield Scott, also of Mexican War fame. The son of Virginia planters, Scott supported the Compromise of 1850.

²²⁹ "Brigadier General," *SR*, June 21, 1845. See Hopkins as delegate to regional and state Whig conventions: *Augusta Chronicle*, May 18, 1843; *SR*, May 4, May 25, and June 13, 1844; May 1 and June 18, 1845; Apr. 22 and May 12, 1846. As Whig candidate for the state senate, see *SR*, June 11 and Sept. 15, 1847.

not have such a numerical white majority. Black slaves outnumbered whites on the coast by three or four to one. Many coastal slaveholders had been supporters of John C. Calhoun in the nullification crisis of the early 1830s. Any perceived threat to slavery such as northern abolitionism evoked a strong response.

In the 1840s, Calhoun, coastal slaveholders, and planters in the newer cotton areas of Georgia and states of the Deep South pushed hard for an aggressive program of territorial expansion of slavery. In 1844 the Democratic party adopted this policy, and Democratic President James K. Polk acted on it by annexing Texas in 1846 and launching war on Mexico in 1848.

With the annexation of Texas and especially the acquisitions of the Mexican War, southern Whigs were squeezed between the territorial ambitions of the Democratic Party-led slaveholders on the one hand, and the growing opposition to slavery's extension from manufacturers and farmers in the North and West—many of them supporters of the Whig Party—on the other. Robert Toombs, Alexander Stephens, and other southern Whig leaders tried to dodge the question of slavery's extension as long as possible. But the debate over slavery in the territories won in the Mexican War and over the Wilmot Proviso, which proposed to ban slavery in them, brought the crisis to a head.

A settlement was reached by leaders of the Whig and Democratic parties, Henry Clay and Stephen Douglas. The Compromise of 1850 was passed as a set of five separate bills including admitting California as a free state, popular sovereignty in Utah and New Mexico, banning the slave trade in Washington, D.C., and enacting a more stringent fugitive slave law. As Ulrich Phillips pointed out, the compromise was “on the whole of decided advantage to the South.”²³⁰

²³⁰ Phillips, *Georgia and States Rights*, 163.

Georgia Whigs Robert Toombs and Alexander Stephens as well as Georgia Democrat Howell Cobb played a major role winning enough southern votes to pass the compromise bills in Congress. But opposition to the Compromise was widespread among Georgia voters of both parties. In the summer of 1850, mass meetings of Georgia voters cheered the secessionist speeches of the so-called “fire-eaters”: Democrats Robert Barnwell Rhett of Beaufort, South Carolina, William Lowndes Yancey of Alabama, and ex-Governor Charles J. McDonald of Georgia. Georgia Governor George Towns, a Democrat, expecting a big victory for opponents of the Compromise of 1850, called for a statewide convention to decide the issue.

To win support for the Compromise, Georgia Whig leader Charles Jenkins drafted a document which became known as the Georgia Platform. It proffered conditional support for the Compromise. But the Platform retained the threat of secession from the union if Congress outlawed slavery in the District of Columbia, or refused to admit as a state a territory which accepted slavery, or if federal and state authorities did not implement the fugitive slave bill. Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb campaigned throughout the state in support of the Platform.

Charles Hopkins and his brothers joined other Georgia Whigs in support of the 1850 Compromise and the Georgia Platform. As a symbol of inter-party unity on the question, Hopkins nominated the aging Democratic Party leader Thomas S. Spalding, an opponent of the fire-eaters, to be McIntosh County delegate at the Milledgeville convention. As had been the case in the nullification crisis of the early 1830s, Georgia voters were not ready for extreme measures in support of southern rights. Delegates supporting the Georgia Platform won a smashing victory in elections for delegates to the convention and overwhelming endorsement of

the Platform at the convention itself. Georgia's precedent paved the way for support for the Compromise of 1850 on the basis of the Georgia Platform in other slaveholding states.²³¹

After the Milledgeville convention, McDonald and other Georgia opponents of the Compromise formed the Southern Rights Party. Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb launched a new political party to support the Georgia Platform: the Constitutional Union Party (CU). Howell Cobb became the CU candidate for governor.

Charles Hopkins and his brothers played a prominent role in organizing the new party in coastal Georgia. In June 1851, at a meeting in Holmesville chaired by his brother Thomas, Charles Hopkins became the CU candidate for Congress. For the next five months, Hopkins poured his heart and soul into the campaign. He travelled throughout Georgia's first district, to small towns like Holmesville, Waynesville, and Springfield. Speaking in Screven County, Hopkins "painted in living colors the blessings of the Union, and implored the people of Georgia to stand by it as the palladium of their safety and happiness." In Waynesville, "in a speech of one hour and a half, [he] made an impression upon the crowd that will last for life." After his speech, said the reporter of the *Savannah Republican*, "no one could hesitate to acknowledge that the cause of the CU party was the cause of the Union." Hopkins was described by reporters as "a plain unassuming man" but a "powerful and eloquent" speaker. "Col. Hopkins I consider a natural orator of no ordinary powers," said another reporter. "His elocution is easy and conciliatory . . . a modest gentleman and a natural orator."²³²

²³¹ *SR*, Oct. 10, 1850.

²³² "meeting in Holmesville," *SR*, June 26, 1851; "painted," *SR*, July 28, 1851; "impression on the crowd," *SR*, Oct. 1, 1851; "plain unassuming," *SR*, Mar. 21, 1851; "natural orator," *SR*, July 28, 1851.

The elections resulted in a big victory for the new party. Howell Cobb was elected governor in a landslide victory over Southern Rights candidate Charles McDonald. But despite Hopkins's strenuous efforts, the first district remained in the hands of the Democrats. A total of 7,866 votes were cast. Hopkins lost the election by 244 votes to Democrat James W. Jackson.²³³

The success of the Georgia Platform in uniting the South in support of the Compromise of 1850 was praised at the time, and often cited by historians today, as a victory of the southern "unionists" (Whigs and Democrats) against the "secessionists." But it did so at a price. There was no longer any out-and-out unionist party in Georgia. All parties agreed that remaining in the Union was conditional on Congress abiding by southern demands. They agreed on the triggers which could lead to secession, particularly northern failure to implement fugitive slave laws.

As northern Whig-turned-Republican William Seward pointed out in a much-publicized speech in 1858, the battle over slavery was an "irrepressible conflict." The opposing class interests of northern manufacturers and western farmers on the one hand and southern slaveowners on the other made conflict inevitable. Confrontations in the 1850s steadily undermined any hope of compromise. What developed instead were ruling classes whose policies more accurately represented the interests of their competing societies: slave labor in the South versus free labor in the North.

By 1852, the southern Whig party was in free fall. The national Whig party collapsed in the mid-1850s as large sections of the northern ruling class turned to the Republican Party to defend their interests. With each big conflict—Kansas-Nebraska, the 1856 elections, Dred Scott,

²³³ *SMN*, Oct. 14, 1851. Hopkins's friends attributed his defeat to the withdrawal of Laurens County from the district, "the vote of which would have elected him by a majority of 400." See *Georgia Weekly Opinion*, Nov. 19, 1867.

John Brown—opposition to any further expansion of slavery and support for the Republican Party grew in the North.

Outright secessionists congregated in the southern wing of the Democratic Party. By the fall of 1852, Thomas Cobb, the victorious Constitutional Union governor of Georgia, was already heading back to the Democratic Party. After 1850, Alexander Stephens and Robert Toombs refused to have anything more to do with the national Whig party. By the mid-1850s, Toombs had joined the Democratic Party and Stephens, a nominal independent, voted with the Democrats in Congress. Former Whig Senator from the First District Thomas Butler King, whom Hopkins had backed in the 1840s, switched to the Democratic Party in the mid-1850s. During the same period, O. C. Hopkins, Charles Hopkins's younger brother and close political ally, joined the Democrats and quickly became a leading party spokesman in McIntosh County.²³⁴

Charles Hopkins supported the Whigs until the bitter end. In 1852, he supported General Winfield Scott, the Whig candidate for the presidency. With the rapid demise of the southern Whigs after Scott's defeat, Hopkins was left without a party. He had devoted 14 years of his life as a regional leader of the Whig party, and now that party was gone.²³⁵

It would have been entirely understandable had Hopkins simply dropped out of politics at this point. The Democratic tide on the coast was overpowering. There was a lot to do in Belleville and his other plantations. The price of sea-island cotton was high. He was now the owner of over 100 slaves. His family had grown to ten children.²³⁶

²³⁴ *The Savannah Georgian*, Sept. 30, 1855.

²³⁵ *SR*, Aug. 23, 1852.

²³⁶ US Census, McIntosh County, 1850.

Writing in 1863, Hopkins stated that for the previous ten years he had taken “no part in politics unless the country was imperiled.” But the country was often imperiled. Throughout the 1850s, Hopkins backed a series of parties which supported slavery and southern rights but opposed secession.²³⁷

In 1855-56, former Whigs clinging to the hope of a return to the old days of compromise politics formed the American/Know Nothing Party. The American Party said the real problem in the United States was massive European immigration. In 1855 Hopkins was a delegate to the American Party convention in Milledgeville. In the elections of 1856, he supported American Party candidates Millard Fillmore for president and Benjamin Hill for governor. Hopkins put a racial spin on the party’s anti-immigrant rhetoric. At a meeting of Fillmore supporters in Darien in March 1856, he presented a resolution that “we do condemn, in the most unqualified terms, the system of legislation which allows a heathen or West India negro to vote in one day after his arrival in the territories, when European gentlemen have been compelled to remain in the country five years, and be of good moral character, to entitle them to the right of suffrage.” When Fillmore and Hill were soundly defeated, Hopkins turned to local politics. In 1857, he was elected mayor of Darien. As mayor, he pushed for a railroad link between Darien and Savannah.²³⁸

From 1857 to 1859, many former Whigs and American Party members campaigned as Opposition Party candidates against both the rising Republican Party in the North and the Democrats. In 1859, Hopkins was elected as a delegate to the Opposition convention in Atlanta.

²³⁷ *SR*, Sept. 25, 1863.

²³⁸ *SR*, Nov. 29, 1855, June 14, 1856, Oct. 23, 1856, Mar. 31, 1856, Jan. 4 and May 20, 1858; *SMN*, Dec. 19, 1857.

He pledged to campaign throughout the “southern and river counties” on behalf of Colonel Warren Akin, a north Georgia lawyer who ran as Opposition Party candidate for governor. Again, a defeat: Joseph Brown was re-elected governor by a large margin. Hopkins’s brother O. C., on the other hand, was the successful Democratic candidate for the state legislature from McIntosh County.²³⁹

The national elections of 1860 brought the conflict over slavery to a head. Decisive sections of the Northern ruling class united behind the Republican Party and the election of Abraham Lincoln as president. The leadership of the Southern slaveholding class split from the Democratic Party and united behind the breakaway candidacy of John Breckinridge of Kentucky for president. Those Democrats who continued to hope for some kind of compromise which could paper over the irreconcilable conflict voted for Stephen Douglas. Others, mainly former Whigs and American Party members, created a new party which—in an ill-fated homage to Georgia’s similarly brief experiment a decade earlier—they called the Constitutional Union Party (CU).

Like the American Party and Opposition parties before them, the Constitutional Union Party did its best to avoid the divisive issue of slavery. The platform of the national Constitutional Union Party was limited to the US Constitution. It adopted an ambiguous platform designed to “remove the slavery issue from politics,” “leaving state parties free to adopt statements suitable to their constituencies.” In CU branches in the deep South, supporters pledged their allegiance to the central tenets of the Georgia Platform. The May convention of the CU in Milledgeville, for instance, insisted on the right to hold slaves, denied the power of Congress or territorial legislatures to “impair the right of property in slaves by any legislation

²³⁹ *SMN*, Aug. 12 and Sept. 8, 1859; *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, Aug. 26, 1859; *SMN*, Oct. 8, 1859.

whatsoever,” and protested the attempts of northern states to prevent the implementation of the fugitive slave law as “revolutionary in their effect.”²⁴⁰

Charles Hopkins was a delegate and member of the executive committee at the CU’s Milledgeville convention. In June, his brother Edward Hopkins became the CU candidate for governor of the state of Florida. His brother Thomas was a Wayne County delegate to the Georgia CU convention in September 1860.²⁴¹

Charles Hopkins was one of Georgia’s delegates to the Constitutional Union Party’s national convention in Baltimore in May 1860. At the convention, he gave a widely publicized speech nominating General Sam Houston as the party’s presidential candidate. In 1859, Houston had united “Union” Democrats with former Whigs and American Party supporters to defeat his “fire-eating” Democratic Party opponent and become governor of Texas. Hopkins hoped that Houston could perform the same magic on a national stage. In his nominating speech Hopkins compared “the hero of San Jacinto” to other men of military renown: former Whig Presidents William Henry Harrison and Zachary Taylor.²⁴²

Houston lost the nomination. Convention delegates elected slaveholder John Bell of Tennessee as their presidential candidate. Bell supporters in Georgia proclaimed themselves the

²⁴⁰ James Alex Baggett, “The Constitutional Union Party in Texas,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 82, no. 3 (January, 1979), 239, 242; *Rome Weekly Courier*, May 11, 1860.

²⁴¹ *Augusta Chronicle*, Apr. 10, 1860; *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, July 4, 1860; *Savannah Daily News (SDN)*, Aug. 30, 1861.

²⁴² *Augusta Chronicle*, May 5, 1860; *The Southern Recorder*, May 22, 1860; *SMN*, Dec. 12, 1886. Hopkins felt so strongly about Sam Houston’s appeal as a fusion candidate in the South that he sent up trial balloons in support of Houston even after Bell’s victory in Baltimore. See *The Columbus Enquirer*, May 29, 1860 and *Augusta Chronicle*, May 30, 1860.

true supporters of southern rights and insisted that Bell was more supportive of the “peculiar institution” than his non-slaveholding opponents Stephen Douglas or John Breckinridge.²⁴³

The results of the 1860 elections dashed any last-minute hopes for compromise. Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party came out on top in the northern and midwestern states, while the Breckinridge Democrats swept the South. Edward Hopkins was defeated in the vote for governor of Florida by a large margin.²⁴⁴

With Lincoln’s victory, the ruling class in Georgia turned decisively in favor of secession. As historian George Irons pointed out decades ago, “the Governor of the state, two of the three members of the Georgia Supreme Court, the Federal Circuit judge, the former Secretary of the Treasury, both Georgia senators, and six of the eight representatives in Congress favored immediate secession. Seven of the eight former governors of Georgia alive in 1860 favored secession.” These were not “fire-eaters.” They were not stampeded into secession. These were part of the conservative leaders of Georgia’s slaveholding ruling class. Their secessionist stance was based on a sophisticated and accurate appreciation of the dire future of their slave-labor-based society under the presidency of Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party.²⁴⁵

The fight for secession in Georgia was led by former “unionist” Whig Robert Toombs, former “unionist” Democrat Howell Cobb, and Democratic Party Governor Joseph Brown. The election of Brown as governor in 1857 and again in 1859 was a huge gain for the secessionist wing of Georgia’s ruling class. Most Georgia voters did not own slaves. In the 1860 elections a

²⁴³ *Southern Recorder* (Milledgeville), July 24 and Aug. 7, 1860.

²⁴⁴ *Weekly Constitutionalist*, Oct. 31, 1860.

²⁴⁵ George V. Irons, “The Secession Movement in Georgia, 1850-61,” Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1936, 343, cited in T. Conn Bryan, “The Secession of Georgia,” *GHQ*, 36, no. 2 (June 1947), 95.

small majority of Georgians had voted for the Constitutional Union Party and national (Douglas) Democratic Party. They were adamant about southern rights but wanted to give the North one more chance. Opposition to secession in Georgia was concentrated among the non-slaveholding farmers in north Georgia and in the wiregrass areas of south Georgia. A farmer, real estate speculator, and judge from north Georgia, Brown devoted himself to winning over the yeomen of north and wiregrass Georgia to support for secession. He combined populist, “anti-aristocratic” demagoguery, including opposition to the banks, with small reforms. He coupled these measures with strong defense of slavery and warnings about the threat to the “white man’s democracy” posed by abolitionism and the “Black Republicans.” “The governor’s energy and positions tended to please the slaveholders,” argue historians William Freehling and Craig Simpson, “for no North Georgian so fervently preached that white men, whether slaveholders or non-slaveholders, must keep black ‘inferiors’ enslaved.”²⁴⁶

On November 7, the day Lincoln’s victory was confirmed, Governor Brown circulated a “Special Message” to the Georgia legislature. Addressing himself directly to the non-slaveholding majority of Georgia farmers, Brown stressed the dire financial consequences which would befall white laborers in the South should slavery be abolished, and the degradation of whites should the Black Republicans legislate equality of the races. To allay fears of civil war, he

²⁴⁶ William W. Freehling and Craig M. Simpson, eds., *Secession Debated: Georgia’s Showdown in 1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 10.

argued that the secession of the southern states would cause the North to capitulate. Secession would bring “no war, no bloodshed” he assured them.²⁴⁷

A rump of reluctant secessionists, mostly former Whigs and American Party members led by Alexander Stephens and Benjamin Hill, tried to slow down the drive toward Georgia’s withdrawal from the Union by proposing that representatives of all the slave states should “cooperate” and make a collective decision on secession. The legislature agreed to hold a convention in Milledgeville in mid-January 1861 to choose between “cooperation” or immediate secession.

Savannah played a key role in the push for immediate secession. Two days after Lincoln’s election, dozens of Savannah city leaders travelled to Charleston to let the fire-eaters there know that if South Carolina were to secede from the Union, Georgia would follow. Former Whig Francis Bartow and self-proclaimed “unionist” Judge Henry R. Jackson vowed Georgia’s support. Historian William W. Freehling argues that the Savannah leaders’ support played an important role in the decision of South Carolina to secede without waiting for other states to join them. Over the next two months, Bartow campaigned around the state for immediate secession. In the debate over secession which took place in Georgia’s legislature in November 1860, Julian Hartridge of Savannah “proposed taking Georgia out of the Union by legislative enactment, without waiting for a convention.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Joseph E. Brown, *Special Message of Gov. Joseph E. Brown to the Legislature of Georgia on our Federal Relations, Retaliatory State Legislation, the Right of Secession, etc., November 7th, 1860* (Milledgeville: Boughton, Nisbet & Barnes, 1860), 19.

²⁴⁸ William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, Volume II: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 410-13; Freehling and Simpson, *Secession Debated*, 10-12.

Unlike the “cooperationists,” the immediate secessionists did not limit themselves to speeches and newspaper articles. When fundamental questions of power are posed, victory comes to those who act, and act decisively. Brown’s “Special Message,” printed in book form and widely circulated throughout the state, ended with the following declaration: “To every demand for further concession, or compromise of our rights, we should reply, ‘The argument is exhausted,’ and we now ‘stand by our arms’.”²⁴⁹

The governor demanded a one-million-dollar appropriation to build up Georgia’s military and for laws giving him the authority to seize the Georgia property of any citizen of a state which refused to enforce the federal fugitive slave law. A few days later, a statewide convention of Georgia militiamen mustered at the capital. In mid-December, the legislature authorized Brown to raise 10,000 troops. When South Carolina voted to secede on December 20, torchlight parades celebrated the decision in Atlanta and other cities. Vigilante groups were set up to ferret out any opposition. In January 1861, the *Savannah Republican* reported approvingly on the public parade of a group which called itself the “Rattlesnakes.” Members vowed to “ferret out evil-doers and suspicious persons in these troublous times” such as “bad northern men prowling through the country.” On January 2, 1861, the day of the elections to the convention, Governor Brown ordered Georgia militiamen to capture Fort Pulaski. Between January 9 and January 11, three other states seceded: Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama.²⁵⁰

On January 16, 1861, the convention delegates assembled in Milledgeville. A majority of Georgians opposed secession, including a big majority of yeomen farmers and poor whites. With no unionist alternative, many counties in north Georgia and wiregrass Georgia voted for the

²⁴⁹ Brown, *Special Message*, 22.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11; *SR*, Jan. 17, 1861.

cooperationists. Charles Hopkins was not elected, but his brother Thomas attended as an anti-secession delegate from Wayne County. Eight-six percent of the delegates owned slaves, and almost half owned twenty or more. Ulrich Phillips called it “without doubt the most distinguished body of men which had ever assembled in Georgia.”²⁵¹

The strenuous efforts of the immediate secessionists paid off. On January 19, 1861, a solid majority of convention delegates voted to secede. Intense pressure was put on the “cooperationist” holdouts to support this decision. Indoctrinated by a decade of unconditional support for secession-if-necessary in defense of slavery, Benjamin Hill, Alexander Stephens, Thomas Hopkins, and almost all the others promptly fell in line.

Ten years earlier, Georgia’s triumvirate of Cobb, Toombs, and Stephens had turned the tide in favor of southern states supporting the Compromise of 1850 provided the North respected southern (slaveholder) rights. The same triumvirate, with the addition of Governor Brown, now united in leading Georgia out of the union. Other slave states in the Deep South followed Georgia’s lead. On April 12, with the go-ahead from South Carolina’s Governor Francis Pickens, South Carolina troops bombarded Fort Sumter, and the Civil War began.

“The shedding of blood,” predicted South Carolina fire-eater Edmund Ruffin, “will serve to change many voters in the hesitating states, from the submission or procrastinating ranks, to the zealous for immediate secession.” Stimulated by the attack on Fort Sumter and the cry of “southern rights,” war fever raged in the state of Georgia. This war fever initially included the plain folk and most poor whites. Cooperationists and “unionists” from every section “went

²⁵¹ Allen D. Candler, ed. *Confederate Records of the State of Georgia, Volume I*. (Atlanta: Chas. P. Byrd, 1909), 310; Jonathan M. Bryant, *How Curious a Land: Conflict and Change in Greene County, Georgia 1850-1885* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 65; Phillips, *Georgia and States Rights*, 202.

along with the State.” The men of the Hopkins family were no exception. O. C. became Captain of the McIntosh Light Dragoons, 1st Division, Georgia Cavalry. Thomas organized the Wayne Rangers. Edward was elected as commanding officer of the 4th Florida Infantry. Hopkins’s oldest son, Charles Jr, became 3rd Lieutenant in the McIntosh Light Dragoons.²⁵²

Georgia’s political elite, secessionists and cooperationists alike, quickly took on prominent positions in the Confederate States of America (CSA). Alexander Stephens became vice-president. Robert Toombs was the first CSA Secretary of State; later he became a brigadier general in the Confederate Army and Georgia militia. Howell Cobb was the president of the Confederate Provisional Congress, then a brigadier general in the army. Benjamin Hill was elected senator in the Confederate Senate. Thomas Butler King was sent by Governor Brown as commissioner of Georgia in Europe. Francis Bartow became chairman of the CSA military committee.

Those who dared oppose the war faced enormous pressure. Many were denounced as cowards or traitors. The most prominent Georgia politician who did not “go along with the state” was Joshua Hill. Hill was a lawyer and slaveowner from Madison, Georgia. He had been elected to the US House of Representatives in 1857 as a candidate of the American Party and reelected

²⁵² “O.C.”: *SR*, Nov. 15, 1862; “Thomas”: William Harden, *A History of Savannah and South Georgia, Volume II* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1913), 915; “Edward”: Jonathan C. Sheppard, *By the Noble Daring of Her Sons: The Florida Brigade of the Army of Tennessee* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), 22; “Charles Jr.”: *Memoirs of Georgia*, 499; Keith Scott Hébert, “Civil War and Reconstruction Era Cass/Bartow County, Georgia, 2007 PhD thesis, Auburn University, citing William K. Scarborough, ed., *The Diary of Edmund Ruffin, Vol. 1: Toward Independence, October 1856-April 1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 542.

in 1859. His congressional district extended well past Atlanta into north Georgia, where opposition to secession was strong.²⁵³

Hill was known for his conviction that secession would lead to a “long and bloody war” and would be devastating to the institution of slavery. When Georgia voted to secede, six of the state’s seven congressmen in Washington declared their allegiance to the self-proclaimed independent state and withdrew from Congress without resigning, proclaiming they no longer acknowledged the authority of the federal government. Hill, on the other hand, resigned his post, making it clear he was opposed to Georgia’s secession. On January 24, citizens of Talbot County “hung Mr. Hill in effigy.” When the war began, Hill declined to volunteer or to urge others to do so. He took “no active part in politics” and retired into private life.²⁵⁴

War fever in coastal Georgia was particularly intense. Charles Hopkins was the most prominent politician on the Georgia coast who refused to support the war. Instead, Hopkins “opposed secession, and at the outbreak of the war he aroused considerable hostility when he resigned his military command to make speeches for the preservation of the Union.” His decision to resign his military command laid him open to accusations of cowardice. Hopkins was “assailed by the rebels, and threatened with death. He was not only designated as a traitor, but was stigmatized with the most opprobrious epithets.”²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Lucien E. Roberts, “The Political Career of Joshua Hill, Georgia Unionist,” *GHQ*, 21, no. 1 (March, 1937), 50-72.

²⁵⁴ I. W. Avery, *The History of the State of Georgia from 1850 to 1881* (New York: Brown & Derby, Publishers, 1877), 180; *SR*, Sept. 4, 1863.

²⁵⁵ Myers, *The Children of Pride*, 1554; *SDR*, Sept. 22, 1865.

Hopkins's public repudiation of the war and support for the Union was extraordinary. Why did he make this decision? His reasons were longstanding. In a letter Hopkins wrote while campaigning as the CU candidate for US Senator in 1851, he posed two alternatives facing Georgia voters. On the one hand, they could remain in "this glorious Union," a "prosperous and happy Republic" where peace reigned, governed by the Constitution and the law. On the other hand, they could choose to withdraw from the union. Withdrawal, said Hopkins, would plunge "ourselves into all the horrors of anarchy and civil war." It would "embrace our hands in fraternal blood." He returned to these alternatives at the end of the letter: "If, on the other hand, you are in favor of tearing down all the pillars of your own great Republic, and scattering broadcast the seeds of anarchy and civil war over your once fruitful fields, you will vote for those who believe the Union a curse, and Republicanism a mockery."²⁵⁶

In speeches after the war, Hopkins asked his audience to "remember that I warned you against this trouble. I told you secession was war, and that war would end in the ruin and subjugation of the South." He explained again and again why he was "unyielding," why he used "his utmost endeavors to crush the influence of those who were struggling to overthrow the Government and bring suffering and widespread desolation to the land."²⁵⁷

Hopkins's opposition to the war was rooted in family history. The Hopkins family had already suffered, and been on the losing side, in one civil war. Charles Hopkins also knew full well, through bitter personal experience, what happens to families and communities when violent words and passion overcome compromise and reason. The run-up to Georgia's secession was filled with the same wild promises of easy victory, the same hostility and violent threats against

²⁵⁶ *SR*, Sept. 17, 1851.

²⁵⁷ *SDH*, July 17, 1865; *SDR*, Sept. 22, 1865.

those who opposed the rush to war. At a time when secessionist leaders were proclaiming that there would be no war, that if there was a war it would be over in six weeks, Hopkins foresaw the disastrous consequences of the war, and warned his fellow citizens.

Hopkins's and Hill's opposition to the war did not mean support for Lincoln and the Union. Both continued to support slavery, and both were vocal opponents of abolitionism and the Republican Party. They opposed the war because they believed that the South was making a historic mistake by fighting a civil war against the North. They believed that slavery could best be defended within the Union rather than as an independent Confederacy. Both continued to hope that some kind of compromise with the North could be worked out. Charles Hopkins and Joshua Hill were unwilling to give any support for a war which they considered suicidal for the South, but neither did they hinder the southern war effort. Having made their point, they resigned their posts and retreated into civilian life.

The direct impact of the war was first felt in coastal Georgia. In November 1861, Federal naval forces seized Port Royal, South Carolina, a few miles north of Savannah. The loss of other barrier islands to Union forces soon followed. Port Royal and the occupied islands became havens for slaves in the area. The northern navy quickly began to apply pressure on Georgia sea islands and coastal settlements. Early in 1862, Union troops took possession of Tybee Island. On April 11, 1862, they took Fort Pulaski. Savannah, the state's major port, was now effectively blockaded. As Union navy raids grew, plantation owners up and down the Georgia coast began moving their slaves and families to more secure areas. In March 1862, Reverend Charles Colcock Jones of Liberty County noted that Darien was "pretty well deserted."²⁵⁸

²⁵⁸ Myers, *The Children of Pride*, 858.

On Friday, November 7, 1862, two union gunboats based on St. Simon's Island raided plantations along the Sapelo River north of Darien. They set fire to Charles Hopkins's home and other buildings on his Belleville plantation. A Union Negro company took off some fifty slaves from the plantation of a neighbor, Reuben King. The raiders were eventually driven off by the McIntosh Cavalry under command of O. C. Hopkins.²⁵⁹

Charles Hopkins had fallen victim to the horrors of the war he had fought so hard to prevent. He had to find a place for his "helpless and exiled family, fugitives from their comfortable home, with only a chair to sit upon." He moved temporarily to the nearby Meadows Plantation, which he had purchased sometime earlier. But it was too exposed to Union gunboats. By April 1863, Hopkins and his extended family moved further from the coast to the tiny town of Blackshear, the county seat of Pierce County. For similar reasons, in the same period Thomas Hopkins moved his family and slaves from Sherwood Plantation near Waynesville to Thomasville, Georgia.²⁶⁰

Charles Hopkins spent his whole adult life fighting against secession and secessionists. He was an unconditional Unionist at a time and place where such views were not permitted. A "practical" politician, he knew that saying what he really believed was political suicide. So for decades, he played the political game. He belong to a series of conditional unionist parties and tailored his speeches to the political prejudices of his audience.

But at every key turning point, he refused to violate his principles even if it meant social and political ostracism. When the Whig Party in the South fell apart, he chose the political

²⁵⁹ *SR*, Nov. 14, 1862; *SMN*, Nov. 19, 1862.

²⁶⁰ *SR*, Sept. 25, 1863; Sullivan, *Early Days*, 282-83; Nellie Stewart, *Recollections of Blackshear, Georgia 1857-1913-14* (Tampa: V.W. Edwards & Co., 1915), 8, 13-14.

wilderness rather than joining the Democratic Party. When Georgia seceded from the Union, he resigned his militia post and denounced the war.

The Civil War marked the biggest change in Hopkins's life. He lost his plantation and moved away from his slaves, away from the coast. For the first time in his life, he lived among people who had nothing to lose with the demise of slavery. He came to realize that slavery and the slave-owning aristocracy were at the root of all the problems of the South, and that it would take revolutionary measures to root them out. In 1865, once the Confederacy was defeated, he began to say what he really believed.

7 AARON BRADLEY, 1815-1865: “HE DISPLAYS RATHER MORE ABILITY THAN HIS DEGRADED RACE ARE SUPPOSED TO POSSESS”

In the early decades of the 19th century, upcountry Georgia and South Carolina were the site of the country’s first major cotton boom. At the boom’s center was Edgefield County, South Carolina, which borders Georgia along the Savannah River opposite Augusta. Original settlers in Edgefield began to grow cotton; newcomers moved from coastal areas and the nearby states of North Carolina and Virginia) to establish cotton plantations. The county was overwhelmingly agricultural. Edgefield, the most important town in the county, had a population of only 300 in 1826. Along with cotton came slaves. “The number of slaves in upcountry cotton districts grew from 21,000 in 1790 to 70,000 twenty years later.” By 1820 the black population was nearly half the population of the district.²⁶¹

Although not nearly as rich or aristocratic as the low-country nabobs in the Charleston area, a small elite of planter families owning hundreds of acres of land and dozens of slaves dominated Edgefield society and politics. Aggressive entrepreneurs when it came to acquisition of land and slaves, paternalist in their relations with their slaves, they pursued law degrees and political office with equal confidence and vigor. From an early period, Edgefield elites played an important role in South Carolina and national politics, as leaders of the nullification movement in the 1820s and 1830s and of the secessionist movement in the 1850s and 1860s.

²⁶¹ Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Tom Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South: Masters, Merchants, and Manufacturers in the Southern Interior, 1790-1860* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005).

The Simkins were one such leading family. Arthur Simkins, who established the Cedarfield plantation in 1772, is considered the father of Edgefield County. A supporter of independence during the American Revolution, he was one of the South Carolina representatives who voted on the new constitution following the war and then spent 16 years in the state senate. He grew cotton, eventually owning 59 slaves. The Edgefield County courthouse, town square, and local Baptist Church were carved out of his plantation.²⁶²

Arthur's oldest son Eldred followed in his father's footsteps. Like many other descendants of the upcountry elite which emerged from the revolution, he went to college in the North (Connecticut) and was admitted to the bar (Charleston). He built his home in the town of Edgefield rather than on his plantation. It was there that he established his law practice, which took on the most important legal cases in the area. Politically active, he served seven years in the South Carolina legislature, three years as Lieutenant Governor, and two years in the US House of Representatives. Early in his career he profited from the cotton boom to expand his holdings in land and slaves. In 1820, he owned 51 slaves.²⁶³

One of Eldred's slaves in Edgefield was a black woman named Celia. Around 1815, she had a son, a mulatto, whom she called Aaron. As the mulatto son of a white father, young Aaron occupied an anomalous position between two worlds. At this period, there were a small number of mulattoes and an even smaller number of free negroes in the South Carolina upcountry. While

²⁶² John Belton O'Neill, *Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina* (S. G. Courtenay & Company, 1859), II, 276-77; "Overview," Edgefield County Historical Society, accessed January 13, 2018, <http://www.historicedgefield.com/id3.html>.

²⁶³ O'Neill, *Biographical Sketches*, II, 277-80; John A. Chapman, *History of Edgefield County from the Earliest Settlements to 1897* (Newberry, S.C.: Elbert H. Aull, 1897), 189-90.

most slaves were part of labor gangs in the cotton fields, as a mulatto Aaron most likely avoided that fate. If his mother was a house servant, he would have lived in town and spent time in the “big house.”²⁶⁴

Eldred Simkin’s house in Edgefield saw a steady stream of elite South Carolinians going through it: relatives, politicians, law partners and clients, planters. It was the center of the plantation universe, with a whole panoply of slaves occupying various positions in town and constant relations with the plantation nearby, with its overseers, lead hands, and work gangs. A self-confident, inquisitive, and “unusually smart” little boy, Aaron soaked it all in: the harsh life of the work gang negroes, the more pampered life of the house servants, the goings-on in the master’s house.²⁶⁵

The Simkins family was connected through marriage, economics, and politics to many other elite families in upstate South Carolina. One of the most prominent was the Pickens family.

The family patriarch, Andrew Pickens, began as a trader with the Cherokee Indians in far northwestern South Carolina in the 1770s and became famous as an Indian fighter and Brigadier General in the Revolutionary War. After the war, he served many years in the South Carolina General Assembly and the US House of Representatives. At his death, he owned hundreds of

²⁶⁴ *Greensboro Herald*, Feb. 17, 1870. The *Edgefield Advertiser* of Feb. 19, 1868 referred to Bradley as “an old fashioned Simkins nigger.” Bradley’s birth year is listed as “about 1815” in the 1860 Massachusetts census. The census entry confirms the calculations of E. Merton Coulter in “Aaron Alpeoria Bradley, Georgia Negro Politician During Reconstruction Times,” Part 1, *GHQ*, 51, No. 1 (March 1967), 15.

²⁶⁵ *Greensboro Herald*, Feb. 17, 1870. See also Aaron’s mother’s testimony cited in *SMN*, Nov. 28, 1874.

acres of land in upcountry South Carolina, including a 600-acre plantation in Edgefield, and dozens of slaves.²⁶⁶

Pickens's son Andrew Jr. was of the same generation and followed the same trajectory as Eldred. Andrew graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Rhode Island University (later Brown), studied law in Charleston, and married Susannah Wilkinson from a prominent Charleston family. The owner of a large plantation and 35 slaves in Pendleton, SC, he was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives in 1810 when Eldred Simkins was in the Senate. During his first year in the legislature, his wife died, leaving him with the care of their two small children. When the War of 1812 broke out, he joined the army, serving first on the Canadian border then in the defense of Charleston before retiring as colonel.²⁶⁷

At the war's end, Andrew Jr. decided to make a fresh start. Rather than returning to Pendleton, he moved to Edgefield in 1815. He established the Oatland plantation 7 miles north of Edgefield where he raised cotton, built a 2-story house in Edgefield named Halcyon Grove, and returned to the practice of law. The families of Andrew Pickens Jr. and Eldred Simkins were close. Andrew's son Francis and Eldred's daughter Eliza were childhood sweethearts. Did Andrew move to Edgefield at the encouragement of Eldred? Did he live in Eldred's home while his own house was being built? In 1815 or thereabouts, at a time when Andrew Pickens Jr. lived

²⁶⁶ Rod Andrew Jr., *The Life and Times of General Andrew Pickens: Revolutionary War Hero, American Founder* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Alice Noble Waring, *The Fighting Elder: Andrew Pickens (1739-1817)*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1962).

²⁶⁷ James Spady, "Pickens, Andrew, Jr.," *South Carolina Encyclopedia*, accessed January 19, 2018, <http://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/pickens-andrew-jr/>. At some later point in time, Andrew Pickens married a woman named Mary Harrison or Mary Nelson. They had no children.

in Edgefield, Eldred Simkins's slave Celia gave birth to a mulatto child named Aaron. Years later, Aaron Bradley remarked that "intimations had been promulgated that Mr. Pickens, of South Carolina, was his father, but he was uncertain."²⁶⁸

In 1816, Andrew was elected Governor of South Carolina, the first governor from the upstate area. In 1818, immediately after his term as Governor ended, Andrew left Edgefield and joined the rush of planters to the rich cotton lands in the newly created territory of Alabama. He bought a big cotton plantation near Selma and became president of the Bank of Alabama in 1824. In 1829, Francis, after studying at South Carolina College and gaining his law degree, married his childhood sweetheart, Eliza Simkins, and entered into law practice with the now ailing Eldred Simkins in Edgefield. At around the same time, Andrew moved from Alabama and lived for a time in Augusta, Georgia before returning to Edgefield and Halcyon Grove. He began construction of a house for the newlywed couple on their new Edgewood Plantation just outside town.²⁶⁹

What was Andrew Pickens doing in Augusta?

Aaron was 14 or 15 years old at the time. With his master's health failing, a decision had to be made about his future. At about the same time that Andrew Pickens moved there, Aaron

²⁶⁸ John B. Edmunds, Jr., *Francis W. Pickens and the Politics of Destruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 7; Edmunds, *Francis W. Pickens*, 9; *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, July 11, 1868. In "Aaron Alpeoria Bradley," Part I, 15, E. Merton Coulter dismisses the possibility that "Mr. Pickens" could have been Bradley's father (see preceding footnote) by noting that Francis Pickens was only 10 years old in 1815. But the *Columbus Daily Enquirer* article referenced by Coulter does not specify which "Mr. Pickens" Bradley was referring to. Francis's father, Andrew Pickens Jr., was 36 years old in 1815.

²⁶⁹ Lois K. Nix and Mary Kay Snell, *Thomas Boone Pickens (1928 -): His Ancestors* (Amarillo, Texas: TypePros, 1989), 103-04.

was taken to Augusta, just across the Savannah River from Edgefield County, and set up as a shoemaker. Did Andrew take Aaron to Augusta? Did he want to move this stain on the family honor out of state and far away from his politically ambitious son? ²⁷⁰

A year later, in 1831, Eldred Simkins died after a prolonged illness. Francis became the executor of Eldred Simkins's estate and took over management of his wife's property, property which included the young slave Aaron, now in Augusta. If Aaron was indeed Andrew Pickens's mulatto son, he was now owned by his half-brother.²⁷¹

In 1830, Augusta was the second largest city in Georgia (after Savannah) with a population of over 11,000. It was a booming port and commercial center, the city where planters in central Georgia took their cotton to be sold and shipped south aboard steamships to Savannah, and where they bought their supplies.

Over half of Augusta's citizens were slaves. The city was the slave-trading center of central Georgia and an important part of the interstate slave trade. Augusta newspapers were filled with notices of slave auctions and rewards offered for runaway slaves. Slaves worked in the port as carters, stevedores, and boatmen. They hauled cotton and other goods as teamsters. Slave craftsmen—carpenters, masons, furniture makers, potters, shoemakers—worked for the planters, merchants, and professionals who lived in Augusta. Augusta was also the home of 235 free blacks, who lived and worked alongside the slaves. Free blacks founded the community of

²⁷⁰ *Greensboro Herald*, Feb. 17, 1870.

²⁷¹ Edmunds, *Francis W. Pickens*, 21. This confirms Bradley's assertion that he had been a slave of Governor Francis W. Pickens. See *Augusta Weekly Constitutionalist*, Apr. 20, 1870, cited in Coulter, "Aaron Alpeoria Bradley," part I, 19.

Springfield on the outskirts of Augusta, along with the Springfield Baptist Church, one of the oldest independent black congregations in the country.²⁷²

Moving to Augusta was a huge change for Aaron. He was no longer isolated in tiny Edgefield and the Simkins plantation. Aaron was trained as a shoemaker. He still had to turn over much of his earnings to his owner, but he was able to keep some of his earnings, and he lived on his own. Augusta exposed him to a wider world: to a world of cities, free negroes, black artisans, steamships, and modern industry; to newspapers from Savannah and beyond; to (other) negroes who could read; to sailors who had seen life in the free states.²⁷³

The white rulers of Augusta often expressed concern about the corrupting influence of city life on the slave population, particularly on slave artisans. In 1829, the grand jurors of Richmond County (Augusta) noted their concern about Augusta printers hiring negroes, “thereby affording them the best possible means of becoming to read writing, and affording a source of information to that class of our population, which sound policy forbids.” They exhorted city authorities to repeal that part of the state law “which permits slaves to live apart from their owners in the city of Augusta.” They decried the practice of “negroes or persons of color being allowed to hire and drive horses and carriages on the Sabbath for their amusement and pleasure, which has a tendency to create dissatisfaction and discontent among the balance of the colored population.”²⁷⁴

²⁷² Donnie D. Bellamy and Diane E. Walker, “Slaveholding in Antebellum Augusta and Richmond County, Georgia,” *Phylon*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1987), 165-77.

²⁷³ *Greensboro Herald*, Feb. 17, 1870.

²⁷⁴ *Augusta Constitutionalist*, Nov. 24 and Dec. 4, 1829; Edward J. Cashin, “Paternalism in Augusta: The Impact of the Plantation Ethic upon an Urban Society,” in Edward J. Cashin and Glenn T. Eskew, eds., *Paternalism*

The years when Aaron lived in Augusta (1829 through 1834) were ones of great political excitement in Georgia and South Carolina. President Andrew Jackson's attempt to increase tariffs on imported goods was met with a strong negative response from his vice-president, South Carolina politician John C. Calhoun. Calhoun argued that the constitution allowed states to "nullify" federal laws with which they disagreed. Local newspapers were filled with news of the controversy. At the apex of the crisis in 1832, thousands of federal troops were stationed in Augusta while the South Carolina militia were mobilized on the other side of the Savannah River.

Slaves in Augusta saw the troops massing; they heard the discussions of the planters and merchants; those who could read followed developments in the press and told those who were illiterate what was going on. It is likely that young Aaron followed developments with particular interest. John C. Calhoun was a cousin of Andrew Pickens and close personal friend of Eldred Simkins. George McDuffie, who led the nullification fight in the US House, was a former law partner of Eldred Simkins. And one of the leaders of the nullification fight in South Carolina's legislature was none other than his new owner, Francis Pickens.

Other events struck even closer to home: protests against slavery, slave revolts, and the rise of the abolitionist movement. In 1829, David Walker, a mulatto free negro living in Massachusetts, assisted by friendly sailors and ship stewards, smuggled hundreds of copies of an antislavery appeal into Savannah and other southern port cities, where they were distributed in the black community. Walker's "Appeal" denounced the subjugation of American blacks,

in a Southern City: Race, Religion, and Gender in Augusta, Georgia (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 22-24.

refuted the accusation of black inferiority, blasted the hypocrisy of white American leaders, and called on blacks to take the lead in their own liberation.²⁷⁵

State authorities in Georgia and South Carolina responded harshly to this threat. The Georgia legislature announced the imposition of the death penalty on any person of color caught assisting the circulation of anti-slavery pamphlets. They quarantined black seamen docking in Georgia to prevent them from having any communication with Georgia blacks. Anyone teaching negroes or free blacks to read was to be punished by fine and/or whipping. Similar laws were passed in South Carolina. Despite such efforts, Walker's pamphlet was widely circulated by early 1830.²⁷⁶

In August 1831, the Nat Turner rebellion in Virginia raised the threat of black insurrection and caused terror throughout the South. In Macon, Georgia, the entire white population rose at midnight, roused from their beds by rumors of an impending slave onslaught. Slaves were arrested and beaten, and new restrictions were placed on blacks in South Carolina and Georgia: prohibitions on teaching slaves to read and write, restrictions on the free blacks' right of assembly and on black worship services. In 1835 there was a new slave insurrection scare, this time in Monroe County, Georgia. In the same year as the Turner revolt, William Lloyd

²⁷⁵ David Walker, *Appeal in Four Articles* (Boston: D. Walker, 1829) accessed January 17, 2018, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/walker/walker.html>.

²⁷⁶ Hasan Crockett, "David Walker's Appeal in Georgia," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (Summer, 2001), 310-12.

Garrison founded *The Liberator* newspaper in Massachusetts. In 1832 he organized the New England Anti-Slavery Society. The modern US abolitionist movement was born.²⁷⁷

In 1834 or 1835 Aaron disappeared from Augusta and reappeared soon after in Williamsburg, New York. He was 19 years old. It is highly unlikely that he escaped from Georgia on his own. Such a feat from the deep South would have required a lot of help from black seamen and shipyard workers along the way. The tale would have provided Bradley with an immediate entrée into the abolitionist circuit, where heroic escapes from slavery were very popular. Bradley never spoke about his escape to freedom, nor were there any accounts by people who helped him flee after he became well known. There were no reward posters for Bradley's recovery in South Carolina or Georgia in the 1830s, and Bradley's status as a freed slave was never questioned in the North, meaning he probably had papers confirming his freed status.²⁷⁸

In the most likely scenario, Andrew Pickens grew increasingly concerned about the futures of his two sons. On the one hand, he feared that Aaron would be affected by the spate of new laws imposing further restrictions on slaves and free negroes alike. On the other hand, he worried that people would discover that he was Aaron's father. This would not only be a blow to his own honor; it would have serious negative effects on the political future of his son Francis. In 1832 Francis was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives where he played a leading role in the nullification debate. In 1834, he was elected to Congress and took up

²⁷⁷ Joseph Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the Cotton Plantation South: Central Georgia, 1800–1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992) 28-29.

²⁷⁸ *SMN*, Nov. 28, 1874; *Greensboro Herald*, Feb. 17, 1870.

residence in Washington, D.C. Manumission of Aaron was out of the question, since South Carolina law acknowledged manumission only through an act of the legislature.

Wanting to “do right” by his two sons, Andrew took Aaron to New York as his personal servant, provided papers to prove that he was not an escaped slave but had been manumitted, and helped set him up as a shoemaker in Williamsburg. Perhaps he made a deal with Aaron: if Aaron promised to never speak of his family history, Pickens would make sure there was no attempt to recover the family’s fugitive slave. In 1870 the *Springfield Republican* noted that Bradley’s father was “one of the wealthiest and most respectable citizens” of South Carolina. “When young, his father sent him to New York. . . . He also furnished him with plenty of money, with instructions to educate himself, which he did.”²⁷⁹

Aaron next appears in the public record in 1848—thirteen or fourteen years after his escape from Augusta—as Aaron Bradley, a shoemaker, living in Williamsburg, New York. Williamsburg was a logical place for an escaped slave to wind up in the 1830s and 1840s. Brooklyn and Williamsburg, located along the East River across from New York City, were major ports of call for ships hailing from Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans. Warehouses along the waterfront were filled with the products of slave labor: cotton, tobacco, and sugar. For an escaped slave smuggled aboard a cargo vessel from Savannah, Williamsburg was a likely dropping-off point.

It was not an auspicious location for a fugitive slave. At the time of the American Revolution, New York had the most slaves of any Northern state. The end of slavery only came in 1827. The economy of greater New York in the 1830s and 1840s—commerce, banks,

²⁷⁹ *Springfield Republican*, Jan. 21, 1870. The article on Bradley was excerpted from the *Cincinnati Commercial*.

insurance, and industry—was tied to Southern planters and the products of their slave plantations. New York was where the slave holders borrowed from the banks, made their contracts, insured and sold their crops, bought their plantation furnishings, and vacationed with their families. Southern businessmen and tourists were frequent visitors to the area, many bringing their slaves along with them. New York City's Tammany Hall as well as the Kings County towns of Brooklyn and Williamsburg were bastions of the pro-slavery Democratic Party, hostile to abolitionists, and unfriendly to escaped slaves.

Blacks in New York City, as elsewhere in the antebellum North, were second-class citizens. They were generally employed as either domestic servants or in non-skilled jobs on the waterfront or in factories. Most lived “in small apartments in back alleys and basements in poor neighborhoods.” They were not allowed on juries or into the professions. While all white men had won the right to vote in the 1820s, black males could only vote if they met stiff property-owning requirements. Fugitive slaves ran the constant risk of being caught and returned to their masters and slavery.²⁸⁰

Its long history as a slave state meant that the New York City area had the largest free black population in the north—nearly 14,000 in 1830. Despite all the obstacles, free blacks had built strong communities in the shadow of slavery, complete with black newspapers, black churches, and evening schools. The area provided a sanctuary for escaped slaves like young Aaron. In 1835, David Ruggles, a free black, created the New York Vigilance Committee to help fugitive slaves arriving in the area. The Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims, the Bridge Street

²⁸⁰ Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015), 47.

African Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church in Brooklyn, and the AME Zion Church in Williamsburg were all stops on what became known as the Underground Railroad.

In the 1840s, the condition of blacks in Kings County worsened. Brooklyn's population doubled from 40,000 in 1840 to nearly 80,000 in 1845. Williamsburg's population also grew dramatically to 11,500 in 1845. With the increased number of skilled as well as unskilled workers, mainly from Ireland and Germany, the fight for jobs grew more intense. The political parties fought for the allegiance of the new (white) immigrants, who became voters as soon as they landed. Blacks found themselves under siege.

For over a decade Aaron laid low in Kings County. He took on the last name Bradley, told people he was formerly a slave in Virginia, and presented himself as a free negro. He established himself as a shoemaker in the tiny town of Williamsburg, near the naval yard, just north of Brooklyn. A skilled worker in a town where most blacks performed menial jobs, he was considered part of the “ ‘upper tendom’ of the colored fraternity of Brooklyn.”²⁸¹

In a speech made several years later, Bradley claimed to have been a supporter of the Liberty Party and the abolitionist movement and to have followed the career of Frederick Douglass during his time in Williamsburg. It is likely he became familiar with the *Colored American* newspaper (published in New York City) and its writers. He expressed his progressive views to others in the community. According to a later newspaper account, he “was pretty extensively known in [Williamsburg] . . . where he cut a pretty big swath, especially among the ‘darks’.”²⁸²

²⁸¹ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle (BDE)*, Apr. 24, 1848 and Apr. 6, 1850.

²⁸² *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Feb. 3, 1855; *BDE*, Nov. 8, 1856.

But although he was generally aware of political events in the black community, there is no indication Bradley was oriented to politics or black community organizations during this period. There is no record of his speaking at political meetings, no articles which mention Bradley in black newspapers. At a time when stories of fugitive slaves' escapes were prime newspaper fodder in the black press, Bradley was silent. It seems probable that, like Douglass, Bradley read widely, worked hard on his vocabulary and on his accent. But he was not preparing himself for a political career. Faced with increasing job pressures and worsening conditions for blacks in Williamsburg, Bradley focused on becoming one of the nation's first black lawyers.

His life experiences in Edgefield County and Augusta led him in that direction. Growing up in Edgefield as a slave of Eldred Simkins, he was surrounded by lawyers and the law. In Edgefield and again in Augusta, he saw the white sons of planters sent off to become lawyers, then vying for the highest political offices in the land. Moreover, in the free North, blacks were breaking down barriers preventing them from entering the professions. In 1844, Macon Bolling Allen became the first licensed African-American attorney in the United States in the state of Maine. In 1845 Allen was licensed in Massachusetts.

Bradley aspired to become part of this tiny black professional class. His biggest hurdle was passing the bar exam. Most aspiring black lawyers were free blacks from middle-class families, who graduated from college, then apprenticed with sympathetic, established white attorneys. When they were ready, they would take the bar exam, which often meant answering questions posed by attorneys they had met during their apprenticeship. Even in a friendlier environment than Williamsburg, as a self-taught black man with no formal education, Bradley found it hard to jump those hurdles.

On January 10, 1848, George Vashon, the first black graduate of Oberlin College, passed the bar exam and became the first black lawyer in New York State. At about the same time, a loophole appeared which could allow Bradley to become a lawyer without undergoing the bar exam. The New York state legislature amended the Judiciary Act to allow “any person of full age” to practice as a lawyer “upon being especially authorized so to do by the party for whom he acts.” This amendment had been supported by Democrats and some Republicans as a Jacksonian “levelling” move against “aristocratic” restrictions on entering the legal profession. But who would hire an untested and unlicensed black man to bring a case to trial?²⁸³

Blacks were arrested in disproportionate numbers in Kings County (as elsewhere throughout the North) for all sorts of crimes. There were lots of blacks in Williamsburg who had to go to court. Given his status in the black community of Williamsburg, Bradley would have had little difficulty finding someone in the community to represent in court. He would probably have been able to find support among black organizations in the New York City area for his attempt to be recognized as a lawyer.

But Aaron Bradley chose another course. He believed that when it came to talent, the legal system was colorblind. It would recognize that he was as good a lawyer as any white man. To prove that, he needed to take on the case of a white man, the more prominent the better. Together with Peter Shapter, a young, radical, white Whig lawyer who had recently passed the New York bar exam, Bradley devised a plan. Shapter would get a case, then turn the case over to Bradley in court. On February 8, 1848, only a month after Vashon became the first black lawyer in the state, Bradley got his chance.²⁸⁴

²⁸³ *New York Tribune*, Apr. 6, 1848.

²⁸⁴ On Peter Shapter, see *BDE*, May 21, 1844; Apr. 8, 1846, Feb. 13, 1848, Nov. 2 and 20, 1848.

Shapter was hired by William A. Woodward to represent him in court on a case of trespass. On the day of the trial, Shapter stepped aside and turned the case over to Aaron Bradley. But Woodward, who was on the state board of the Whig party, had a commission business with important clients in several states, including Tennessee and South Carolina. His customers would not look kindly on working with a firm which had the audacity to hire a black lawyer. Woodward immediately dropped the case and “expressly prohibited [Bradley] from any further connexion with this matter.” Bradley refused to drop the case. He depended on it to establish himself as a lawyer. He contended that he had a “legal right to proceed, and that his client could not revoke.”²⁸⁵

The case quickly drew the attention of the press and the legal establishment in Kings County. Reporters were impressed by Bradley, who “has been educated and displays rather more ability than his degraded race are supposed to possess.” The case itself raised a number of legal questions. Was a former slave a citizen of the United States and therefore able to become a lawyer? Could a person now become a lawyer merely by arguing a case in court? Could Bradley pursue the case even after his client had dropped it? Over and above all these questions was the bigger political question. Was the legal system colorblind, as Bradley hoped? Would the Brooklyn political and legal establishment, tied as it was to the slave South and the Democratic Party, allow a black man to become an attorney in Kings County?²⁸⁶

The answer was not long in coming. A week and a half later, Bradley found himself the indicted before a Brooklyn court of sessions grand jury “for maliciously commencing suit without authority.” In early April, Judge Nathan B. Morse, a prominent Democrat, ruled on the

²⁸⁵ *The Evening Post* (New York), Apr. 23, 1846; *BDE*, Feb. 8 and 9, 1848.

²⁸⁶ *BDE*, Mar. 24, 1848.

case. He insisted that an attorney must not only be of full age and of good moral character, “but must also possess the requisite qualifications of learning and ability.” Bradley, said Morse, produced no evidence of either good moral character or qualifications, so he could not be a lawyer in the state of New York.²⁸⁷

Bradley’s attempt to qualify himself as a lawyer came as a surprise to the black organizations of the time. Their responses were generally favorable to Bradley and highly critical of Judge Morse. Morse’s disqualification of Bradley was denounced in letters to the *Tribune* and by the *North Star*, the newspaper of Frederick Douglass, as “tyrannical,” “absurd,” and “despotic.” It was unjust, made “on account of his [Bradley’s] complexion.” Others hinted that Bradley’s tactics may not have been the best. A correspondent in the *North Star* reminded readers that “colored men should have too much self-respect to look for favors; but remember that those in authority will exact from them the whole pound of flesh; their indulgence, if exercised, will be for the more favored aspirants. We must be wide awake.”²⁸⁸

The results were devastating for Bradley’s ambitions. He was now linked to the despised abolitionists and had managed to rouse the ire of leading members of the Kings County political and legal establishment, both Whig and Democrat. Bradley refused to back down. A white coworker testified years later that Bradley “used to come into Dare & Carrol’s shoe shop on Peck slip, and he would take out work and occasionally read law in the shop.” In November 1849, an examination for admission to the New York bar was held in Brooklyn’s City Hall. Judge Morse

²⁸⁷ *BDE*, Apr. 14 and 19, 1848; *New York Tribune*, Apr. 6, 1848.

²⁸⁸ *New York Tribune*, Apr. 6, 1848; *The North Star*, Apr. 21, 1848. See also the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* (New Lisbon, Ohio), Apr. 28, 1848. On Morse’s political affiliations, see *BDE*, June 2 and 4, 1847, Oct. 9, 1849.

was one of the examiners. Fourteen white men were admitted. Aaron Bradley, “the persevering colored applicant,” was rejected once again.²⁸⁹

In Bradley’s first appearance in the historical record, several characteristics stand out. He aspired to high status in society, to be part of the black upper class and respected by black and white alike. He believed he would be accepted once his superior intelligence and superb confidence in his own abilities was recognized. But acceptance into the upper class takes connections and working within the system. Bradley had no college degree, nor any support from well-established white attorneys or even of the nascent black organizations of the time.

In his first attempt at recognition as a lawyer, Bradley tried to finesse the rules of the game. He began with a ruse and then doubled down by waging an unwinnable fight over whether a client could fire his attorney. Even had he chosen more friendly areas like Maine, Massachusetts, or upstate New York rather than conservative Kings County to launch his career, such an effort was unlikely to succeed. His naive belief that the law existed separate from and above the class and racial politics of the time was dealt a big blow.

In the late 1840s, political tensions in the country over the “race question” continued to escalate. The end of the Mexican-American war saw polarized debates over the Wilmot Proviso, free versus slave states, the rise of the free soil movement, and growing differences over treatment of fugitive slaves. Attitudes hardened on both sides. For the ruling establishment of Brooklyn, something had to be done to remove this would-be black lawyer, this thorn in their side, once and for all.

Just as Bradley had used a recent New York law to attempt to bypass traditional bar procedures, the Kings County establishment used another recent law to do him in. In 1848, “after

²⁸⁹ *SDR*, Apr. 15, 1868; *Spectator*, Nov. 12, 1849.

a lengthy struggle, including a petition campaign . . . the [New York] legislature passed an Act to Punish Seduction as a Crime.” The law made seduction of a “previously chaste female under promise of marriage” a misdemeanor offence, punishable by imprisonment in a state prison not exceeding five years, or by imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year. Conviction required supporting evidence from someone other than the offended female, and if the couple agreed to marry all charges were dropped.²⁹⁰

From the very beginning, this attempt at legislating morality was ripe for abuse. When the seduction law was finally abolished 87 years later in 1935, the Civil Practice Act explained that the law had “been subjected to grave abuses, causing extreme annoyance, embarrassment, humiliation and pecuniary damage to many persons wholly innocent and free of any wrongdoing, who were merely the victims of circumstances.” One of the first victims of the new law was Aaron Bradley.²⁹¹

At some point in the late 1840s, Bradley began a relationship with a young colored woman named Cecelia Holley, the sister of a Williamsburg shoemaker whom Bradley knew. The relationship apparently went sour when Bradley refused to marry Miss Holley. The young woman, or more likely her father, a teacher, went to the police about the matter. Or perhaps county authorities, hearing of the conflict and wanting to nail Bradley any way they could, sought out the father. In any case, when this issue came to the attention of the Brooklyn police,

²⁹⁰ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 807; *BDE*, Feb. 4, 1854.

²⁹¹ Elaine Lindy, *Women’s Roots: The History of Women in Tompkins County* (Ithaca: Home Town Publications, 1976), 106-07, accessed Dec 26, 2017 at <http://tcpl.org/local-history/documents/ithaca-tc/women-roots/lawp101-117.pdf>.

they arrested Bradley on the charge of seduction and threw him in jail. The date was April 1, 1850, four months after he had failed the bar exam.²⁹²

Middle-class blacks of the day had the same strict concept of morality as the white upper classes. Any hint of sexual impropriety such as the charge of seduction was a mortal threat to any possibility that Bradley would ever be accepted into their ranks. Moreover, conviction for seduction followed by a jail term would shatter any hope of his becoming a lawyer in New York or elsewhere. In a larger political sense, the indictment would serve as a deterrent to any other uppity blacks with the same aspirations. Blacks in Williamsburg understood the stakes in the trial. According to newspaper accounts, “from the number of darkies present, we should say that the affair was exciting some little interest.”²⁹³

Bradley pleaded innocent. To calm down any show of support from local blacks, he was held in the county jail in Brooklyn for 5 months without possibility of bail. Bradley protested this harsh treatment. On September 3, 1850, he was released on a writ of habeas corpus and admitted to bail for the exorbitant sum of \$1,000, a lot of money for a black man in Brooklyn in 1850.²⁹⁴

Events following his release on bail rendered any hope of a fair trial impossible. On September 18, 1850, the Fugitive Slave Act was signed by President Buchanan. The act created a new category of U.S. commissioners to hear cases of fugitive slaves, overrode various state and local laws which slowed down the rendition process, and commanded state officials and

²⁹² *BDE*, Apr. 2, 1850. Years later, Bradley claimed to have been “a very great libertine” during this period. See *SDNH*, Feb. 6, 1868.

²⁹³ *BDE*, Apr. 6, 1850.

²⁹⁴ *New York Herald*, Sept. 4, 1850.

individual citizens to assist their capture. Panic swept through black communities in the North; hundreds fled to Canada.

Eight days after the bill passed, U.S. marshals made their first New York arrest under the new act: a black man named James Hamlet in Williamsburg, Bradley's hometown. Despite protests by a large number of blacks, Hamlet was immediately extradited to Maryland and slavery. A huge fundraising campaign bought Hamlet from his owner. On October 5, 1850, a mass meeting of colored citizens celebrated his return at City Hall Park in New York City. In response, Whig and Democrat merchants and bankers formed a Union Safety Committee in support of the Fugitive Slave Act.²⁹⁵

In January 1851, the New York Vigilance Committee and the Union Safety Committee squared off around the case of another fugitive, Henry Long, arrested under the law. The judge ruled against Long. A force of two hundred cops and an armed gang from Tammany Hall made sure that Long was returned to slavery.²⁹⁶

It was in this polarized atmosphere that Bradley's case finally came to trial in June 1851, fourteen months after his arrest. There were, of course, no blacks in the jury. Both Bradley's judges and the jury were loaded with Democratic Party activists. The presiding judge in the case was John Greenwood, a prominent Brooklyn official, along with Aldermen John Leech and Edward Pell, both prominent Democrats. The district attorney prosecuting the case was Henry A. Moore, a young man aspiring to high office and a Democratic Party activist. The jurors included a trustee of the Brooklyn Mechanics Building and Mutual Loan Association (James Bennett), a

²⁹⁵ Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 124-35; Craig Steven Wilder, *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 74-75.

²⁹⁶ Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 130-32.

ship joiner at the Navy Yard and Democratic Party candidate for alderman (Francis Quevado), a city hall contractor and director of the Nassau Fire Insurance Company of Brooklyn (Leonard Cooper), a wealthy landlord (Robert Craig), the president of the South Brooklyn Savings Institution (Ira Smith), and a member of the Democratic Party's Fifth Ward Concord Granite Club (Simon Driscoll). This was neither an impartial jury, nor a jury of Bradley's peers.²⁹⁷

Bradley was defended by a lawyer named Allen, described years later by the *World* newspaper as "an abolition shrieker . . . from Utica." The prosecution presented five witnesses: Cecelia Holley, James T. Holley (presumably her father), and three women. Four male witnesses testified on Bradley's behalf. The trial lasted two days. According to the *World*, "just before the case went to the jury he [Bradley] arose and protested against the allegation of 'malice' in the indictment." It made no difference. After a two-day trial, Bradley was convicted.²⁹⁸

Punishment for the crime of seduction varied widely. Frequently the cases were settled by fines paid to the aggrieved woman's father for defamation of the family honor. Since Bradley had already served nearly half a year in jail, the judge could have taken that into account or even sentenced him to time served. But Bradley was no ordinary criminal, and these were no ordinary times. On June 21, he was sentenced to two year's imprisonment and hard labor in Sing Sing State Prison in Ossining, New York.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Allen D. Candler, ed., *Confederate Records of the State of Georgia*, VI (Atlanta: Chas. P. Byrd, 1911), 548-49; *BDE*, Nov. 1, 1850 (Leech), July 1, 1852 (Pell), Oct. 23, 1851 (Moore), Nov. 17, 1853 (Quevado), July 16, 1852 (Cooper), May 16, 1853 (Craig), Sept. 29, 1850 (Smith), Aug. 22, 1852 (Driscoll).

²⁹⁸ *The World*, Jan. 13, 1868.

²⁹⁹ *BDE*, June 21 and Dec. 13, 1851. Barely two weeks after Bradley's sentencing, District Attorney Moore appeared before Judge Greenwood in another seduction case, this one involving a German man and woman. When the aggrieved woman stated that the promise of marriage "was made at a time when she was in bed with the

Sing Sing in the 1850s was a barbaric place. Prisoners were housed in tiny, cold, dark, and dank cells, with straw pallets for beds and a night bucket. It was an exceptionally unhealthy environment. In 1850, fifteen prisoners died from infectious diseases, and there were outbreaks of cholera and dysentery in 1852 and 1853.³⁰⁰

The prison operated under a contract labor system, with the state providing the workforce at low wages to private employers. Prisoners worked ten-hour days either in a rock quarry or in prison workshops. Convicts were expected to remain absolutely silent, walked in lockstep, and saw no visitors. If rules were broken or production quotas were not met, prison authorities made liberal use of “the yoke, the shower-bath [water torture], ball and chain, and solitary confinement.” In 1852, 170 men received the water torture treatment, 120 men were put in solitary confinement, three were yoked, and five were “bucked” (hung upside down).³⁰¹

According to historian James Berrigan, Sing Sing “‘treat[ed] the convict as a slave’ who the wardens, superintendents, and contractors cynically forced to work in the pursuit of profits. Prison guards tortured prisoners who did not work satisfactorily; prisoners worked long hours at grueling labor; Sing Sing was a nineteenth century industrial plantation.”³⁰²

defendant,” Moore said such testimony proved “she could not be a virtuous woman” and dropped the case. Moore was elected county judge on the Democratic Party ticket in November 1851. See *BDE*, June 26 and Nov. 5, 1861.

³⁰⁰ *Annual Report of the Inspectors of State Prisons, Vol. 5: 1852-53 (Albany, 1849-1877)*, 117, accessed October 30, 2018 at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433075961940>; “Sanitation at Sing Sing During the Mid-to-Late 19th Century” accessed January 12, 2018 at <https://nyprisonorigins.com/abby/sanitation-at-sing-sing-during-the-mid-to-late-19th-century/>.

³⁰¹ *Annual Report of the Inspectors of State Prisons, Vol. 5*, 20, 87.

³⁰² James Berrigan, “Sing Sing as a Factory During the Nineteenth Century,” Nov. 15, 2015, accessed on January 12, 2018 at <https://nycriminal.ace.fordham.edu/?p=72>.

The prison had shoemaking contracts, so it is possible Bradley made shoes rather than quarried marble. In April 1852, Bradley appealed to the state Supreme Court for a new trial. Heading the court was Judge Morse, the same Democratic Party judge who had deemed him unsuitable as a lawyer in 1848 and again in 1849. Bradley's motion for a new trial was denied. He remained in the Sing Sing hellhole for a full two years.³⁰³

Bradley's return to Williamsburg did not last. His job as a shoemaker was long gone. He no longer had any possibility of becoming a lawyer in New York. A black man with a criminal record had no hope of returning to the "upper tendom." Fugitive slave catchers and a surge of Irish immigrants forced many blacks to flee northward to safer areas with more jobs. With the passage in 1854 of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the political situation grew even more tense. After living for 20 years in the state, Bradley left New York and made his way to Boston.

Boston was where David Walker had penned his appeal. It was the home of William Lloyd Garrison, *The Liberator* newspaper, and the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. The city was noted as a stop on the Underground Railroad, for its support for runaway slaves and ongoing protests against the Fugitive Slave Act, and as the election district of abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner. The city's legislation on racial issues was the most advanced in the country. Schools and public transport were officially desegregated. Surely it would be friendlier than New York for a talented black man who wanted to become a lawyer.

Now 40 years old, Bradley tried to reinvent himself once again. First of all, he changed his name. In the *Boston Directory* of 1855, he was no longer Aaron Bradley, former prisoner at Sing Sing. He listed himself as Aaron A (for Alpeoria) Bradley, counsellor, living at 46 Court,

³⁰³ *Brooklyn Evening Star*, Apr.3, 1852; *BDE*, Apr. 8, 1852.

on the fringes of Beacon Hill. Registering as a counsellor indicated his intent to pursue his calling as a lawyer.³⁰⁴

In addition to changing his name, Bradley jumped into Boston politics. In New York, Bradley had put all his hopes in the impartiality of the justice system. Although familiar with political issues and supportive of black rights, he was not mentioned anywhere in the abolitionist literature of the time. But if he tried to ignore politics, politics had not ignored him. Lawyers and politicians in the mainstream parties had found ways to frame him up on seduction charges and throw him into Sing Sing for two years. The only people on his side were two abolitionist lawyers and the abolitionist press.

In January 1855, Bradley attended the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society (MASS). He signed a petition sponsored by prominent MASS black spokesperson Lewis Hayden calling on the legislature to allow colored children into Boston's public schools, and another petition by MASS leader Samuel May calling on the legislature to remove from office and "punish with fine and imprisonment" any state or local official "who engages in arresting, holding or returning a fugitive slave." The second petition was directed against Massachusetts Probate Judge Edward Loring. As a US Commissioner charged with enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act, Loring had overseen the return to Virginia of a fugitive slave, Anthony Burns, in June 1854, provoking huge protests by Boston abolitionists.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ *Boston Directory*, 1855, 1854. It also helped distinguish him from the 'Aaron Bradley, boatmaker,' listed in the 1854 *Boston Directory*.

³⁰⁵ Digital Archive of Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions, Massachusetts Archives, Boston MA, 2015, "Passed Acts; St. 1855, c.256, SC1/series 229, Petition of Lewis Hayden,"

The New England Anti-Slavery Society was the first abolitionist organization in the United States, established by William Lloyd Garrison in 1831. Garrison was opposed to political action or partial reforms. He denounced the US government, most churches, and the US Constitution for their complicity with and support for slavery. He would accept nothing less than the immediate and complete emancipation of all slaves. For a number of years, Garrison had worked with Frederick Douglass. But since the fight over the Fugitive Slave Act, Douglass had begun working with anti-slavery politicians like Charles Sumner and Salmon Chase. Douglass supported partial victories and argued that the US Constitution was a “glorious liberty document” which could be used in opposition to slavery.³⁰⁶

On the opening day of the MASS Conference, Garrison repeated his opposition to all half measures. As for Frederick Douglas, he “was in such a state of mind as unfitted him to represent the views which he (Mr. Garrison) held on any subject,” said Garrison. Nevertheless, the desire to move away from an abstentionist position toward some form of political action made itself felt in the convention. Stephen S. Foster, a prominent MASS leader, “urged the importance of forming a new political party, on the basis of the Constitution of Massachusetts, wholly ignoring the Constitution of the United States, thereby presenting, in a tangible form, the commencement of a political revolution, which is essential to the overthrow of slavery.”³⁰⁷

<https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/QXZ3Q>, Harvard Dataverse, V5; and "Passed Acts; St. 1855, c.489, SC1/series 229, Petition of Samuel May", <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/WEDVP>, Harvard Dataverse, V4.

³⁰⁶ Frederick Douglass, *Frederick Douglass, Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, July 5th, 1852* (Rochester: Lee, Mann & Co., 1852).

³⁰⁷ *The Liberator*, Feb. 2, 1855; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Feb. 2, 1855.

Bradley's first political intervention on record came in the discussion on Foster's proposal. As described in *The Liberator*:

Mr. Bradley, a young colored man, of Boston, rose to speak against the project of Mr. Foster for a new political party. He had long been a political man and he claimed the honor of originating the Liberty Party! He gave quite a complacent account of his early labors in the cause, and his influence over some of the Anti-Slavery political leaders of New York. He also alluded to Frederick Douglass and spoke of him as a prodigal son, who had turned away from his first love, and from the friends that made him all that he is.³⁰⁸

What Bradley's speech lacked in coherence it more than made up for in chutzpah: Bradley the founder of the Liberty Party, Bradley a man of influence among New York abolitionists, Bradley an old friend of Frederick Douglass. His entrée into Boston's political world was similar to his entrée into New York's legal world a decade earlier: supremely confident of his own abilities, yet too impatient to proceed through normal channels. In New York, he catapulted himself into the courtroom with a ruse; in Boston, it was all bluff and braggadocio. By aligning himself with Garrison and against Douglass, he was joining the most extreme wing of the abolitionist movement. If Bradley's entry into black antebellum politics was intended to make a splash, it accomplished its goal. On February 23, the paragraph on Bradley's speech which appeared in *The Liberator* was reprinted, without comment, in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.³⁰⁹

Bradley's goal in Boston was to achieve official status as a lawyer. On February 2, 1856—eight years after his first court appearance in New York—Bradley was admitted to the Massachusetts bar, becoming only the third black lawyer in the state. He set right to work. On February 11, he represented Anna Connors in the Suffolk County Superior Court, having

³⁰⁸ *The Liberator*, Feb. 2, 1855.

³⁰⁹ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Feb. 23, 1855

jurisdiction over Boston. Other cases followed. Within a couple of months, he was filing petitions “relative to Justice Courts” in the Massachusetts Legislature.³¹⁰

These were not cases involving white businessmen like William A Woodward or prominent abolitionists. Bradley’s clientele was far removed from the upper-class whites and middle-class blacks represented by black lawyer Robert Morris, who no longer even lived in the black community. Bradley’s clients were members of Boston’s tiny free black population, which numbered less than 2,500. His clients faced the same color bar blacks faced everywhere in northern cities. They competed for jobs with huge numbers of Irish and other immigrants who arrived in Boston in the 1840s and 1850s. They were concentrated in tenements in the poorest, most crime-ridden parts of the city, mostly on the back side of Beacon Hill, commonly known as “Nigger Hill.” Bradley’s practice consisted primarily of small-time cases usually on behalf of cash-strapped working-class blacks. When his clients couldn’t pay, arrangements were made to settle up later. It was a hard-scrabble world.

Bradley’s appearances in the Superior Court and the legislature quickly brought him to the attention of unfriendly white lawyers and politicians. Massachusetts had a reputation as a state favorable to abolitionists, but Boston, like New York, was strongly linked to the cotton South. City politics were controlled by Democrats; blacks made up less than one percent of Boston’s population; and abolitionists were a despised minority. The rioting over Anthony Burns, the attempt to remove Judge Loring from his job, and the civil war in Kansas had added to a growing polarization over the question of slavery. Many white lawyers did not want another abolitionist black lawyer like Robert Morris in their ranks.

³¹⁰ *Boston Daily Advertiser (BDA)*, Feb. 12, 1856; *Boston Daily Atlas*, Apr.30, 1856. The Judiciary Committee found it “inexpedient to legislate” on his petition.

They took steps to embarrass Bradley in court. On June 25, 1856, a constable arrested Bradley outside the door of the Superior Court of Boston, allegedly because of a small amount of money Bradley owed. Bradley insisted on going into the courtroom where he intended to make a motion. While the court was in session, the constable and another officer of the court forcibly removed Bradley from the courtroom. He resisted, “clung to the railing of the bar,” and “appealed to the Court for protection, but no attention was paid to his appeal.” Bradley was jailed briefly before paying the money he owed. The account of this humiliating and “unusual scene at court” was picked up by several newspapers around the state.³¹¹

In early July, Bradley filed a petition in the Suffolk Superior Court against B. F. Russell and Wade Goodwin. B. F. Russell was a lawyer and a leading member of the Democratic Party in Suffolk County. It is likely that Russell was the lawyer who claimed the small sum Bradley owed. Wade Goodwin was a Boston police officer whose beat included the black section of Beacon Hill. He also rented tenements “to colored families only.” Was Goodwin the constable who arrested Bradley in court? Bradley’s petition was dismissed. But the confrontation between Bradley and Russell was only beginning.³¹²

In July 1856, a landlord named William F. Mason ordered Henry A. Grace, a bartender in one of his bars, to remove the property and lock the room of one of his tenants, George R. Dwyer, for non-payment of rent. Dwyer, a black shipping agent, hired Aaron Bradley to help him get his belongings back. On August 9, the Suffolk County Court rendered a judgment in

³¹¹ *Boston Herald (BH)*, June 25, 1856; *Boston Post (BP)*, June 25, 1856; *Manufacturers’ and Farmers’ Journal*, June 30, 1856; *New London Daily Chronicle*, July 1, 1856.

³¹² *BP*, July 17, 1856; *Boston Daily Atlas*, June 19, 1855; *BH*, Dec. 12, 1856; *BH*, Sept. 2, 1856; *Weekly Messenger*, Oct.22, 1856. I have been unable to find out anything more about the petition.

favor of Dwyer. Grace was ordered to return the property he had taken from Dwyer and pay damages of \$100. Grace did not comply with the order of the court and on September 4 he was arrested. He returned Dwyer's property and, a couple of days later, he paid \$70 to Bradley in satisfaction of the judgment.³¹³

The Dwyer case quickly came to the attention of B. F. Russell. He saw a way the case could be used against Bradley. Dwyer was deeply in debt. In addition to being unable to pay his rent, his few belongings were mortgaged and he owed money to a lot of other people. Russell pressured Dwyer to pursue a claim against Bradley for the \$70 judgment. On Sept 12, Dwyer, now represented by Russell and another attorney, R. C. Gurney, brought suit against Bradley in Suffolk County Superior Court.³¹⁴

Dwyer's suit was conceived by Russell and Gurney as a way to achieve more than simply recovering money to make Dwyer whole. Rather, the retrieval of the money allegedly owed to George Dwyer became the platform for charging Bradley with contempt of court and demanding that he be disbarred.

The case bore many similarities to Bradley's seduction trial in New York. His energy, intelligence, and sheer gall brought him to the attention of the Democratic establishment. Money

³¹³ Notarized statement by Wm. F. Mason, 15 October 1859, Docket #72, "Bradley's Petition," March 1861, p. 7, Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Archives, Boston (hereafter cited as "Bradley's Petition"); *G. R. Dwyer, Shipping Agent v. A. A. Bradley* in Suffolk Superior Court 1856, September Term, Docket #4439, pp. 461-63, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston (hereafter cited as *Dwyer v. Bradley*).

³¹⁴ Statement by Wm. F. Mason, "Bradley's Petition," MA SJC Archives; Geo. R. Dwyer to the Justices, "Bradley's Petition," MA SJC Archives, p. 6. In the trial, Bradley refers to an "offensive and insulting" note sent to Dwyer by another well-known lawyer, Rufus Choate. See *BP*, Oct. 6, 1856.

problems resulting from the poverty of his clientele combined with Bradley's lack of attention to detail provided them an opening. Once again white lawyers, prominent Democratic Party members, pursued a small-scale complaint of a black plaintiff against Bradley. The *Springfield Republican* confirmed the bad faith in this whole procedure by noting that "there is an attempt among the small white lawyers of Boston to procure the exclusion from the bar of a colored lawyer named Aaron A. Bradley."³¹⁵

Bradley responded to the charges of theft both in a pretrial deposition and in court. He insisted that the \$70 judgement in Dwyer's favor was used in settlement of a claim against Dwyer by another client of his named Ebenezer Pratt. Bradley produced a written agreement confirming this settlement signed by Dwyer. Pratt testified in court as a witness to this agreement.³¹⁶

Bradley could dispute the facts about the disposition of the \$70. But when the trial began on October 4, Russell opened the hearing by stating that he would not normally appear against a fellow lawyer unless "a previous bad conduct had been established." He then read a letter from the warden of Sing Sing prison, certifying that Bradley had served time there for the crime of seduction.³¹⁷

The presiding judge, Charles Huntington, dismissed the warden's letter as irrelevant. Bradley should have left the matter there. But the allegations hit him at his weakest point. The whole persona that he had created, through which he viewed the work and through which he hoped the world would view him, suddenly collapsed. He was no longer Aaron Alpeoria

³¹⁵ *Springfield Republican*, Oct. 9, 1856.

³¹⁶ *BP*, Oct. 13, 1856.

³¹⁷ *BH*, Oct. 4, 1856.

Bradley, lawyer. The past that he had worked so far to put behind him—the nightmare of Aaron Bradley, convicted seducer and ex-con—reappeared. His strivings, his hopes, his dreams of respectability disappeared with it. Alone and fighting against a system arrayed against him, he responded in an emotional and irrational fashion. In an affidavit dated October 4, he denied that his name was Aaron Bradley, or that he was a mulatto, or that he had ever been charged with seduction or jailed in Sing Sing.³¹⁸

Bradley's desperate and implausible effort to refute the Sing Sing warden's letter undoubtedly played a role in the court's decision. On October 18, Judge Huntington, in a "decision of considerable length," found Bradley "guilty of contempt of court and malpractice" and ordered him "removed from practice as an attorney in any court in this commonwealth." A few days later, *The Liberator* reported Bradley's expulsion from the bar without comment.³¹⁹

The next ten years were difficult ones for Bradley. Disbarred, a relative newcomer to Boston, he was neither part of Boston's black upper class nor a laborer. With no stable source of income, he bounced from one cheap rented room to another in the heart of "nigger hill," boarding with Frances Delancy on Southac Street, with John and Catherine Mantley in early 1857 on Joy Street, with Catherine Greenland in 1858, then back with Frances Delancy. He tried to make a living as an unlicensed "counsellor" for poor blacks in trouble with the law. To keep his name before the court and hopefully make a little money, he also filed lawsuits in his own

³¹⁸ *BH*, Oct. 7, 1856.

³¹⁹ *Dwyer v. Bradley*, Suffolk Superior Court, 1856, Massachusetts State Archives; *BP*, Oct. 20, 1856; *The Liberator*, Oct. 31, 1856.

name, often for trifling amounts. In June 1858, for instance, he sued his landlord, Catherine Greenland, for throwing water on him, winning \$2 and costs for his efforts.³²⁰

His focus remained the fight against his disbarment. In December 1856, to prove his contention that Dwyer owed him money (and not the reverse), he sued Dwyer in court and recovered a judgment in the amount of \$48.77. He also filed a motion before the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts to reinstate him to the practice of law pending his appeal from Judge Huntington's disbarment order.³²¹

As had been the case in New York a decade earlier, Bradley was now a marked man. The more he filed cases and launched appeals, the more members of Boston's legal establishment determined to put him down. They soon got their chance.

In 1857, Bradley was boarding with John and Catherine Mantley, saloon keepers on Joy Street. When Mrs. Mantley was indicted by the grand jury for selling liquor in violation of the law, Bradley advised her to plead guilty and charged her \$50 for his services. When the Mantleys refused to pay up, Bradley filed suit for \$50 and another in the Superior Court demanding \$75. Bradley lost both suits. This provided an opportunity for his opponents in the Boston legal establishment to deal him a blow. In March 1857, represented by the prominent black attorney Robert Morris, the Mantleys countersued Bradley in the Justices Court for "malicious persecutions." The court returned the verdict for the plaintiffs, fining Bradley \$80. Not

³²⁰ *Boston Directory*, 1857; *BH*, June 3, 1858.

³²¹ *Bradley v. Dwyer*, Dec. 4, 1856, "Bradley's Petition," MA SJC Archives; *Bradley v. Dwyer*, "The said Bradley comes and moves," "Bradley's Petition," MA SJC Archives.

surprisingly, Bradley's appeal to the Supreme Judicial Court against his disbarment was dismissed later that month.³²²

Isolated, but intent on regaining his ability to practice law, Bradley took advantage of every opportunity to press for reinstatement. The abolitionist movement was still trying to remove Judge Edward Loring from office for his role in returning a fugitive slave, Anthony Burns, to slavery in Virginia. In March 1858, a special committee of the Massachusetts legislature met to hear arguments for Loring's removal. William Lloyd Garrison, speaking for the petitioners, made a brief address. Bradley, speaking from the floor, noted "that Judge Loring had been guilty of acts which would have been sufficient for the expulsion of any member of the bar from Court for contempt." Clearly Bradley was not referring so much to Loring as to himself. Why was he (Bradley) disbarred for contempt when a judge guilty of a far more egregious case of contempt (Loring) remained in office? What followed was a "tumultuous sort of speech," with Bradley called to order several times and the hearing adjourned before the end of his argument.³²³

In June 1858, Bradley succeeded in convincing Dwyer to sign a notarized statement in which Dwyer acknowledged that after reviewing his "claims and accounts" with Bradley, he now agreed that Bradley had been correct in arguing that he owed Dwyer nothing at the time of the 1856 court case. In fact, said Dwyer, he actually owed Bradley eighty cents. This statement by Dwyer undermined the entire legal basis for Bradley's disbarment. It validated Bradley's

³²² *BH*, Mar. 11, 1857; *BDA*, Mar. 26, 1857; A. A. Bradley motion to Supreme Judicial Court overruled by G. T. Bigelow, "Bradley's Petition," MA SJC Archives.

³²³ *Boston Traveler*, Mar. 4, 1858; *BP*, Mar. 4, 1858. *The Liberator's* May 5, 1858 article on the hearing did not mention Bradley's speech.

contention throughout his 1856 trial that the \$70 judgment in the case of *Dwyer v Grace* was used to settle other claims against Dwyer. In 1859, Bradley used Dwyer's notarized statement as the basis for a new appeal to the Supreme Judicial Court. On February 1, 1860, he made a lengthy appeal to the Massachusetts Supreme Court to reopen his case.³²⁴

Encouraged by this new evidence, on January 30, 1860, Bradley appealed to the Massachusetts legislature for his return to the bar. He accused the courts of destroying "his business and character without any trial by jury." He asked the legislature to allow him to prove he was of "good moral character" to practice law and to relieve him from this "hard, painful, and cruel judicial treatment." He requested \$4,000 compensation for his loss of business since his disbarment.³²⁵

News of Bradley's renewed attempts to regain his law license did not sit well with the lawyers, policemen, and others who were ranged against him. A neighborhood tiff provided them an opening. On May 22, 1860, Bradley was arraigned in Police Court for assaulting a neighbor, a black man named Frederick Fatal. Even though the only damage was to a washstand, Boston newspapers portrayed the fracas as a "murderous assault" by Bradley, "who for the time totally ignored the law, or rather took the responsibility of administering it after a method of his own during a terrible fit of passion." Bradley pleaded not guilty, arguing that he was only defending

³²⁴ Notarized statement by G. R. Dwyer, 4 June 1858, "Bradley's Petition," MA SJC Archives, p. 7; Petition of A. A. Bradley to the Superior Court, "Bradley's Petition," October Term, 1859, MA SJC Archives, p. 1; *Boston Evening Transcript*, Feb. 1, 1860.

³²⁵ Digital Archive of Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions, Massachusetts Archives, Boston MA, 2016, "Senate Unpassed Legislation 1861, leave to withdraw, SC1/series 231, Petition of Aaron A. Bradley", <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/BMOVD8>, Harvard Dataverse, V3.

himself. Bail was set at \$100 (later increased to \$200) and this minor incident received a lot of attention in the press.³²⁶

At this low point in his life, Bradley attempted to use racial prejudice to his advantage. Questioned about his right to speak at the hearing on Judge Loring, he claimed to represent “a society for mutual improvement, composed of intelligent white gentlemen, a society which had been organized ten years.” As for the fracas with Frederick Fatal, Bradley described what happened as an “attack made upon a poor mulatto boy (meaning himself) by three double jointed niggers, of ferocious aspect and immense strength.”³²⁷

In March 1861, the Supreme Judicial Court dismissed Bradley’s appeal from the disbarment order on two procedural grounds. The Court noted first that the errors identified by Bradley were factual in nature, not errors of law, and the mechanism for this appeal—a petition for writ of certiorari—was available only to correct errors of law. Secondly, even if the errors were legal in nature, the petition was filed too late. Thus, his disbarment stood undisturbed without any review of the substantive basis for Judge Huntington’s order. When his petitions (for imprisonment, for costs, and for relief from judicial cruelty) came up for review in the legislature a week later, Bradley withdrew both. His five-year battle to be recognized as a lawyer in Massachusetts was over.³²⁸

³²⁶ *Boston Evening Transcript*, May 22 and June 13, 1860; *BH*, May 23 and July 13, 1860; *BP*, May 23, 1860. I have been unable to discover what happened with this case.

³²⁷ *Boston Traveler*, Mar. 4, 1858; *BH*, May 23, 1860.

³²⁸ *BDA*, Feb. 14, Mar. 8, and Mar. 15, 1861; “Brief Statement of the Grounds and Reasons of the Decision,” March 1861, “Bradley’s Petition,” MA SJC Archives; Digital Archive of Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions, Massachusetts Archives, Boston MA, 2016, “Senate Unpassed Legislation 1861,

For 15 years or more, the focus of Bradley's life was to be certified as a lawyer and become part of the black upper class. A man of superior intelligence, of confidence in his own abilities and dogged persistence, he had butted heads against the racism of northern legal institutions, the Democratic Party, and the police and lost, time after time.

Bradley's failures can't be blamed entirely on racism. The success of the Republican Party in the 1860 elections reflected progressive changes in northern society. The abolitionist movement continued to grow. Frederick Douglass and other blacks had made headway. But Bradley was determined to go it alone. Even when he had made efforts in Boston to associate himself with the abolitionist movement, his intervention in the Loring case showed this was more an attempt to further his career than out of political conviction. Without allies, he had tried to get around the enormous difficulties he faced by skirting the norms: the ruse of his original court appearance in New York in 1848, making a scene in the courtroom and sloppy financial record-keeping in Boston. Racists had taken advantage of his lack of allies and his bending the rules to set him up time and again. His seduction trial, years in Sing Sing, and meltdown during disbarment proceedings in Boston in 1856 were the end results of his solitary quest.

The outbreak of the Civil War in early 1861 changed everything. New opportunities opened up, especially for blacks in the North and the border states. Bradley seems to have spent considerable time taking stock of his life. He began to focus not just on his career but on issues of broader concern to blacks.

The Emancipation Proclamation at the beginning of 1863 accelerated this process. It brought the goal of black equality closer than any person, black or white, thought possible only a

leave to withdraw, SC1/series 231, Petition of Aaron A. Bradley", <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/TZ1YYE>, Harvard Dataverse, V3.

few years earlier. Soon afterwards, President Lincoln called on Massachusetts Republican Governor John Andrew to organize recruitment of black troops. This was an important step forward for blacks. Membership in the armed forces was considered one of the rights and obligations of citizenship. Progressive blacks in Boston had long fought to include blacks in the state militia. The Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Wendell Phillips, Frederick Douglass, and other abolitionists travelled across Massachusetts and around the country recruiting blacks to the first black regiment in the army, the Massachusetts 54th. Robert Morris and others protested when the federal government only allowed white men to be officers of the 54th.

Bradley saw himself as part of this movement. In 1861, he signed a petition to the Massachusetts Legislature circulated by Robert Morris asking that “colored citizens may be authorized to form military companies for the support of the government.” Once black troops began to be recruited, he carefully researched the statutes of the state legislature. On November 17, 1863, he submitted a petition to the Massachusetts Legislature to allow blacks to become officers in the state militia by striking the word “white” from the relevant section of the statutes. This, the petition stated, so as not to “furnish to South Carolina a good legal reason why the soldiers of the 54 Regiment should not be given up and it makes your Hon body, appear like the South in fact, in the eyes of Europeans in your treatment to colored person that you call citizens.” Bradley’s petition met with rapid success. On January 22, 1864, the Senate amended the statutes by striking the word “white.” Bradley was given credit for the change.³²⁹

³²⁹ Digital Archive of Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions, Massachusetts Archives, Boston MA, 2015, "House Unpassed Legislation 1861, referred to next General Court, SC1/series 230, Petition of Robert Morris", <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/BP1DU>, Harvard Dataverse, V5; Digital Archive of Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions, Massachusetts Archives, Boston MA, 2015, "Passed Acts; St. 1864,

The Civil War and especially the Emancipation Proclamation offered Bradley a new way to use his legal skills, not merely for his personal advancement but in the cause of black rights. His 1863 petition did not have multiple signers like other petitions circulated by leaders of the abolitionist movement. Bradley was the only signer. Nevertheless, he had taken his first steps along a new political course.

c.15, SC1/series 229, Petition of Aaron A. Bradley," <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/T98JX>, Harvard Dataverse, V4; *BDA*, Jan. 23, 1864. Confederate President Jefferson Davis promised that captured black soldiers would be presumed to be escaped slaves and treated accordingly. See Luis F. Emilio, *History of the Fifty-Fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863-1865* (Boston: The Boston Book Company, 1891), 17.

8 1866: FREEDMEN BEGIN TO ORGANIZE

By late 1865, there were growing divisions in the Republican Party over President Johnson's Reconstruction policies. Conservative supporters and Radical opponents presented starkly different assessments of the situation in the South.

In July 1865, President Johnson commissioned Brigadier General Carl Schurz, a Radical Republican, to make a fact-finding tour of the South. Over the next few months, Schurz travelled to several southern states, interviewing and receiving first-hand reports from leaders and ordinary citizens as well as Army officers, both black and white, and Freedmen's Bureau agents. He documented the extreme hostility and violence against blacks and Unionists, the ongoing practice of corporal punishment of the freedmen, the widespread violation of wage agreements by the planters, the evictions of laborers from their houses once the harvest was in, and so forth. Schurz found three ideas about the negro at the core of the belief system of southern ruling class whites: "the negro exists for the special object of raising cotton, rice, and sugar for the whites"; "you cannot make the negro work without physical compulsion"; and "blacks have no rights that whites are bound to respect."³³⁰

As the contents of Schurz's report began to emerge, Johnson encouraged fellow conservative General-in-Chief Ulysses S. Grant to make an "inspection tour" of the South. In November and December 1865, Grant made a whirlwind five-day tour of major cities in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. He spoke with army commanders and prominent southern legislators and businessmen. In Savannah, he met General John B. Gordon, one of Robert E. Lee's leading generals and Georgia's most esteemed Confederate war hero,

³³⁰ Carl Schurz, *Report on the Condition of the South*, Thirty-ninth Congress of the United States, 1st Session, Senate, Ex. Doc. No. 2, 21-24.

now the owner of a rice plantation in Brunswick. Gordon had been sent to Savannah by planters in Darien and Brunswick to request the removal of “obnoxious” negro soldiers. He accompanied Grant to Augusta and Atlanta. According to Gordon, Grant told him that “the sentiments of the Southern people were not one tittle as objectionable to him as were those of Radicalism.”³³¹

When Congress reconvened in December, Schurz and Grant presented their findings and proposed solutions. Schurz, like most northern Radicals, abolitionist organizations, and middle-class black leaders, believed that the solution to the problems of the South was negro suffrage and an influx of northern investors. The northern capitalist planters would demonstrate the profitability of the wage labor system and the freedmen would provide the Republican Party with the necessary votes. With “free labor,” the Union army, and negro suffrage, argued Schurz, “the great social reform is completed, the most difficult problem is solved, and all other questions it will be comparatively easy to settle.”³³²

Grant’s report, on the other hand, minimized the problems in the South. There is “universal acquiescence in the authority of the General Government,” he insisted, particularly by “the mass of thinking men of the South.” Grant favored the rapid return of the Southern states to self-government. He was a strong supporter of contracts and fiercely opposed to the freedmen’s desire for land redistribution. Grant was particularly critical of the support given land redistribution by black soldiers and some agents of the Freedmen’s Bureau. To remedy those problems, he proposed to remove black regiments from the South and put the Freedmen’s

³³¹ *SDNH*, Oct. 16, 1867; *Augusta Weekly Chronicle & Sentinel*, Apr. 8, 1868; Tankersley, *John B. Gordon*, 230-31. See also Brooks D. Simpson, “Grant’s Tour of the South Revisited,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 54, no. 3 (August 1988), 425-48.

³³² Schurz, *Report on the Condition of the South*, 49.

Bureau under army control. Opposed like Johnson to black suffrage, he made no mention of expanding voting rights in his report.³³³

Johnson, conservative Republicans, and the southern ruling class were delighted by Grant's report. But Republican moderates and Radicals were troubled by recent developments which confirmed Schurz's analysis. The newly elected southern state legislatures were busy adopting "Black Codes": vagrancy laws, apprenticeship arrangements, and convict leasing provisions. The codes made a mockery of any concept of "free labor," imposing conditions little different from slavery. Southern legislatures elected unrepentant secessionist leaders to represent them in Congress. Georgia elected former Confederate Vice-President Alexander Stephens and former Confederate Senator Herschel Johnson. If these men were seated and blocked with congressional Democrats, the Republican Party's economic policies as well as Reconstruction were put in jeopardy. Congressional Republicans refused to seat the new southern senators. They established a fifteen-member Joint Committee on Reconstruction, which began to hold hearings on the situation in the South.³³⁴

The first major piece of legislation considered by Congress was a new Freedmen's Bureau bill. In an impassioned speech on December 18, Thaddeus Stevens spoke once again on the need for confiscation of rebel property. "If we do not furnish [the freedmen] with homesteads

³³³ Edward McPherson, *The Political History of the United States of America during the Period of Reconstruction, April 15, 1865–July 15, 1870* (Washington, D. C.: Philp & Solomons, 1871), 67-68. See also Simpson, "Grant's Tour," 439-442.

³³⁴ As previously noted, one of the witnesses who appeared before the Joint Committee was Sidney Andrews, who entered most of his interview with Charles Hopkins into the congressional record on Apr. 19, 1866. See *Report of the Joint Committee*, Part III, 174-75.

from forfeited rebel property, and hedge them around with protective laws; if we leave them to the legislation of their late masters,” he thundered, “we had better left them in bondage. . . . If we fail in this great duty now, when we have the power, we shall deserve and receive the execration of history and of all future ages.”³³⁵

But the freedmen’s hope for forty acres and a mule and the impassioned rhetoric of Stevens were far less powerful in Washington than the opposition to any further assaults on property rights. The southern “moderates” the Republicans were trying to win over, northern investors intent on buying up cheap plantation property, and conservative Republican voices like the *New York Times* wanted to retain cheap black labor in the South. In February 1866, Congress passed a bill extending the mandate of the Freedmen’s Bureau. But the congressmen turned their backs on the promise in the first Freedmen’s Bureau act to provide forty acres of land to every freedman and refugee. The new bill implicitly accepted President Johnson’s return of abandoned lands to the rebel owners. As a sop to the freedmen’s land hunger, the bill opened millions of acres of unoccupied public lands in five southern states (but not South Carolina or Georgia) to settlement by the freedmen. It offered limited protection for three years to those who already possessed Sherman land grants.³³⁶

Thaddeus Stevens sharply criticized the new Freedmen’s Bureau bill as a major retreat from the Act which established the Bureau a year earlier. Much of the new land open for settlement consisted of the Florida Everglades and other unproductive land, he noted. Returning

³³⁵ *CG*, 39th Congress, 1st Session, 74.

³³⁶ A concurrent bill, the Southern Homestead Act, opened additional public land in the South to the freedmen and gave blacks and loyal whites special rates. But the special rates would only apply for the remainder of the year. See Foner, *Reconstruction*, 246.

to the language of the original bill, he proposed to add the “forfeited estates of the enemy” to the lands open to the freedmen. Stevens proposed to reduce the cost of land leases to a maximum of ten cents an acre and to reduce the sale price of the land to two dollars per acre. He denounced as “robbery” the agreements which permitted the planters to reclaim Sherman lands. He wanted to confirm forever the land titles of freedmen who had received Sherman land grants. Stevens’s attempt to amend the bill in the interests of the freedmen was defeated by a wide margin.³³⁷

Republican moderates assumed that after their strong repudiation of confiscation, Johnson would be amenable to an extension of the Freedmen’s Bureau. They were shocked when the bill was vetoed by the President. Like most Republicans, Johnson believed that wage labor would be the salvation of the freedmen. “[C]ompetition for [the freedman’s] services from planters, from those who are constructing or repairing railroads, and from capitalists in his vicinage or from other States, will enable him to command almost his own terms,” he argued. “The laws that regulate supply and demand will maintain their force.” The Freedmen’s Bureau, now a branch of the US Army, was no longer needed in the South, the President insisted. Civil governments were in place and peace had been restored. There was no need for any special treatment of the freedmen. Such assistance would be an unprecedented and costly expansion of the federal government. Moreover, it would be “injurious” to the “character” of the freedmen and would “tend to keep the mind of the freedman in a state of uncertain expectation and restlessness” at a time when his “labor cannot well be spared.”³³⁸

³³⁷ CG, 39th Congress, 1st Session, 16-17, 655, 658, 688; Charles Oubre, *Forty Acres and A Mule: The Freedmen’s Bureau and Black Land Ownership* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 57; CG, 39th Congress, 1st Session, 655, 688; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 245-46.

³³⁸ CG, 39th Congress, 1st Session, 917.

In July, Congress passed a second Freedmen's Bureau bill with sufficient votes to override President Johnson's veto. The Freedmen's Bureau would continue for another two years. The bill marked a further blow against freedmen's hopes for confiscation of planter property. It outlined a procedure to return the Sherman grant lands to the planters in short order. Valid claimants to Sherman lands, both those still occupying the grants and those whose title had already been surrendered, were to be given a warrant for a lease of 20 acres of tax-confiscated land in the parishes of Saint Helena and Saint Luke, South Carolina, with an option to buy after six years. Restoration of the Sherman grant lands was to be made after this year's crops were gathered and compensation given for any "improvements or betterments" made on the property by the freedmen.³³⁹

Rejecting any further infringements on property rights in the South, Republicans turned their attention to what Sidney Andrews termed "the opposite policy": crafting legislation which they believed would protect blacks' political rights while at the same time winning over southern white moderates to support for Reconstruction and the Union. In March Congress passed the Civil Rights Bill, which proclaimed that all people born in the United States, black as well as white, were citizens, with equal civil and legal rights. Denial of equal rights was made a crime. Federal commissioners and officers of the Freedmen's Bureau were authorized to prosecute cases of discrimination on the basis of race in federal district and circuit courts.³⁴⁰

This was a radical piece of legislation. Race relations, hitherto left largely to the states, now became an issue of federal concern, providing new avenues for blacks, north as well as south, to pursue their fight against racism and injustice. President Johnson vetoed the Civil

³³⁹ *CG*, 39th Congress, 1st Session, 174-77.

³⁴⁰ Andrews, *The South Since the War*, 373.

Rights Act. Not only did it take away rights which the Constitution gave to the states, he argued, but it forced the government to “operate in favor of the colored and against the white race.” On April 9, in an unprecedented move, the Republican Congress overrode the President’s veto, and the Civil Rights Bill became law.³⁴¹

One day after his veto of the bill, Johnson declared that the insurrection in the southern states was over except for the state of Texas. The following day, the US Supreme Court ruled in the Milligan case that military trials of civilians in areas other than war zones were unconstitutional. The consequences of these decisions were immediate. On May 1 the War Department issued General Order 26. When civil tribunals were in operation, civilians were not to be tried before military courts. In South Carolina, General Orders No. 15 “officially discontinued the provost courts in the state and handed all responsibility for justice over to the civil authorities.” The result of these decisions was that, all over the South, men awaiting trial for assaulting and murdering freedmen and Union soldiers were released from jail, and men convicted by military courts began filing writs of habeas corpus.³⁴²

Johnson’s vetoes of the Freedmen’s Bureau and Civil Rights bills ended any hope by Republican moderates that he would amend his Reconstruction policies. As Johnson aligned himself ever closer with the positions of the Democratic Party and violence increased in the South, moderates worked with Radical Republicans to come up with an alternative policy.

³⁴¹ CG, 39th Congress, 1st Session, 1681.

³⁴² Richard Zuczek, *State of Rebellion: Reconstruction in South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 34. See also Fawn M. Brodie, *Thaddeus Stevens: Scourge of the South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966), 291.

In June, Congress passed the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. The first section permanently guaranteed citizenship and civil rights for blacks, entrenching the provisions of the Civil Rights Act in the Constitution. The next sections of the amendment were designed to ensure that the gains of the Civil War, and governmental power in the hands of the Republican Party, remained intact. Black suffrage—supported by Radical Republicans but opposed by most whites, North as well as South—was used as a lever to achieve Republican aims. Under section two, southern states which denied blacks the right to vote would lose representatives in Congress in proportional measure. If southern states allowed black men the right to vote, Republicans believed the freedmen would vote for their party, and southern Republicans would win office. Section three denied state or federal office to anyone who had violated his oath of allegiance to the Constitution by aiding the Confederacy. As Eric Foner points out, this section “made virtually the entire political leadership of the South ineligible for office.” The fourth section made illegal any payment of the Confederate debt.³⁴³

In adopting the Civil Rights Bill and the 14th Amendment, Congress entrusted the federal government, the courts, and other state institutions with broad new powers and also new responsibilities. Although he helped engineer passage of the amendment, Stevens was not hopeful of its success. He noted that it was “content with patching up the worst portions of the ancient edifice, and leaving it, in many of its parts, to be swept through by . . . the storms of despotism.”³⁴⁴

³⁴³ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 259.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 254.

When Bradley left Georgia on February 10, 1866, he did not return to Boston. Instead he got off the boat in the nation's capital. In a letter at the end of April to President Johnson, Bradley insisted that his speech at the December 1865 meeting in Savannah was protected by the Constitution's guarantee of freedom of expression. He noted that "the State of Georgia was under Civil and not Military Government" at the time. Thus his expulsion from Georgia was illegal: "I have committed no Offence against the laws of the United States nor the State of Georgia." He entreated the President to "please let me Return Home to Savannah GA. . . . I am here without a \$1."³⁴⁵

Bradley had no intention of confining his activities in the nation's capital to pleas for an end to his exile. He had raised money from the black population in Savannah to send him to Washington to present their views on land rights, civil rights, and the vote. He would uphold that promise. In late April at a meeting of the National Equal Suffrage Association, Bradley spoke at length on suffrage and the Constitution, the expansive powers of Congress, the need for a "better Moses" than President Johnson, and the actions taken against blacks by the rebel mayor of Savannah.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ "From Aaron A. Bradley," Paul H. Bergeron (ed.), *The Papers of Andrew Johnson, Volume 10, February-July 1866*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 456-57. See also *Boston Traveler*, Mar. 9, 1866.

³⁴⁶ *Washington Evening Star*, Apr. 26, 1866; *Boston Traveler*, Apr. 24, 1866. In 1864, Johnson had promised a black audience in Nashville that he would "be your Moses . . . and lead you . . . to a fairer future of liberty and peace." See *Nashville Times and True Union*, Oct. 25, 1864. Bradley also spoke at a May meeting of the 19th Street Baptist Church called to prepare for a march celebrating the anniversary of emancipation. See *Washington Evening Star*, May 10, 1866.

Bradley was not the only person trying to bring the plight of the freedmen to the attention of the nation's capital. In early 1866, at a secret meeting at the African Methodist Episcopal church in Tallahassee, Florida, local blacks raised several hundred dollars to send Joseph Oats to Washington. Oats had a background similar to that of Bradley. He too had been owned by a prominent politician: David S. Walker, the newly elected governor of Florida. A carpenter by trade, Oats was literate and before being set free he had hired himself out. A leader in his community, he was described by a political foe years later as "a mulatto of intelligence, of rascally practice, and of suave tongue." Soon after his arrival in Washington, Bradley met Oats and found that they shared common positions on the question of land for the freedmen.³⁴⁷

In late April, Bradley and Oats petitioned Congress "in behalf of the colored people of the States of Florida and Georgia." The arguments in the petition, as summarized by the *Journal of the Senate*, were ones Bradley had raised in Boston and Savannah and were similar to those Stevens had raised in the debate on the recently vetoed Freedmen's Bill. Congress had "exclusive control" over the recently seceded states and all their property, Bradley and Oats insisted, and "the products of the lands . . . belong legally to the persons occupying the same, who should receive the protection of the government."³⁴⁸

³⁴⁷ John Wallace, *Carpentbag Rule in Florida* (Kennesaw, Georgia: Continental Book Company, 1959), 38-39; William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida, Volume 53* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co, 1913), 495.

³⁴⁸ *Journal of the Senate of the United States of America, 1789-1873*, April 26, 1866. Unfortunately, the Bradley-Oats petition was not saved. Oats returned to Florida shortly after signing this petition. His welcome home showed the state of freedmen's organization during this period:

The freedmen prepared a picnic at Houstoun's spring, about a mile from Tallahassee. Oats notified them that if they desired to know what he had done for them while in Congress, they must prepare to protect him, as the whites would kill him when they should learn what he had accomplished against them. . . . At nine o'clock on that memorable 20th of May, the drums commenced beating

Bradley had long argued that as citizens, blacks had the right to bear arms. After the massacre of blacks in Memphis in early May, he circulated a petition among blacks in Washington calling on Congress to enact a law for the drilling of “all able-bodied *loyal* male citizens over 18 and under 45 ... in each Judicial District of the Rebellious States once in three months *without regard to Color or race*” so that “Life and Liberty & property may be better defended and protected.” The petition demanded that that no loyal citizens should be disarmed, that no rebels should be made “home gards over all the Loyal men and women,” and that no former rebels should ever be permitted to serve as policemen. The petition also prayed that Congress “shall not adjourn during 1866, and leave the County exposed to another Rebellion,” and that the President be “paid for 4 years and requested to resign.” The petition, signed by thirty-three blacks, was presented by Ohio Senator Benjamin Wade on May 14 and was referred to the Committee on Military Affairs and the Militia. From that moment on, support for armed self-defense by black and white loyalists and opposition to any proposal to disarm them became central elements of Bradley’s political program.³⁴⁹

To earn a living, Bradley gave lectures at the Douglass Institute in Baltimore. Formally opened in October 1865 by Frederick Douglass himself, the Institute was a three-story brick

and the freedmen, to the number of two or three thousand formed in line and marched to Oats' dwelling and sent a committee armed with old cavalry swords and pistols to escort Oats to the place of destination. He was escorted to Houstoun's spring, when the committee, at his request, arranged that he should be surrounded by the freedmen and the whites kept from harming him or hearing what he said. . . . Oats' speech was, that he had seen the President, and they had true friends in Washington.

See Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule*, 38-39. Oats was a delegate to Florida’s 1868 Constitutional Convention representing Leon and Wakulla counties.

³⁴⁹ Bradley et al. to the Senate and House of Representatives, [early 1866], 39A-H10.2, Petitions and Memorials, 39th Congress, Records of the US Senate, RG 46, NA; *Journal of the Senate*, May 14, 1866.

building in the heart of the historic black community near Baltimore's Inner Harbor. Bradley had an "office and school room" in the Institute. In early May, the *Christian Recorder*, a four-page weekly publication of the AME Church in Philadelphia, wrote that Bradley enjoyed "the highest considerations of our citizens in Washington and Baltimore."³⁵⁰

Bradley apparently had a hard time convincing the men in charge of the Institute to support the fight of the freedmen for confiscation and forty acres. Most northern black leaders believed that the free labor system offered the best chance for freedmen to advance. The only additional step needed was winning the right to vote. The passing of the Civil Rights Bill offered Bradley a new opening. He had fought against discrimination based on race in court cases for twenty years. Even if blacks in DC and Baltimore didn't understand the stakes in the revolutionary struggle in the South, perhaps he could help launch a second front fighting for equal rights in the North.

Northern blacks had a long history of protesting racial segregation in public transport. Frederick Douglass had refused to leave a whites-only car in 1841 in Lynn, Massachusetts, leading to the state's guarantee of equal rights in railroad accommodations the following year. In February 1865, after a long fight in Congress led by Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner, desegregation was ended on the streetcars of Washington, D.C. Within weeks of the Civil Rights Bill's passing, two black schoolteachers entered the whites-only ladies' waiting room in a Maryland train station. Thrown out of the waiting room, they filed a complaint under the bill in state court "seeking the arrest of the station master who tossed them out."³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 566; *Boston Clipper*, May 24, 1866; *Christian Recorder*, May 12, 1866.

³⁵¹ William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 92-93; Charles Sumner, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, pages 324-37; David S. Bogen, "Precursors of Rosa Parks: Maryland

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad company, one of the largest and most powerful corporations in the country, provided train service between Baltimore and Washington. Black passengers were not allowed seats in the whites-only cars and were confined to inferior compartments. In May 1866, Bradley purchased a ticket for Washington at the Camden station of the B&O Railroad in Baltimore. He tried to take a seat in the whites-only car but was refused admission by the officer at the car door. The next day, he returned to the Camden station “with two white friends.” Refused entry once again, he proceeded to the office of Justice Hayward and launched a civil suit in state court against the B&O Railroad for ejecting him from the railroad car “in contempt of a law of the United States on account of his color, race, etc.” He demanded the return of his fare and \$100 damages.³⁵²

It was a bold move: a black man suing the most powerful corporation in the state and one of the leading companies in the country. It was also one of the first test cases of the newly passed Civil Rights Act. On May 22, Judge Hayward tried to throw the suit out of court on the grounds that Bradley wasn’t recognized as a lawyer in the state of Maryland. But the B&O Railroad had assigned its chief council, John H. B. Latrobe, to the case. The railroad wanted the case to be heard in order to establish a legal precedent in its favor. The judge allowed it to proceed.

Transportation Cases between the Civil War and the Beginning of World War I,” *63 Maryland Law Review* 721 (2004), 724, 725-26. Senator Sumner was able to force the desegregation of Washington streetcars because the purse strings and laws regulating commerce in the nation’s capital were controlled by Congress. In the Maryland schoolteachers’ case, the station master requested a jury trial. As all-white juries were unlikely to rule in favor of the black plaintiffs, the suit was dropped.

³⁵² *SDH*, May 29, 1866, citing an article in the *Baltimore Gazette*, May 23, 1866; Bogen, “Precursors of Rosa Parks,” 728-29. As legal scholar David Bogen notes, Bradley sought damages, “so the suit avoided the discretion inherent in requests for equity.”

Bradley argued that, under the Civil Rights Act, the B&O Railroad “had no right to refuse him admittance to any car, and that he, under the law, could take a position where he pleased.” In reply, Latrobe argued that “the company, as a corporation, had a right to make their own rules and enforce their regulations.” Men were not allowed to go in ladies’ cars, for instance. Such rules were “essential to the good government of the road in every respect.” The Civil Rights Act, the company argued, was only applicable to cases of race discrimination resulting from state and federal law. It did not apply to the rules and regulations of private companies. Judge Hayward accepted the company’s argument and dismissed the case, saying there was no cause for action. The case revealed a gaping loophole in federal legislation, one which would be exploited hundreds of times over the next century.³⁵³

Bradley wasn’t content with just one test case. Perhaps anticipating the judge’s negative ruling, and hopeful that he would have a better chance of success in federal court, he launched a concurrent suit on the grounds of racial discrimination, this time against the Baltimore City Passenger Railway Company (BCPRC).

The BCPRC used horse-drawn carriages to transport passengers from place to place in Baltimore. Whites were seated in a covered car; blacks were required to stand on an uncovered platform behind the whites-only car. The railway ran along Jefferson Street in front of the Douglass Institute. On May 18, Bradley tried to board the white men’s car and was ejected. Four days later, immediately after the negative decision in the B&O case, Bradley, a “colored citizen of Massachusetts,” together with Mary Hutt and James Davis, filed a petition with Judge William Fell Giles in US District Court. The petition demanded an injunction against the BCPRC “for refusing to let ride in [its passenger railway] cars . . . Bradley and other colored citizens of the

³⁵³ *Boston Traveler*, May 25, 1866; *Evening Union* (Washington, D.C.), May 23, 1866.

United States . . . contrary to the laws of the United States.” The petition alleged that the railway was a “common nuisance to the colored people” on Lexington Street, and sought to prevent the BCPRC from running railway cars in front of the Douglass Institute and other streets inhabited by colored citizens. It stated further that Henry Tyson, the president of the BCPRC, and his agents committed assault and battery on Bradley when they ousted him from the car. In support of his demand for an injunction, Bradley cited the US Constitution and the Civil Rights Act. Judge Giles, noting that two of the petitioners (Hutt and Davis) were residents of Baltimore, said that the “jurisdiction of the [federal] court applied only to suits between citizens of different states.” The plaintiffs withdrew the petition. Bradley said he would amend it and refile.³⁵⁴

Bradley was not a political novice. He would have known that referring to the Douglass Institute in his suit would not sit well with the Institute’s directors. He was trying to goad them into throwing their support behind a campaign to desegregate public transport. This tactic might have worked if there were a grassroots movement among blacks in Baltimore for boycotting the BCPRC until it desegregated its railway cars. But there was no such movement. Instead, Bradley’s call for shutting down the railway provoked an immediate negative response from Baltimore’s black establishment.

The directors of the Douglass Institute paid for an advertisement in the *American and Commercial Advertiser* stating that Bradley’s suit was brought without their knowledge or consent. Bradley also incurred the wrath of Baltimore’s most prominent black leader, Isaac Myers. In 1865, more than one hundred black ship caulkers in Baltimore lost their jobs when white caulkers went on strike demanding that black caulkers be fired. Myers, a skilled caulker at

³⁵⁴ *Baltimore Sun*, May 24, 1866. Bogen explains in more detail the legal arguments behind Judge Giles’s ruling in “Precursors of Rosa Parks,” 727 and 727n43.

the time, proposed that the blacks purchase a shipyard and run it as a cooperative. With financial support from middle-class blacks and a loan from a ship captain, Myers purchased a shipyard in February 1866, hired hundreds of blacks (and some whites), and formed the Colored Caulkers' Trade Union Society of Baltimore. On behalf of "a meeting of black citizens of Baltimore," Myers submitted a petition to the press arguing that Bradley's "only object is to excite and agitate the public mind. . . . [W]e denounce the action of the aforesaid Bradley, and demand that he let the colored citizens of Baltimore attend to their own business in their own time and in their own way."³⁵⁵

Bradley attempted to counter the arguments in Judge Giles's ruling as well as the attacks from Myers and the Douglass Institute directors in an amended petition filed two days later. He no longer argued that the railway was a common nuisance to the colored people and did not demand the railway stop serving colored areas. Instead, he called for the court to order the company to cease all its operations until it granted equal treatment to all citizens. Bradley based his claim for an injunction on Article 4, Section 2, Paragraph 1 of the US Constitution: "The Citizens of each State shall be entitled to all Privileges and Immunities of Citizens in the several States."³⁵⁶

Bradley's revised petition was far stronger than his original one on both legal and political grounds. But it was dismissed nevertheless. Judge Giles ruled that if Bradley was deprived of his rights by the company, he should sue for damages "on the law side of this court."

³⁵⁵ Bogen, "Precursors of Rosa Parks," 728n52 (citing the *American & Commercial Advertiser*, May 25, 1866); *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, May 30, 1866; Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor & the Black Worker 1619-1973* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 21-22.

³⁵⁶ *Boston Clipper*, May 24, 1866.

On the other hand, if he wished to present arguments “on the proper construction” of the US Constitution and the Civil Rights Act, he should present his case “in the proper way.” Confronted with strong opposition to further court action from leading Baltimore blacks, Bradley elected to drop the matter.³⁵⁷

Myers’s denunciation of Bradley as an interloper whose only goal was to stir up trouble was widely trumpeted by the racist Democratic Party press. The *New Orleans Daily Crescent* titled their article on the case “A Negro After his Rights not Appreciated by the Colored Brethren.” In its article headlined “A Presuming Negro,” the Washington, D.C. *Evening Union* lambasted the “nigger Bradley,” “backed up by a host of howling dervishes of the Radical school,” and compared him unfavorably to a baboon. “This negro will go a little too far,” the article threatened, “and will be brought up with a jerk before he knows where he is.” Across the country, from Charleston and Savannah to Cincinnati and Brooklyn, the civil rights cases in Baltimore added to Bradley’s growing national notoriety.³⁵⁸

Bradley’s missteps in his initial petition on the BCPRC case had ruined any possibility that black leaders in Baltimore would throw their support behind his campaign to integrate public transportation. But for those with a longer view, his efforts in Baltimore were not in vain. In its report on Bradley’s attempt to integrate the railroad cars, the *Christian Recorder* proclaimed that

³⁵⁷ *Baltimore Daily Commercial*, May 26, 1866.

³⁵⁸ *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, June 12, 1866; *Evening Union*, May 23, 1866; *Charleston Daily News*, May 29, 1866; *SDH*, May 29, 1866; *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, May 30, 1866. The article on Bradley in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* on May 26, 1866 did not link him to the Aaron Bradley who had fought against racial discrimination in Brooklyn and Williamsburg twenty years earlier.

“an agitation of the matter has thus commenced, and we believe it will end in securing colored persons the right to ride in the street cars unmolested.”³⁵⁹

1866 was a year of growing confrontations between the freedmen and the southern ruling class both in the countryside and in towns. Georgia was now at the center of the fight of blacks to hold onto their forty acres and a mule. In South Carolina, the freedmen’s struggle against returning confiscated land was not supported by the large middle-class black leadership in Charleston. Though they were strong supporters of voting rights and civil rights for blacks, urban black leaders opposed confiscation and believed that contracts and the vote would solve all the problems on the plantations. As a result, on the sea islands near Charleston the fight to hold onto confiscated land had largely collapsed by February 1866.³⁶⁰

Even though Bradley had been expelled from the state, coastal Georgia freedmen continued to occupy their land. In the winter of 1865-66, Dr. John Cheves returned to his Grove Point plantation on the Ogeechee neck west of Savannah. “Neither Cheves nor the Freedmen’s Bureau recognized the possessory titles issued to former slaves.” Cheves “contracted with one hundred of his former slaves for a year’s labor.” They worked alongside 108 freedmen holding Sherman grant titles on the property. On other plantations nearby, freedmen leased their plantations from the owners, raised and marketed the crops, and paid the owners “one-third of the proceeds from their profit.” Walter Heyward, who owned Vallambrosia plantation, leased it

³⁵⁹ *Christian Recorder*, June 2, 1866. Bogen’s article cited above documents the ongoing fight against racial discrimination in public transport in Maryland between the Civil War and the beginning of World War I. A number of later cases were adjudicated by Judge Giles.

³⁶⁰ Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 98-101.

to “seventy-four former slaves for a term of one year and subdivided the land with each head of family receiving ten acres.”³⁶¹

In February and March 1866, General Tillson toured the Georgia Sea Islands together with northern investors who were convinced they could make a profit growing sea island cotton. Tillson’s job was to convince the freedmen, who had settled on these islands with the support of Tunis Campbell and other Freedmen’s Bureau agents, that they could improve their situation by working for the planters. To pressure the freedmen into signing contracts, he arbitrarily reduced the acreage of Sherman grants on St. Catherine’s Island from forty acres to ten or fifteen acres. He also said they would get no more help from the Freedmen’s Bureau. When large numbers of Sherman title holders on the islands followed Tunis Campbell’s advice and refused to sign contracts, Tillson used trumped-up charges to fire Campbell. During the remainder of 1866, the Sea Islands were worked by freedmen on their Sherman claims on one part of the island, along with freedmen working under contract to northern investors on another.³⁶²

Across the South, the fight to hold onto forty acres and a mule on the Georgia coast kept the hope of land alive. In Georgia, thousands of freedmen balked at signing contracts with the planters in December 1865 and January 1866 in hopes that the federal government would offer them land. But when Washington did not act, freedmen had no choice. They had to come to some kind of arrangement with the planters.

³⁶¹ Jonathan M. Bryant, “‘Surrounded on All Sides by an Armed and Brutal Mob’: Newspapers, Politics, and Law in the Ogeechee Insurrection, 1868-1869,” in *After Slavery: Race, Labor, and Citizenship in the Reconstruction South*, ed. Bruce E. Baker and Brian Kelly (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 70; Bell, “Ogeechee Troubles,” 382-83.

³⁶² Cimbala, *Under the Guardianship of the Nation*, 178; Oubre, *Forty Acres and a Mule*, 63-65.

Buttressed by the labor code adopted by Georgia's general assembly in December, planters "envisioned a scheme of centralized management by which workers could be obligated to perform a full range of general chores. . . . Freedpeople's understanding of the social relations implicit in wage agreements acknowledged no such subordination." Blacks had learned hard lessons from the dreadful experience of the previous six months, when contracts had been unilaterally imposed on them with the aid of the army. "Banking on planters' need for their labor," and conscious of growing opposition to Johnson's Reconstruction policies in Washington, "black men forcibly inserted themselves into the bargaining process." They refused to work from sunup to sundown. They wanted Saturday and Sunday off. They claimed "the right to cultivate land on their own account" and grew food crops rather than only cotton. They "demanded to supervise the cultivation, processing, and marketing of their shares of the plantation staple."³⁶³

"Planters found themselves in the unhappy and, as one put it, 'annoying' position of appealing to the interests and needs of workers who were no longer slaves," "men who drove their old masters wild by driving very hard bargains." With most planters having no cash to pay wages and many workers preferring shares of the crop, a huge variety of labor contracts were drawn up in 1866: contracts for shares, for shares as well as wages, and for monthly cash wages. In the low country of South Carolina and Georgia, "labor rents" became more widespread in 1866 and 1867. "That is, each resident worker within a household was obligated to fulfill a

³⁶³ Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 113-14, 116-17, 121; O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 189. Although Saville's observations concern freedpeople in South Carolina, they are equally applicable to conditions in Georgia.

stipulated quota of workdays in return for the right to cultivate a fixed acreage, typically one-half an acre, of land.”³⁶⁴

As the year wore on, there were growing confrontations over wages and working conditions in the countryside. Freedmen “demanded to supervise the cultivation, processing, and marketing of their shares of the plantation staple.” They insisted on “gaining immediate possession of the harvested crop.” “Sparks flew and blood sometimes flowed as laborers stalled, fell mysteriously ill, fought back, or quit altogether when called upon to perform services not spelled out in their contracts, and when planters attempted to extend their authority beyond the workplace. They were ‘determined,’ remarked a frustrated planter, ‘to have their own way irrespective of their or mine interest’.” When the wages “they had dickered so vigorously to get” went unpaid, black men were “relentless in their pursuit of defaulting bosses.”³⁶⁵

When workers refused to submit to planters’ demands in southwest Georgia, “roving bands of thugs did the work for them,” sweeping “through the springtime countryside, usually by night, frequently disguised.” In South Carolina, Brevet Brigadier General Benjamin Runkle wrote Assistant Commissioner Scott that “armed men roam through the country shooting and assaulting blacks, and no effort is made by the civil authorities to check them.”³⁶⁶

Blacks found little help from the Freedmen’s Bureau in resolving these problems. Most of the two hundred and fifty white Georgians appointed by Tillson as civilian agents were more responsive to planters’ claims than to the complaints of their workers. The Bureau supported planters’ “apprenticeships” of black youth. “Utilizing hastily passed vagrancy laws and the threat

³⁶⁴ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 189-90, 191; Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 133.

³⁶⁵ Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 117, 118; O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 204, 215.

³⁶⁶ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 217-18; Zuczek, *State of Rebellion*, 34.

of physical punishment, the Bureau collected unemployed freedmen and transported them to areas experiencing labor shortages,” notes Lewis Wynne. “Bureau agents and planters became unlikely partners in efforts to force freedmen back to the plantations.” Some agents were more responsive, “issuing summonses, examining witnesses, checking the math in planters’ accounts, seizing crops to force payment, and occasionally tossing defaulters into jail.” But agents’ decisions against planters were frequently ignored. The army could not enforce their rulings. Protests against violent attacks and contract violations to civil officials were useless. Many policemen and county officers “spent their nights riding with the mobs and ‘black horse cavalries’.”³⁶⁷

With the courts and county officials against them and most Freedmen’s Bureau agents either unreceptive or powerless, freedmen responded enthusiastically to the efforts of John Bryant, Henry Turner, and others to build the Georgia Equal Rights Association (GERA). By April, local GERA affiliates, with their program of civil rights and education for blacks, appeared in Macon, Savannah, Augusta, and the counties around them.

Freedmen organized in GERA chapters went far beyond the limited aims of their middle-class founders. O’Donovan notes that

[m]embership transformed and emboldened black workers. . . . Former slaves across southwest Georgia accelerated their assault against exploitative bosses, oppressive terms of work, and the violent reprisals to which many were subjected. . . . Turning their backs on civil and federal systems that tended in their different ways to favor planters over ex-slaves, southwest Georgia’s black men began to assemble alternative institutions. Formal drilling clubs, military companies,

³⁶⁷ Lewis N. Wynne, *The Continuity of Cotton: Planter Politics in Georgia, 1865-1892* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), 13, 14; O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 206, 218-19.

neighborhood posses, and as fall approached, a rush of new chapters of the GERA, sprang up.³⁶⁸

In areas where there were no GERA chapters, blacks organized Union clubs, often meeting secretly at night. With the support of James Simms and Moses Bentley of the Savannah Colored Union League, Ogeechee freedmen formed a Union Club, which met on Grove Point. Solomon Farley was elected president and Paul Campbell vice-president. Farley had been a sergeant in the 34th US Colored Infantry, seeing action along the coast in South Carolina and Florida from 1863 through the end of the war. When he mustered out in February 1866, he moved back to the Ogeechee. Farley headed up drills on Grove Hill plantation, adjacent to Grove Point. Planter Andrew Waddell noted that “they never drilled as an armed company. They had drum and fife, and kept drumming all night.” The planters protested to Captain Cook “because the negroes would leave their work early, go to drilling and parading around, and it injured our planting.” Cook said the Union Club was a “political organization” and allowed it to continue its activities.³⁶⁹

Over the summer and fall of 1866, the tempo of political developments increased. With state and county governments and courts under their control, a friend in the White House, and the US army and Freedmen’s Bureau less likely to intervene, planters stepped up their use of terror and intimidation to reassert control over the freedmen. Attacks on freedmen also increased in the

³⁶⁸ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 218-22, 223, 225-29, 231. See also Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 144-45.

³⁶⁹ Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 253; Bell, “Ogeechee Troubles,” 385; Solomon Farley, Freedmen’s Bureau Claim Records, 1865-1872, accessed September 7, 2020, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QG-MDHY>; *SMN*, Jan. 26, 1869.

South's towns and cities. In early May, dozens of blacks, including uniformed Union troops, were killed by white policemen and civilians and hundreds of black dwellings were destroyed in a three-day anti-black onslaught in Memphis, Tennessee. At the end of July, loyalists attempting to hold a meeting in New Orleans were attacked by a mob of city policemen and ex-Confederates organized by the city's mayor. Dozens of Union supporters, including many black soldiers, were killed. "The events in New Orleans discredited Presidential Reconstruction," notes Foner, as more and more northerners blamed Johnson for the return of the rebels to power in the South and the violent attacks on Unionists.³⁷⁰

Shortly afterwards, a National Union Convention met in Philadelphia to organize support for pro-Johnson candidates in the November 1866 elections. The convention was followed by a national speaking tour in which Johnson, accompanied by Grant and others, defended his policies to the nation. The Johnson campaign was a disaster for his supporters, little more than the "Democratic party in a new guise." "By the fall, most conservative Republicans had returned to the party fold." The election of November 1866 "became a referendum on the Fourteenth Amendment. . . . [T]he result was a disastrous defeat for the President." Republicans now had large veto-proof majorities in both houses of Congress. By the fall of 1866, Republican leaders agreed on three things, notes Foner: "existing Southern governments should be superseded, 'rebels' should hold no place in the new regimes, and 'the negroes should vote'." There was also increasing support for impeachment of President Johnson.³⁷¹

These developments in national politics had immediate repercussions in Georgia. Businessmen and yeomen in north Georgia had long resented the control of the state's politics by

³⁷⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 263.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 266, 267, 272.

planters from south Georgia. Poor and yeomen whites there were at the center of the fight against conscription and impressment during the war. Many were Unionists who had fought their rebel neighbors and supported the US Army. After the war, they confronted years of crop failure, rising debts, and the threatened loss of their farms and livelihoods. They demanded relief in the form of stay laws and mortgage adjustments. Beginning in June 1865, Atlanta attorney Henry Farrow addressed rallies in Cassville, Dawson, and elsewhere in support of the Republican Party. In the summer and fall of 1866, Farrow and others founded white councils of the Union League throughout the area.³⁷²

The rapid growth of the Union Leagues and the prospect of blacks being allowed to vote attracted the interest of prominent Atlanta politicians and businessmen. Two “1850s Whig mayors William Markham and Jonathan Norcross, industrialist James L. Dunning, and pharmacist David Young” had been born in the North, had come to Atlanta before the war, and “were embittered by their wartime treatment.” On July 4, 1866, Dunning, Markham, and Young addressed a largely black audience in support of Reconstruction. Proponents of industrialization and urban development, they joined the Union League. Markham, a wealthy industrialist and realtor, became president of the Union League, with Farrow as secretary.³⁷³

Delegates from fifty-nine counties at a state convention of the Georgia Equal Rights Association at the end of October painted a picture of the situation facing blacks in 1866 which the *New York Tribune* reporter found “almost too horrible to contemplate.” They documented one hundred and forty murders of freed people by whites and many more assaults with “no

³⁷² James, Alex Baggett, *The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 170.

³⁷³ Baggett, *Scalawags*, 171.

notice taken of them by white authorities,” whippings by the planters and the courts “as common now as in the days of Slavery,” and laborers being “driven off without pay when crops are gathered.” Bureau agents were “of no use.” Noted one delegate: “Might as well have no Bureau as to have it in the hands of Southern men.”³⁷⁴

Confronted by growing attacks on GERA members and affiliates by rebel whites, President Bryant argued that “opposition would not be as great if political question[s] were not discussed at meetings of the Associations.” Delegates resolved to “refrain from public political discussion” in their meetings and devote all their energies to establishing schools. Hope for political change now rested in the hands of the Republican Party and their new plan of reconstruction. To that end, Bryant, Turner, and others established Union League councils in Augusta, Atlanta, Savannah, and Macon.³⁷⁵

While Georgia Union League and GERA leaders tried to reign in and redirect the growing militancy of their members, Aaron Bradley pushed in the opposite direction. Unable any longer to use the facilities at the Douglass Institute to earn an income from lectures and classes, Bradley left the Washington-Baltimore area over the summer and returned to Boston. He had left Boston nine months earlier with a less than stellar reputation: a disbarred lawyer, spurned by most middle-class blacks, known mainly for his multiple confrontations with the police and the courts. He returned to the city a much more experienced politician and a spokesperson for the freedmen in coastal Georgia.

³⁷⁴ *New-York Semi-Weekly Tribune*, Nov. 20, 1866.

³⁷⁵ *Proceedings of the Convention of the Equal Rights and Educational Association of Georgia, assembled at Macon, October 29th, 1866* (Augusta: The Loyal Georgian, 1866); Baggett, *Scalawags*, 170.

On September 3, Bradley organized a public meeting at Boston's Tremont Temple on "The Colored High School in Savannah, Ga. and the Present Condition of the South." He described the organization of his short-lived school, claiming attendance of 114 at his daytime classes and 200 at his nighttime classes. Bradley blamed Tillson for forcing him to leave his school, and criticized Johnson for granting amnesty and pardon to rebels at the end of the war. Reverend Justin D. Fulton, a well-known defender of black rights and pastor of the Union Temple Baptist Church, echoed Bradley's denunciation of Johnson.³⁷⁶

Fulton introduced Allen Coffin, a well-known Massachusetts newspaper editor and unionist. In the fall of 1865, Coffin was hired to edit the *South Carolina Leader*, a new paper in Charleston, South Carolina, "devoted to the support of the Union, free labor, and . . . 'that all men are created equal'." He also worked as a teacher in Charleston's new schools set up for black students. After serving as editor for the paper's first six months, Coffin was fired in March 1866 for criticizing President Johnson and replaced by more conservative editors. He returned to Massachusetts in April 1866. Coffin described his experiences as a teacher in Charleston during the eight months he had worked there. He said there were more secessionists in South Carolina today than there were when the war began. Everything was going backward in the South, he argued. Unless blacks were given suffrage, there would be a race war.³⁷⁷

Coffin was Bradley's guide to the growing labor movement in the North. After supporting the Union war effort through years of inflation and wage restraints, northern workers

³⁷⁶ BDA, Sep. 1, 1866; *Boston Evening Transcript*, Sep. 4, 1866.

³⁷⁷ BDA, Sep. 4, 1866; *New Bedford Evening Standard*, Aug. 26, 1865 and Apr. 14, 1866; Richard H. Abbott, *For Free Press and Equal Rights: Republican Newspapers in the Reconstruction South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 32-33.

in 1866 and 1867 insisted that “social reconstruction be extended northward.” At the center of their concerns was the reduction in the working day. Two weeks before Bradley’s school meeting, a national labor conference in Baltimore launched the National Labor Union. The NLU campaigned to win the eight-hour-day for working people through political action and supported the organization of black workers into unions.³⁷⁸

Coffin was a central leader of the labor reform movement in Boston. When the Republican candidate for Congress in Boston’s Third District opposed the shorter working day, labor reformers ran their own candidate on the workingman’s ticket. At a mass meeting in October, Coffin

drew a parallel between slavery and capital. Slavery had been the power which, until recently, had ruled the country, and if the laborer would but come up and assert his rights, capital, which now rules labor, would soon cease to do so. . . . He charged the Republican party and its leaders with being false to their professions of sympathy with the workingmen. . . . These men only cared for power, for place, and for wealth. The only thing remaining for the workingmen to do . . . was to go to work and build up a third party . . . on the labor question.

In the election that fall, Coffin ran as a workingman’s candidate for state senator in the Fourth District against two Republicans.³⁷⁹

The labor reform movement would become increasingly important for Bradley in later years, but in 1866 his eyes remained focused on developments in the South. The recently passed Freedmen’s Bureau bill required the President to “extend military protection and have military

³⁷⁸ Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, ix, 176-80.

³⁷⁹ *BH*, Oct. 26, 1866; *Boston Semi-Weekly Advertiser*, Nov. 7, 1866. See also the article on “Workingmen’s Meeting in Faneuil Hall” in *Boston Journal*, Oct. 12, 1866. For a fuller account of the complicated relations between labor and the Radical Republicans in Massachusetts in the summer and fall of 1866, see Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, 265-77.

jurisdiction” over any cases of discrimination on account of race in every state “where the ordinary course of judicial proceedings has been interrupted by the rebellion.” In July, General Grant’s Order 44 directed military commanders in the South to make arrests when civil authorities failed to act. By the fall of 1866, the unwillingness of civil courts to prosecute crimes against blacks caused many state assistant commissioners of the Freedmen’s Bureau to support using military tribunals.³⁸⁰

Aaron Bradley had been expelled from Georgia by a military tribunal backed by Tillson and other Freedmen’s Bureau and Army officials. Throughout his trial, Bradley maintained that as a civilian he should not be tried by a military tribunal. He believed the federal court system and Congressional oversight offered greater protection for the freedmen’s civil rights than military tribunals. Days after his meeting on Savannah schools, Bradley sent a letter to Bureau Commissioner O. O. Howard arguing against the use of military tribunals by the Freedmen’s Bureau. Such tribunals came under the authority of President Johnson as commander-in-chief. The Freedmen’s Bureau, he argued, derived its mandate from Congress, not the President. Bradley called on Howard to reject military tribunals and turn instead to the “United States District Circuit and the Supreme Court under the Civil Rights Bill.”³⁸¹

Bradley called for Howard to do the right thing even at the risk of being dismissed by the President Johnson. He noted that Article 2, Section 4 of the US Constitution allowed for the impeachment of the President if he were guilty of “high crimes and misdemeanors,” and that Article 2, Section 2 limited the President’s ability to make appointments during Senate recess.

³⁸⁰ *CG*, 39th Congress, 1st Session, 177.

³⁸¹ Bradley to O. O. Howard, Sept. 9, 1866, B-210 (No. 2) 1866, Letters Received, Comr., RG 105, NA; Reidy, “Aaron A. Bradley,” 287 and 304n16.

The implication was that any attempt to remove Howard from office would result in Johnson's impeachment. "My great object," concluded Bradley, "is to give you Back-bone, and as the Chief Justice of 4 millions of Colored people, and Refugees; you can not, and must not, be a Military Tool, in the hands of Andrew Johnson."³⁸²

Another important issue was the right of citizens to bear arms. The army was upset by the actions of armed white regulators as well as freedmen's drilling. In September 1866, Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Sickles, the army commander over North and South Carolina, issued General Orders 7, which prohibited all "organizations of white or colored persons bearing arms" from operating as paramilitary units. Bradley had no confidence in the ability or willingness of the small numbers of US Army troops stationed in Georgia and South Carolina to disarm the ex-Confederates. He knew, on the other hand, that these troops could and would be used to disarm blacks who were only trying to defend themselves. The new Freedmen's Bureau Bill specifically protected blacks' Second Amendment rights. In a letter to South Carolina Freedmen's Bureau Assistant Commissioner Robert Scott, Bradley protested any attempt to deny freedmen the right to bear arms. "It is not within the power of President Johnson to order you to arrest any citizen for forming military companies and for wearing shoulder straps and side arms in compliance with the Constitution and the laws of Congress," he insisted.³⁸³

³⁸² Bradley to Howard, Sept. 9, 1866.

³⁸³ Mark L. Bradley, *The Army and Reconstruction 1865-1877* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 2015), 30; Bradley to Gen. [R. K.] Scott, Oct. 22, 1866, Letters Received, Mil. Dist. Of S. C., Records of U.S. Army Continental Commands, RG 393, pt. 2, no. 132, NA; Reidy, "Aaron A. Bradley," in Rabinowitz, *Southern Black Leaders*, 287 and 304n17.

As the end of the year approached, a major confrontation was brewing between opposing class forces in Georgia, with the Sherman title areas at their center. In October, Tillson moved his headquarters to Savannah “to supervise the restoration process,” that is, to complete the return of the Sherman grants to the planters. Together with northern investors, he toured the Georgia Sea Islands once again. The few freedmen whom he judged to have valid Sherman claims would be given warrants for twenty acres of land in South Carolina. If the remaining freedmen didn’t sign contracts by January 1, 1867, they would be forced to leave the islands.³⁸⁴

The discontent of the freedmen boiled over on Sapelo Island. Two northern speculators, McBride and Dickson, leased part of island in 1866. Freedmen signed a contract with them for a share of the crop. When all the cotton was picked, freedmen filed in with the bags of cotton they had produced during the year. McBride and Dickson calculated the value of the cotton against the credit the freedmen had been granted at the plantation store. They informed the freedmen, one after another, that they hadn’t produced enough to offset their expenses at the store. They were told to add their cotton to McBride’s pile. Twelve freedmen who refused to turn over their cotton were arrested by Tillson and given hard labor at Fort Pulaski. Tunis Campbell, whom Tillson blamed for the trouble on Sapelo, was threatened with jail if he dared visit the island. Few of the Sapelo freedmen agreed to sign contracts with the Northern speculators for 1867. Similar opposition was registered on Ossabaw, St. Catherines, and St. Simons islands.³⁸⁵

A December 1866 report by Bvt. Lieut. Col. G. A. Williams to Assistant Commissioner Scott about conditions in the Charleston area accurately summarized the situation prevailing

³⁸⁴ Cimbala, *Under the Guardianship of the Nation*, 185.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 182-84; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 266; Russell Duncan, *Freedom’s Shore: Tunis Campbell and the Georgia Freedmen* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 33-35.

along the Georgia and South Carolina coasts. Williams noted that “not more than one tenth of the freedmen employed upon plantation work have realized enough to support themselves and families through the season, with the strictest economy.” Not surprisingly, “the freedmen show but little disposition to contract for the coming year.” The freedmen, he said, “have been holding meetings at various points for the purpose of consulting together on their condition and arranging their plans and terms of labor, during the year.” Expressing “a great dissatisfaction with their present situation,” their “almost universal desire,” he noted, was “for land for themselves.”³⁸⁶

On December 17, 1866, the majority and minority opinions in the Milligan case were made public. The military court ruling which had expelled Aaron Bradley from Georgia was overturned. Within days, Bradley was on board a steamer bound for Savannah. A powder keg was primed to explode in coastal Georgia. Now it had a match.

³⁸⁶ Genl. R. K. Scott Asst Com to General O. O. Howard, “Report of Operations during December 1866,” Jan. 23, 1867, S-190, Registers and Letters Received, Comr., RG 105, NA. Karen Bell notes that “[b]etween November 30, 1866 and January 7, 1867, some 108 individuals in the Ogeechee district received land warrants as a result of this legislation. The allotment of plantation lands among those who held valid titles raised the hopes of those who were dispossessed and who still believed that the government would concede land.” See Bell, “Ogeechee Troubles,” 384.

9 JANUARY–MARCH 1867: SAVANNAH’S ‘JANUARY REVOLUTION’

On Christmas Day, 1866, Gen. Davis Tillson, along with other army officials and a Mr. Prince of Maine, arrived at a plantation on Wilmington Island east of Savannah aboard his steamer *Port Royal*. He summoned a local black preacher, Reverend King Tatnal, aboard his vessel and told him to gather the freedmen in his church. A number of freedmen on the island held forty-acre Sherman titles. When the freedmen gathered in the church, Tillson informed them that the new Freedmen’s Bill meant that they would either have to surrender their Sherman titles for warrants of twenty acres of land on St. Helena Island, South Carolina, or sign a one-year contract with the owner (presumably Mr. Prince). If they refused both the warrants and the contract, they would have to leave the property by January 1.³⁸⁷

The freedmen had already heard through the grapevine of the arrival of Aaron Bradley in Savannah. They knew very well who Bradley was and what he stood for. After all, it had only been a year since he visited other plantations around Savannah, spoke in favor of land for the freedmen, and was expelled from the state for his efforts. A couple of days after Tillson’s visit, a large number of Wilmington Island freedmen came to see Bradley at his new office in Savannah. They recounted the story of Tillson’s visit and his ultimatum to either accept the warrants, sign a one-year contract, or leave the island.

Accompanied by “a large number of colored citizens,” Bradley proceeded to the office of Henry S. Fitch, the US Attorney in Savannah, and complained about Tillson’s actions. Fitch told them to register their complaint, in writing, with the office of the US Commissioner. Bradley hastily drafted affidavits on behalf of three leaders of the Wilmington Island freedmen: Marcus

³⁸⁷ A. Alpiora Bradley to Senator Wade, Jan. 3, 1867, filed in packet “Hon. B. F. Wade,” January 15, 1867, W-17 1867, Letters Received, Comr, RG 105, NA.

Barstow, Andrew Washington, and Daniel Williams. Accompanied by Bradley, the three went to the office of Amherst Stone, the US Commissioner in Savannah, and signed the affidavits. The affidavits asserted that the three held Sherman grants to their property. Bradley had carefully studied the provisions of the second Freedmen's Bureau bill concerning return of land to the planters. Invoking Section 11 of the bill, the affidavits noted that neither Tillson nor the new owner offered them compensation for the "improvements and betterments" they had made on their property. Fully aware that Tillson would not take these affidavits lightly, Bradley asked to have the three men protected by the officer in command.³⁸⁸

On January 2, Bradley went to Wilmington Island. He and the freedmen discussed what had happened on Christmas Day. Twenty freedmen signed a petition to Congress praying for protection. The next day, Bradley sent the freedmen's petition and a letter to Senator Benjamin Wade giving the freedmen's version of what had happened on Christmas Day on Wilmington Island. The letter requested Wade's help in relieving the suffering freedmen "from the outrages of General Davis Tilson, who has not regard for the laws of the United States, humanity, nor the laws of God." It accused Tillson of travelling from plantation to plantation, "with soldiers and the gunboat," compelling the "colored persons under duress" to "divide with their former owners the crops produced on the lands granted to them by General Sherman" and to give up their Sherman certificates. The letter noted that Tillson had "ordered the arrest of the 3 witnesses that gave affidavits against him." Furthermore, Tillson was complicit in the brutal treatment of freedmen in Savannah. "Russell the jailor whips and puts a ball and chain on all colored men

³⁸⁸ Henry S. Fitch to Maj. Genl. Davis Tillson, Jan. 23, 1867; Amherst W. Stone to United States Commissioner's Office, Dec. 27, 1866; A. Alpiora Bradley to Senator Wade, Jan. 3, 1867. All three documents are filed in packet "Hon. B. F. Wade."

brought to the county jail and compels them to work in the streets even before any trial. . . . [O]ur people would not submit to these abuses were it not for the soldiers under General Davis Tilson.”

The letter concluded:

We know that all just laws derive their powers from the consent of the governed. We are governed by laws not made by us, nor recognized by the Congress of the U.S. Being free citizens of the United States and not in the minority we are a part of the law making power of the State of Georgia. We are the producers of all that is exported of any value. *We are the loyal men who can save Georgia, if you will let us do it. Make us the militia under a General in each county*, and always in the active and actual service of the U.S.³⁸⁹

Wade was a leading Radical Republican and had presented the Bradley-Oats petition to Congress a few months earlier. On receipt of the letter and petition, Wade wrote to Commissioner Howard: “Can you do anything in this matter? I have no doubt that the statements are true.” Throughout 1866, in letter after letter Bradley had demanded that Bureau and Army officials (Howard, Sickles, Scott) break with Tillson and the Johnson administration and come to the aid of the loyal freedmen instead of siding with the rebel planters. His pleas had gone unanswered. With the passing of the Fourteenth Amendment and the October elections, the balance of forces in Washington had changed. Wade’s response to Bradley’s petition was a sign of that change. Wade’s request and comment would have big repercussions.³⁹⁰

News spread quickly about Bradley’s return, the affidavits against Tillson, and the petition to Congress by the freedmen of Wilmington Island. The next flashpoint was the Delta plantation. Located on the South Carolina side of the Savannah River just north of Savannah, the

³⁸⁹ Wilmington Island Petition of Rev. King Tatnall and others, Jan. 2, 1867; A. Alpiora Bradley to Senator Wade, Jan. 3, 1867. Both documents filed in packet “Hon. B. F. Wade.” Emphasis added.

³⁹⁰ B. F. Wade to US Commissioner’s Office, Jan. 15, 1867 filed in packet “Hon. B. F. Wade.” Emphasis added.

Delta plantation was owned by Charlotte and Isabella Cheves. At the end of November, the rice crop on the plantation was divided under the personal supervision of US Army Captain Henry Brandt, with the Cheves sisters receiving their one-third share. Brandt informed the freedmen that the plantation had been leased in two parts to former Confederate Captain A. S. Barnwell and Charles White. The freedmen were told to make contracts with the lessors or leave the plantation by the end of the year. On January 7, Barnwell informed Captain Brandt that the freedmen refused to contract with him “and declared, to hold the land and that no Officer of the Fdn [Freedmen’s] Bureau or any Military force, could drive them off.” A party of three freedmen from the plantation called on Brandt and told him the same thing.³⁹¹

Captain Brandt was worried. On both Wilmington Island and the Delta plantation, freedmen were openly defying not only the planters but the army and the Freedmen’s Bureau. When informed about these developments, South Carolina Assistant Commissioner Scott issued Circular No 2, informing the freedmen throughout the state that they had to either sign contracts or leave the plantations. Holders of Sherman possessory certificates must exchange them for warrants to twenty acres on St Helena or Hilton Head islands. “If they refuse to quietly leave,” the circular threatened, “military force will be used to remove them.” Brandt requested reinforcements from Major General Tillson. Tillson sent one officer and six privates, with orders

³⁹¹ Capt. Henry C. Brandt to Brevet Lieut Colonel H. W. Smith, 12 Jan. 1867, Letters Received, set. 3318, Rice Hope Plantation SC Subasst. Comr., RG 105 in Rene Hayden et al., eds. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series 3, Vol. 2, Land and Labor, 1866-1867* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 343.

to inform the freedmen that if they didn't contract with Barnwell, they had twenty-four hours to leave the plantation with their personal property or be evicted by force.³⁹²

When the army reinforcements arrived on the plantation on January 9, they were met by fifty to sixty freedmen, "armed with Revolvers & Rifles," who vowed "to resist any action by military authority." They produced a document, signed "Bradly Attorney," stating, according to Brandt, "that the freedpeople have a right to hold the land under the Civil Rights Bill." The *Savannah Republican* reported that when one of the soldiers aimed his gun, the freedmen "cocked their weapons and stood prepared" to shoot. Captain Brandt knocked the soldier's weapon away and ordered his arrest. Faced with the blacks' determination, Brandt returned to Savannah and requested sufficient military force to clear the plantation and arrest the three Delta plantation emissaries as well as Aaron Bradley.³⁹³

News of the armed standoff at the Delta plantation and the retreat of government troops spread rapidly among the freedmen. Blacks from numerous plantations converged on Bradley's office, seeking his assistance and advice. Bradley also travelled extensively, meeting freedmen throughout the area. He was aware that the strictly legal basis of the freedmen's resistance was slim. The one legal foothold he could find was in Section 11 of the new Freedmen's Bureau bill:

restoration of lands occupied by freedmen under General Sherman's field order . . . shall not be made until after the crops of the present year have been gathered . . . nor until a fair compensation shall have been made to them by the former owners of such lands . . . for all improvements or betterments erected or constructed thereon, and after due notice of the same being done shall have been given by the assistant commissioner.

³⁹² Circular No 2, Headquarters Assistant Commissioner Bureau Refugees Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, South Carolina, 9 Jan. 1867, vol. 26, p. 62, General Orders & Circulars Issued, ser. 2924, SC Asst. Comr., RG 105 in Hayden, *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, 342-43.

³⁹³ Brandt to Smith, 12 Jan. 1867, in Hayden, *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, 343-44; *SDR*, Jan. 21, 1867.

Bradley wrote petitions and letters to Commissioner Howard and Assistant Commissioner Scott demanding justice for the freedmen. Compensation for “improvements and betterments” was included in every petition. Some petitions also raised the question of division of the crops and lack of due notice from the assistant commissioner.³⁹⁴

Bradley didn’t demand proof that the signers of the petitions held valid Sherman grants. For him, these legalities were secondary. The real struggle was political rather than legal. He believed the freedmen had a right to the land whether or not they had legal documentation. When the freedmen raised new concerns, his petitions made additional demands. Each new petition was a way to raise the consciousness of the freedmen who signed them, to educate them about their rights. Bradley believed that, unlike Davis Tillson, Commissioner Howard and Assistant Commissioner Scott could be won to the cause of the freedmen. He hoped that the freedmen’s refusal to give up the land, combined with the arguments in his petitions, would give Howard and Scott “backbone.”

The petition sent by Bradley on behalf of the “Georgia and South Carolina Freedpeople” to Commissioner Howard on January 16 is a good example of this political strategy. The petition demanded that the Bureau provide “military protection” against the illegal actions of Assistant Commissioner Tillson. It asserted that Tillson had ordered the freedmen off Sapelo, Wilmington, and Argyle islands in Georgia without compensating them for improvements they had made, in violation of the Freedmen’s Bureau Bill of July 1866. The petition demanded that the courts rather than military officers determine the validity of land titles, and that “a Jury of loyal men half colored . . . set a fair Compensation on all improvements.” It protested Tillson’s arrest of the three Wilmington Island freedmen who had signed the affidavit against him and called for

³⁹⁴ *CG*, 39th Congress, 1st Session, Ch. 200, 1866, 176.

military protection for the freedmen in all cases involving equal rights, as well as protection against all “unreasonable searches and seizures.” The petition was signed by forty-three freedmen from both Georgia and South Carolina. Other petitions drafted by Bradley in this period include one sent to Howard and Scott signed by twenty freedmen from the Lucknow Plantation in South Carolina, and two sent by Bradley and freedman Charles Frazer to Assistant Commissioner Scott, one signed by forty-five freedmen, and the second by twelve freedmen.³⁹⁵

The confrontations on Wilmington Island and the Delta plantation, combined with Senator Wade’s support for Bradley’s complaints against Tillson, pushed Commissioner Howard to take action. On January 14, he removed Tillson as assistant commissioner for Georgia. On January 17, Tillson resigned from the army.³⁹⁶

Tillson’s ouster was a victory for Bradley and the freedmen. For sixteen months Tillson had been the point man for the ruling class’s attempt to remove the freedmen from confiscated lands and force them to accept labor contracts with the planters. His removal showed what united and militant freedmen could accomplish when they had the support of powerful Republicans in

³⁹⁵ Captain Shige et al. to Major Gen O O Howard, 16 Jan. 1867, S-37 1867, Letters Received, ser. 15, Washington Hdqrs., RG 105 in Hayden, *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, 346-47; Adams Humes et al. to the Commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the Assistant Commissioner, for SC, [late Jan. 1867], filed as B-16 1867, Letters Received, ser. 15, Washington Hdqrs., RG 105 in Hayden, *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, 349-50; Charles Frazer et al. to the Assistant Commissioner of South Carolina or Georgia, [Jan. 1867], and Charles Frazer et al. to the Honorable Assistant Commissioner of South Carolina, [Jan. 1867], both filed as B-22 1867, Registered Letters Received, ser. 2922, SC Asst. Comr., RG 105.

³⁹⁶ O. O. Howard to Col. Caleb C. Sibley, January 14, 1867 and R. D. Townsend to Brevet Major General Davis Tillson, January 17, 1867. Both letters were printed in *SDR*, Jan. 24, 1867.

Congress. But Tillson's replacement, Colonel C. C. Sibley, had worked closely with Tillson and shared his views.

Bradley's hope that he could persuade Howard and Scott to reverse course and support the freedmen's claim to the land was misplaced. Both Howard and Scott were aware of widespread exploitation and brutal mistreatment of the freedmen throughout the South. Reports from their own agents were proof of that. But like the majority of Republicans, they believed the free labor system was the best system for both the freedmen and the planters. The Freedmen's Bureau Bill was the law of the land, passed by a Republican Congress. They were officers in the US Army, obliged to enforce the law. In no way could they countenance threats of armed resistance against legal authority. Howard thought Bradley was "deranged"; both Howard and Scott wanted him jailed. Pressure was also coming from the planters, who were gathering in Savannah and demanding that the troops squash the rebellion.³⁹⁷

Prior to his resignation from the army, Major General Tillson, in compliance with a request from General Scott, provided Captain Brandt with a commissioned officer, Lt. Robert Miller, and a detail of fifty infantrymen from Fort Pulaski to bring the freedmen to heel. Arriving on the Delta plantation, Brandt discovered that the entire plantation was carefully picketed "*a la militaire*." He read the orders of Generals Howard and Scott to hundreds of freed people, women and children as well as men, to no effect. "The freedmen, who crowded together in solid phalanx, . . . swore more furiously than before they would die where they stood before they would surrender their claims to the land." The freedmen said Bradley had encouraged them to resist.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁷ Maj Gen O O Howard to Col C. C. Sibley, 31 Jan. 1867, Unregistered Telegrams Received, ser. 634, GA Asst. Comr., RG 105 in Hayden, *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, 352.

³⁹⁸ *SDR*, Jan. 21, 1867. Italics in original.

Lt. Miller apparently wounded one of the freedmen “while he was brandishing his sword and endeavoring to drive back the mob.” When soldiers pointed their guns at the freedmen, “one of the negroes, an intelligent looking man, who sported a sword and belt, shouted ‘fall in guards,’ which order was promptly obeyed by the rapid assembling of armed men.” Some freedmen got behind the soldiers and pointed guns at them through holes in a fence. After an hour’s “threats and coaxing,” Brandt “deemed it advisable to withdraw.” The troops remained encamped on the plantation. Brandt telegraphed Scott, saying that 250-300 armed blacks were prepared to fight to keep their land.³⁹⁹

The stakes were now very high. Four days later, General Scott himself arrived at the Delta plantation by steamer from Charleston to address the freedmen. Joining Scott and Brandt were Rev. Mansfield French and “several black clergymen from Savannah.” Reverend French was the Freedmen’s Bureau superintendent of missions in South Carolina. He accompanied Scott to tout the virtues of Sherman grant holders taking the offer of twenty acres of land on St Helena Island. The other clergymen joining Scott likely included some who had testified in Bradley’s trial a year earlier. Joining these notables as the spokesman for the freedmen was Aaron Bradley.⁴⁰⁰

It was a historic event. Two years earlier, and only a few miles away, Stanton and Sherman had met with the twenty black ministers, a meeting which led directly to the Sherman land grants and the first Freedmen’s Bill. Six months after that came the meeting of Freedmen’s

³⁹⁹ *SDR*, Jan. 21, 1867; *SDNH*, Jan. 28, 1867; Capt. H. C. Brandt to Bt Maj Gen R. K. Scott, 20 Jan, 1867, filed in packet “Papers relating to Savannah Troubles,” Unregistered Letters Received, ser. 2923, SC Asst. Comr., RG 105, in Hayden, *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, 345.

⁴⁰⁰ *SDR*, Jan. 22, 1867; Hayden, *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, 224.

Bureau Commissioner O. O. Howard with blacks on Edisto Island to inform the freedmen that they had to give up their land. Now, once again, a Union general was meeting with the freedmen. But the meeting ground this time was a plantation, occupied days before by hundreds of poorly armed but determined blacks. And instead of being represented by an aging preacher, the freedmen had a new champion in Aaron Bradley.

This meeting on Delta plantation was a negotiation between contending parties representing opposed class interests. Bradley insisted on the freedmen's rights to the land. General Scott spoke on behalf of the planters, supported by the authority of the federal government. At the end of the meeting, a negotiated settlement was reached on the basis of Section 11 of the Freedmen's Bureau bill, which Bradley had trumpeted in all his affidavits and petitions throughout the conflict. According to the *Savannah Daily News and Herald*,

The General [Scott] has ordered Capt Brandt to select three disinterested parties who, in accordance with the law as it now stands, are to appraise the improvements made by the freedmen on the place, for which they are to be paid, and at the end of the week those wishing to remain will make contracts, and the others will leave the plantation.

It was another small victory for the freedmen, giving them more time to organize and make their voices heard.⁴⁰¹

The confrontation on Delta plantation jumped to the top of regional and national news. The fear that the example of the Delta freedmen would spread was palpable. Newspapers raised the threat of "another Santo Domingo." Planters throughout the South were aware that the freedmen were fed up and wanted land of their own. Northern businessmen were concerned by the threat to their new investments in Southern plantation land. Republicans no less than Democrats understood that the new free labor system they envisioned for the South was in

⁴⁰¹ *SDNH*, Jan. 24, 1867.

jeopardy if freedmen were willing to take up arms against the Freedmen's Bureau and the US Army in defense of their land. Some explanation for this wholly unprecedented series of events had to be found.⁴⁰²

Front-page articles in the *Savannah Republican* on January 21 and three succeeding days provided the answer. All the troubles on the plantations, the newspaper insisted, were caused by one man: Aaron Bradley. The particularly credulous, uneducated, and backward rice plantation freedmen had been taken in by this self-serving charlatan, who had allegedly charged each of the petition signers the outrageous fee of \$1 for his services. The editor of Savannah's leading paper expressed confidence that once Bradley was brought to justice, peace and prosperity would reign once again on the plantations.⁴⁰³

The *Republican* printed pages of official documents on the confrontation given to them by officials of the Army and Freedmen's Bureau. Gone was any mention of the disastrous situation facing the plantation workers after a year and a half of "freedom." Nothing was said about freedmen being forced from their homes, nothing about being cheated of the products of their labor, nothing about the daily brutality and ill-treatment they suffered at the hands of the planters and the cops. The newspaper made no mention of the agreement reached at the meeting on the Cheves plantation on January 22. On January 24, the newspaper printed General Tillson's response to O. O. Howard and Senator Wade concerning the events on Wilmington Island. Affidavits from two military officers serving under Tillson stated that two of the three Wilmington Island freedmen had retracted their claims. There was no mention that these

⁴⁰² *SDR*, Jan. 21, 1867; *Bedford Gazette* (Bedford, Pennsylvania), Feb. 28, 1867.

⁴⁰³ *SDR*, Jan. 21, 22, 23, and 24, 1867.

retractions came only after Tillson had thrown them in jail and were a condition of their release.⁴⁰⁴

The *Savannah Republican* articles quickly became the “official story” of the Delta plantation uprising. The tale of the self-seeking charlatan Bradley was circulated by Republican as well as Democrat newspapers around the country. The Philadelphia *Christian Recorder*, a black newspaper which had written articles in support of Bradley in the past, now lamented that although Bradley “means well,” he is a man with “a vast deal of courage and not a lot of discretion.”⁴⁰⁵

The freedmen on the rice plantations were not the only ones dissatisfied with their situation. Working people in Savannah, white as well as black, confronted low pay, unemployment and underemployment, high rents, rising prices, and new fees imposed by the city council. In addition, black workers faced daily harassment by the cops, disproportionately high fines, and brutal treatment in jail. On October 6, 1866, a “very large crowd of white mechanics and citizens” met to protest onerous city taxes and high rents.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁴ *SDR*, Jan. 24, 1867. See also Davis Tillson to Gen. Howard Com’r., Jan. 23, 1867; Affidavit of William R. Pritchard, Jan. 23, 1867; and Affidavit of Capt. Eugene Pickett, Jan. 23, 1867. All three documents are filed in the packet “Hon. B. F. Wade.” On the arrest of the Wilmington Island freedmen who signed affidavits against Tillson, see endorsement by C. C. Sibley to O. O. Howard, Feb. 2, 1867 in Captain Shige et al. to Major Gen O O Howard, 16 Jan. 1867, S-37 1867, Letters Received, Ser. 15, Washington Hdqrs., RG 105.

⁴⁰⁵ *Christian Recorder*, Feb. 2, 1867. See other articles about the Savannah River uprising in *NYT*, Jan. 27, 1867; *Edgefield Advertiser*, Jan. 30, 1867; *Atlanta Weekly Intelligencer (AWI)*, Jan. 30, 1867; and *Southern Recorder* (Milledgeville), Jan. 29, 1867.

⁴⁰⁶ *SDNH*, Oct. 6, 1866. Also see Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 269.

Stevedores and other dockworkers comprised the largest and best organized group of black workers in the city. In December 1866, the city council imposed a \$10 annual licensing fee or “badge” for all “porters.” Historian Jacqueline Jones noted that this fee “hit black workers harder than their white counterparts, since blacks earned \$1.25-\$1.50 a day, and whites received wages twice as high.”⁴⁰⁷

Black dockworkers approached Bradley for help in opposing this measure. Bradley petitioned Col. Sibley on behalf of “James Mackey of the Union League and 200 others.” The petition argued that the ordinance was a “violation of the first section of the Civil Rights bill” since the dockworkers had no say in the decision-making process. The petitioners were laborers not “Porters” and thus not required to purchase a “Badge.” Finally, the petition noted that the Bureau had the right to extend military protection to the “Poor colored Labors” of the city under the Freedmen’s Bureau bill of 1866.⁴⁰⁸

January 24 was “the last day for all dockworkers to buy a license for \$10 each; no employer would be able to hire a man who did not have one.” Inspired by the courageous actions of the rice workers, 300 men who loaded cotton and lumber stopped work. Unlike the strike of black dockworkers in 1865, this time the strikers were white as well as black. The next day, 800

⁴⁰⁷ *SDNH*, Dec.12, 1866; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 274.

⁴⁰⁸ James Mackey to Col. C. C. Sibley, [early 1867], Unbound Miscellaneous Papers, Ga. Asst. Comr., RG 105, NA, published in Edward Magdol, *A Right to the Land: Essays on the Freedmen’s Community* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977), appendix 6. No date given. The petition was sent after Sibley became assistant commission of the Bureau (January 14, 1867). Surprisingly, although both Reidy and Jones refer to the petition, neither of them links it to the dockworkers’ strike. See Reidy, “Aaron A. Bradley,” 291, and Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 288-89.

dockworkers, white and black, milled about; the docks fell quiet. Four days later, the city council, in an attempt to end the strike, reduced the cost of a license from \$10 to \$3. But the strikers refused to take the bait; the strike held firm.⁴⁰⁹

For the ruling class on the coast of South Carolina and Georgia, this had become an intolerable situation. It seemed to portend a radical realignment of class and racial politics in the region. In plantations surrounding Savannah, armed freedmen were defying not only the planters, but also the Freedmen's Bureau and the US Army. In Savannah itself, the port, the lifeblood of the city's economy, was shut down. Militant dockworkers, with blacks in the lead, were defying merchants and ship captains, the city council, and the city police. Worse still, even white workers were being infected by this new disease.

There was growing pressure to end the standoff on the rice plantations. The planters had no intention in abiding by the compromise deal worked out at the January 22 meeting on the Delta plantation. They pressured Scott to expel the freedmen by force and to lock up Bradley.

With no negotiations with the planters taking place, on January 28 the freedmen and their families began to return to the plantations along the Savannah River. They landed on the Rice Hope plantation (next to Delta) where Brandt had established his headquarters. Brandt, together with Rice Hope proprietor Walter Blake, Louis Manigault (owner of an Argyle Island plantation), and Reverend James Lynch, came from Savannah to confront the returning freedmen. This was not going to be another negotiation like the January 22 meeting. Blake and Manigault were two of the most powerful planters in the region. Brandt was under orders to end the freedmen's resistance by any means necessary. When more freedmen approached Rice Hope,

⁴⁰⁹ *SDR*, Jan. 25 and 26, 1867; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 274.

Brandt threatened to “shoot the first man who attempted to land.” The freedmen returned to Savannah for consultation with Bradley before proceeding further.⁴¹⁰

One of the Rice Hope planters who had travelled with Brandt to confront the returning freedmen was G. T. Lemen. Like several new planters in the area, Lemen was a former US Army and Freedmen’s Bureau officer who saw ownership of a rice plantation as a way to make his fortune. That evening, furious at this infringement on his property rights, Lemen, gun in hand, confronted a group of occupying freedmen and ordered them off his property. The freedmen refused to leave. What happened next is unclear. The only account we have is Lemen’s. According to him, the freedmen attacked and shot at him. In the melee which followed, Lemen shot and killed a freedman, Robert Scott, and was himself wounded. More shots rang out during the night.⁴¹¹

The next day, dozens more fully armed troops arrived at Rice Hope and other Savannah River plantations to “restore order.” The certainty of further bloodshed ended the standoff. While the freedmen wished to demonstrate their resolve to hold onto their land and publicize their case to the fullest possible extent, they had never entertained any idea of launching a war against the US Army. On January 30, Bradley was arrested by order of Maj. Edwin Deane. Within a week,

⁴¹⁰ H. Neide to My Dear General, 4 Feb. 1867, N-37 1867, Letters Received, ser. 15, Washington Hdqrs, RG 105 in Hayden, *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, 354; *SDR*, Jan.31, 1867. Reverend James Lynch had been a government witness in Bradley’s December 1865 trial.

⁴¹¹ Neide to My Dear General in Hayden, *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*; *SDR*, Jan. 31, 1867. A rapid inquest absolved Lemen on the grounds of self-defense. See *SDH*, Jan. 31, 1867.

most of the freedmen who participated in the struggle had either exchanged warrants and left for St. Helena, signed contracts, or vacated the plantations.⁴¹²

In Savannah, the city council, merchants, and ship owners took their cue from the dispersal of the freedmen on the rice plantations and Bradley's arrest. There were to be no more concessions to the striking dockers. The strike would be broken by force. On the afternoon of January 30, Savannah policemen waded into the peaceful picketers. They "arrested several negroes, whom they treated in the most brutal and barbarous manner—beating them over the head so severely as to cause the blood to flow profusely." No white strikers were beaten. Anticipating further trouble, the commander of the US gunboat *Pretoria* offered "to assist the civil authorities in maintaining order." Nine black leaders of the strike, including Nero Thomas, president of the Negro Stevedores Association, were arrested and charged with "disturbing the peace" or "inciting to riot." The strike leaders were tried in mayor's court and fined \$50 to \$100. If unable to pay, they had to serve sixty or ninety days in jail at hard labor. Other arrests of black strikers were promised.⁴¹³

With peace restored, on February 3 General Scott and Chaplain French, flanked by several planters, addressed another meeting of aggrieved freedmen, this time on the plantation of a Mr. Fife. They explained once again the government's position on the "rights and privileges of both the landholders and the freedmen." There was no question now of the broken promises of

⁴¹² B' Maj Edw. L. Deane to Captain H. C. Brandt, 30 Jan. 1867 in packet labeled "Papers relating to Savannah Troubles," Unregistered Letters Received, ser. 2923, SC Asst. Comr., RG 105 in Hayden, *Land and Labor, 1866-1877*, 352; Bvt: Brig. Genl H. Neide to Bvt: Maj: Edwd L. Deane, 9 Feb. 1867, N-14 1867, Registered Letters Received, ser. 2922, SC Asst. Comr., RG 105 in Hayden, *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, 356.

⁴¹³ *NYT*, Feb.10, 1867; *SDH*, Jan. 31, 1867; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 275.

the planters, the hardships the freedmen were suffering, or their demand for land. No representatives of the rice workers spoke at the meeting. With Bradley under arrest and the “fertile lands which [the freedmen squatters] have made a wilderness” returned to their owners, crowed the *New York Times*, the freedmen are “making contracts to cultivate the lands for hire.” Contracts, observed Brigadier General Horace Neide, “will be mutually advantageous” for both the planters and the freedmen. A large military force remained in the immediate vicinity to make sure no more trouble arose.⁴¹⁴

Bradley was not cowed by being imprisoned once again. His arrest by Colonel Sibley in a state which was no longer at war was in clear contradiction to the Milligan decision. The day after his arrest, Bradley wrote Sibley “demanding to know the charges against him, insisting that he be taken before the US district attorney or US commissioner and released on bail, and challenging the constitutionality of the proceedings against him.” On February 13, Judge J. Erskine ruled “that as the civil courts were now in full exercise of their authority, he could see no reason for the detention of Bradley by the military authorities; that if he had committed any crime either against the State or United States, he could be arraigned and punished by them. He, therefore ordered the discharge of the prisoner.” Two weeks after being arrested, Bradley was once again a free man.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁴ *SDR*, Feb. 4, 1867; Hayden, *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, 356. The *New York Times* article is quoted in *SDR*, Feb. 11, 1867.

⁴¹⁵ A. Alpeora Bradley to Col C C Sibley, 1 Feb. 1867, Unregistered Letters Received, ser 632, GA Asst. Comr., RG 105 in Hayden, *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, 353; *SDR*, Feb. 12, 1867; *SDH*, Feb. 14, 1867. Bradley’s imprisonment became a contentious issue at the highest levels of government. Like many Republicans, O. O. Howard believed military courts were the only way to bring peace and order to the South. He was convinced that the ruling in the Milligan case did not apply to the former Confederate states, whose civil courts were anything but

Undaunted by setbacks, Bradley continued to fight for his rights in the courts. In mid-January, Bradley applied for admission to the Georgia bar. Claiming to be “a full member of the Superior Court of the State of Maine,” he quoted Article 4 of the US Constitution and a December 1866 opinion of the US Supreme Court in arguing that as a member of the bar in Maine, he should be granted the same status in the state of Georgia.⁴¹⁶

Bradley was surely aware that his chances of being admitted to the Georgia bar were nil. There is no indication that he was ever admitted to the bar in Maine, and all states reserved the right to establish rules for admission to the state bar. Bradley’s application was ruled on by Judge W. B. Fleming of the Eastern District Court of Georgia. Fleming was a key figure in the

impartial. He wanted to bring a test case before the courts concerning the legality of Section 14 of the July 1866 Freedmen’s Bureau bill, which authorized military tribunals. On January 30, 1867 he wrote to his assistant commissioners asking them if they could not “get a judge of the U.S. court, to take from a Military commission appointed by you, a case by Habeas Corpus, and carry it up to the Supreme Court. . . ?” Historian George Bentley notes that “when Colonel Sibley received Commissioner Howard’s letter . . . he immediately thought of Aaron A. Bradley.” Sibley showed Howard’s letter to District Attorney Fitch and “asked whether Bradley would not serve well for Howard’s purpose.” Fitch, a loyal supporter of the President, was not convinced that using Bradley as a test case was a good idea. If the Supreme Court ruled that Bradley’s trial by military court was legal, it would open the floodgates to southern whites being tried by military courts. Fitch sent a letter to Secretary of the Interior Orville H. Browning about Howard’s proposal and authorized Browning to show the letter to the President. Browning and the President saw the danger in this procedure for their southern supporters and vetoed any idea of making a test case of Bradley. See George R. Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen’s Bureau* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955), 164-65; O. O. Howard to Col. C. C. Sibley, Jan. 30, 1867, appended to Col. C. C. Sibley to O. O. Howard, Feb. 16, 1867, Letters Sent, Commissioner, RG 105, NA; O. O. Howard to Col. C. C. Sibley, Feb. 20, 1867, Letters Received, Washington Hdqrs., RG 105.

⁴¹⁶ *SDR*, Jan. 18, 1867; *New York Commercial Advertiser*, Feb. 1, 1867; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 272.

Savannah ruling class, a planter's son and ardent secessionist who had been judge of the Superior Court of Chatham County since 1853. Fleming immediately rejected Bradley's application. He noted that the state of Georgia had "absolute and exclusive jurisdiction" over admission to the bar. He rejected Bradley because "the laws of Georgia do not authorize or contemplate the admission of persons of color to the bar." Dismissal of Bradley's application on the basis of race was a clear case of discrimination, in violation of the Civil Rights Act and the 14th Amendment. It would be another seventeen years before a black man won the status of lawyer in Georgia.⁴¹⁷

Two weeks after his release from prison, Bradley launched a libel suit against *Savannah Daily Republican* editor John E. Hayes. In his January articles on the uprising, Hayes described Bradley as "designing and unscrupulous," "pernicious," a "notorious brawler," and an "insolent impostor." Bradley's suit was a message to the white establishment. He would continue to use any means available to assert that he, and by implication, all blacks, had all the rights of white men.⁴¹⁸

Days after launching his suit, Bradley abruptly left Savannah and sailed for Boston. The occupations and strikes were over. The plantation laborers and dockworkers were back at work. For over two months, Bradley had worked at a reckless pace and under constant pressure. He was attacked in the vilest, racist language by the press. Surrounded by bitter enemies, the threat of violence and prison was never far away. Weighing on him most, perhaps, was the fact that he

⁴¹⁷ *SDNH*, Jan. 19, 1867. On Fleming, see Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 272.

⁴¹⁸ *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, Mar. 1, 1867; *SDR*, Jan. 21-24, 1867. Hayes, who used his newspaper to attack his many enemies, had recently begun serving a sentence of one year in jail on a charge of libel brought by the prominent Savannah businessman and rebel politician Solomon Cohen.

still had no job, no source of income. Returning to Boston would allow him to plan his next steps in a friendlier environment.⁴¹⁹

Without the support of a single newspaper or any political organization, the Savannah River freedmen and Bradley had succeeded in placing the issue of land for the freedmen back onto the national stage. Widespread publicity about the uprising also reached the eyes and ears of freedmen across the South. For blacks angry about their situation, the Delta plantation freedmen's militant defense of their rights to the land was an example not to be shunned, but emulated.

Bradley led the freedmen with boundless energy, personal courage, and unflinching resolve. He "exhibited the most extraordinary activity in visiting different localities," complained Tillson, "holding public meetings, advising the negroes not to give up the old grants of land held by them, or allow the Act of Congress before mentioned to be enforced, but to resist its execution by force and arms." He found legal footholds for the freedmen's opposition to expulsion in the Constitution, the new Freedmen's Bureau bill, and the Civil Rights Act.⁴²⁰

Working together with vanguard freedmen from many plantations, Bradley had helped form the rice workers, almost all of them illiterate, into a disciplined striking force. For several critical weeks they faced the planters and the guns of the US Army without flinching. They forced the authorities to hear their demands and negotiate. Not one drop of blood had been

⁴¹⁹ On Bradley's leaving Savannah, see Captain H. C. Brandt to Bt. Maj. Gen. R. K. Scott, 4 Mar. 1867, Registered Letters Received, S. C. Asst. Comr., RG 105.

⁴²⁰ *SDR*, Jan. 24, 1867.

spilled by the armed freedmen. Having pushed their fight as far as it could go, they knew when to retreat.

For a year and a half, coastal freedmen, led by Bradley and Tunis Campbell, had blocked the planters and the army from returning confiscated land to the former owners. It was a rear-guard, defensive action. They fought against overwhelming odds. The defeat of freedmen on the Savannah River plantations marked the end of that period. All confiscated lands had been returned to the planters.

Bradley and the freedmen faced a new situation. Radicals in Congress were preparing to implement their program for overcoming the resistance of the southern ruling class to Reconstruction, a program which centered on suffrage and defense of civil rights for blacks. Wade's intervention in support of Bradley reflected the changed relation of forces in Washington. A new period was beginning, one which offered both major openings for the freedmen to advance their interests and new political challenges.

10 MARCH–JULY 1867: REVOLUTIONARY UPSURGE OF THE UNION LEAGUES

On March 2, Congress overrode President Johnson's veto and passed the Reconstruction Act of 1867. Reconstruction entered a new stage. Under the terms of this and succeeding acts passed by Congress in the next few months:

- The Confederate states were divided into five military districts under the command of a Union general. Military officers had the right “to suspend or remove . . . any officer or person holding any civil or military office.”
- Delegates “elected by the male citizens of said State twenty-one years old and upward of whatever race, color, or previous condition” were mandated to hold constitutional conventions. Thus adult black males were granted suffrage.
- Those excluded from office by clause four of the Fourteenth Amendment could not vote or hold office. No member of the legislature of any state, whether before or during the war, whether he took an oath to uphold the Constitution or not, who afterwards engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the US or gave aid or comfort to the enemies of the US government, was entitled to be registered or to vote.
- Prior to the conventions, eligible voters had to register. Registration required affirming support for the Constitution and encouraging others to do so.
- For states to be readmitted to the Union, the new state constitutions had to provide for black male suffrage and adopt the Fourteenth Amendment.⁴²¹

⁴²¹ *CG*, Mar. 2 and 23, and July 19, 1867. Prominent northern Radicals, inside and outside of Congress, proposed even more far-reaching reforms. Some called for removal of prominent Confederate leaders from office and permanent restrictions on their political rights. On March 19, Thaddeus Stevens introduced a bill calling for the

The political landscape in the former Confederate states was transformed. Millions of black men, the vast majority of them former slaves, now had the right to vote. At the same time, as Eric Foner points out, “the larger part of a political generation . . . had been temporarily excluded from office or voting,” including “Unionists who had assumed minor positions to avoid military service.” Under Johnson, anti-secession Whigs and secessionist Democrats had joined together to form governments similar in composition to the old antebellum governments. Republicans hoped that these new measures, combined with promises of economic development, would break up this bloc by luring large numbers of ex-Whigs to newly formed state Republican parties. What actually happened was completely unexpected.⁴²²

News of the Reconstruction Acts spread like wildfire through black communities around the state. Freedmen had two years of “freedom” under their belts. Two years of bad contracts and wage slavery; two years of poverty and hunger and humiliation and jail; two years of planters, rebel mayors, racist cops, sheriffs and judges, Army officers and civilian agents of the Freedmen’s Bureau controlling their lives. They saw the imposition of a military government and the promise of suffrage as steps toward getting out from under the control of the planters and getting their forty-acre homesteads at last. The measures were also welcomed by yeomen and poor whites in north Georgia. Burdened by poor crops and debt, threatened with the loss of their homes and their farms, many saw military rule and sanctions on rebels as their salvation.

confiscation of all the property belonging to the former Confederate states and the assignment to every freedman of a forty-acre homestead “with \$100 to build a dwelling.” “Homesteads to them are far more valuable than the immediate right of suffrage,” he insisted, “though both are their due.” See *CG*, Mar. 19, 1867, 205, and Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 338.

⁴²² Foner, *Reconstruction*, 275, 276.

Politics in Georgia was transformed. It no longer consisted of back-room meetings of elite whites to decide on candidates. Politics was now public meetings where white and black speakers presented their perspectives before huge audiences. Freedmen gathered in “excited and anticipatory crowds in Thomasville, Newton, and Albany” in southwest Georgia. In Savannah, with Aaron Bradley out of state, Reverends James Porter and Tunis Campbell organized a meeting on March 18 to discuss the meaning of the new situation for blacks. Three thousand attended, mainly freedmen. On April 1, an impressive number of white officeholders in Savannah organized an even larger public meeting to discuss this new stage of Reconstruction. An immense crowd of 7,000—“a large and enthusiastic collection of negroes, with a considerable number of white persons”—crowded Chippewa Square.⁴²³

The white officials at these meetings, mostly supporters of President Johnson, did their best to deflate the hopes of blacks for radical change. “Remember that while you may be emancipated, the white man is the emancipator,” insisted US Attorney Henry Fitch at the April 1 meeting, “and that to his blood, not to your exertion, you are indebted for your freedom. . . . Learn to suspect those whites who tell you that you are their equals; your common sense will do this. Politicians have been the bane of all people, and they will be your bane if you fail to act wisely and well in your new relations to the race which always has and always will be the predominant race in the world we live in.”⁴²⁴

James Simms, a black “Baptist missionary and labor agent” among the Ogeechee freedmen, responded on behalf of the freedmen. “Slavery was tyranny,” he said, and white men “knew nothing of his race. Under the old system the negroes were compelled to use

⁴²³ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 236; *SDNH*, April 2, 1867.

⁴²⁴ *SDNH*, April 2, 1867.

dissimulation toward their masters. Now, for the first time, he could tell them the truth.”

Rejecting the view that the white man had given the black man his freedom, Simms said “he was under no obligation to any man, for the freedom of himself and his race.” Would blacks vote for their former masters? No, he insisted, negroes “would vote only for tried and true Union men. . . . Colored men were not fools; they knew enough to fight right and they would vote right. . . . They would not elect a Rebel Mayor, or have any more brutal policemen. . . . He would have white and colored aldermen, and white and colored policemen.” “It is impossible to describe the intense enthusiasm exhibited by [Simms],” noted a reporter from the *New York Tribune*. “The crowd caught his enthusiasm, and, though they had been before rather slow to respond to some speeches, they applauded him to the echo.” After Simms’s speech, “one of the speakers unrolled a photographic picture of Thad Stevens, and called for three cheers for that individual, which was very generally responded to by the colored portion of the audience.”⁴²⁵

Major General John Pope, the new military commander of the Third District with headquarters in Atlanta, had the task of recruiting prominent Georgia politicians and businessmen to lead the Republican Party. He made a good start in north Georgia, where white Union League members, including prominent businessmen and politicians from Atlanta, quickly formed Republican parties. What he needed was a similar group from south Georgia. He found them in Augusta, the largest city in the state’s historic cotton belt. Leading Augusta politicians and businessmen were anxious to “cut loose from old wartime political leaders” and rebuild the economy with the help of northern investors. Moreover, Augusta was the home base of GERA

⁴²⁵ *SDNH*, Apr. 2, 1867; *New York Tribune*, Apr. 6, 1867. The speaker who displayed Stevens’s photo was not identified. In *Saving Savannah*, 284-86, Jacqueline Jones quotes versions of Simms’s speech taken from three different newspapers.

President John Bryant and the conservative black leaders preferred by Republicans. When the term of Augusta's mayor and aldermen ended and they refused to allow freedmen to vote in municipal elections, Pope installed former mayor Foster Blodgett as mayor, along with another former mayor, Benjamin Conley, and Southern Express Company superintendent Rufus Bullock as alderman. He appointed Southern Express agent Edward Hulbert as the state's chief of registration.⁴²⁶

These were the type of men the Republican Party needed if they were to entice businessmen and planters from south Georgia to join. Blodgett was a native-born Georgian. Both Blodgett and Bullock had played prominent roles in the Confederacy. Bullock and his Southern Express Company had organized transport and communications; Blodgett led a rebel artillery company. The men had all been supporters of President Johnson. Johnson had appointed Blodgett postmaster of Augusta. Conley, Blodgett, and Bullock supported the pro-Johnson National Union Convention. These men did not become Republicans in support of black voting rights or civil rights for blacks. They joined the party as a means to power and as the key to economic prosperity. "If black suffrage helped create solid gains toward business profits," comments his biographer Russell Duncan, "then Bullock wanted black suffrage." "That spring, the influence of the new political alliance extended widely through Bullock and Conley's railroad interests, Conley and Blodgett's previous Whig connections, Bryant's influence among blacks, and Bullock's Southern Express Company." The men of the "Augusta ring" would become central leaders of the new Georgia Republican Party.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁶ Baggett, *Scalawags*, 172. The Third Military District included Alabama, Georgia, and Florida.

⁴²⁷ Baggett, *Scalawags*, 209; Russell Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality: Governor Rufus Bullock, Commerce, and Race in Post-Civil War Georgia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 19.

Other prominent native-born Georgians argued that the state should acquiesce in Congressional Reconstruction but did not join the Republican Party. In February 1867, ex-Governor Brown travelled to Washington, D.C. to assess the state of affairs. On his return to Georgia, in a widely circulated letter, he portrayed the situation facing the southern ruling class as “dark, dreary, gloomy, no rainbow of hope spans the black impenetrable cloud that overshadows us.” Voters in the North supported the Radical Republicans, he observed, not President Johnson. The only way for the state to avoid the disaster of confiscation was through “prompt adoption of the constitutional amendment and universal suffrage.” As for negro suffrage, Brown was confident the former slaveholders could control the situation. “We should not forget, in yielding to an inevitable necessity, that these people were raised among us, and naturally sympathise with us.” At the April 1 meeting in Savannah, ex-Governor James Johnson voiced similar sentiments. “What shall we do in this emergency?” he asked. “Every consideration of person prosperity demands that this plan [negro suffrage] must be adopted and carried out to secure our release from military rule.”⁴²⁸

The contrast between the elite composition and moderate goals of the nascent Republican Party and the more radical stance of the freedmen in the Union Leagues was evident at the founding convention of the state’s Republican Party in Atlanta’s City Hall on July 4. Delegates included the businessmen and lawyers from Atlanta and north Georgia, the newly installed mayor and council members from Augusta, along with black GERA leaders. Together they cobbled together a platform described accurately by the *Savannah Republican* as “full of loyal rhetoric and glittering generalities.” Simms and other black delegates wanted black rights to be

⁴²⁸ *SDNH*, Apr. 2, 1867; *Atlanta Daily New Era*, Feb. 26, 1867; *SDR*, Apr. 2, 1867.

spelled out in the platform, but they had to make do with a vague phrase in support of “equal rights for all men.”⁴²⁹

Outside the convention, “the negro population . . . appeared upon our streets in a high state of enthusiasm in immense throngs from early morn to a late hour in the evening.” The crowd, estimated at twelve to twenty thousand people, included freedmen from “the adjacent towns, villages, and rural districts.” As soon as the convention was declared in session, City Hall was “surrounded by a colored procession, yelling, followed by women and children, cheering. The doors were thrown open, and they crowded into the Convention.” When the convention was over, there was a mass meeting nearby. Delegates were greeted by “the members of the five negro loyal league clubs of this city.” Led by mounted marshals, the marchers arrived “in a state of organization, and in martial array.” There were banners from Stevens’ Union Republican Club; from the Sherman U. R. C., “with General on horseback, and motto underneath ‘We are marching to the C.’”; from Ward Four, Saxton U. R. C.; from Ward No. 5, “Let’s make friends, vote for the Convention: If you do “old Thad” can’t confiscate”; and from the Saxton Club: “General, we are grateful.” The banners and club names told their own story. Stevens, Sherman, Saxton: these were the three names most associated with the fight for forty acres and a mule.⁴³⁰

Over the summer of 1867 the effort of the national Republican Party to register voters, build support for the constitutional conventions, and recruit members moved into high gear. Pope established three-person boards of registration for each of Georgia’s forty-four senatorial districts. One member of each board had to be black. Pope bragged that “registrars are all or

⁴²⁹ *SDR*, July 8, 1867; *SDNH* July 8, 1867.

⁴³⁰ *SDR*, July 8, 1867; *SDNH* July 8, 1867; *Weekly Atlanta Intelligencer (WAI)*, July 10, 1867; *NYT*, July 10, 1867.

nearly all members of the Loyal League & out & out Republicans.” He believed that having black registrars “will keep many of the ‘dignity party’ who would otherwise register & vote against a convention, entirely aloof—They will not be willing to be questioned & cross examined & compelled to take an oath administered by a darkey.”⁴³¹

The Republican Party and the Office of Civil Affairs of the US Army hired organizers, black as well as white, to register voters and build Union Leagues and the Republican Party in hard-to-reach areas. Reverend Turner recruited black delegates for this job at the Atlanta conference. Beginning in July, dozens of Republican organizers, including black leaders Turner, Simms, U. L. Houston, and Campbell, went on the payroll to organize freedmen in rural Georgia. Freedmen’s Bureau officers participated in this effort.⁴³²

The urban, middle-class, black and white organizers of the Leagues “embraced the same principles of industriousness, frugality, and self-perfectibility that animated so many of the northerners on duty in the post–Civil War South. . . . Equal rights before the law, Union, forgiveness, harmony, contract, and compromises—not the subversion of traditional order—were [their] guiding principles.” They and the “highly skilled and educated [black] proprietors of small businesses, farms, and shops” scattered throughout the state saw the Leagues as electoral machines, organizations to get out the vote for the Republican Party.⁴³³

⁴³¹ J. Pope to Schenck, May 20, 1867, in Schenck Papers, Hayes Library, quoted in Michael W. Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South: Politics and Agricultural Change During Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 39; Edmund Drago, “Georgia’s First Black Voter Registrars during Reconstruction,” *GHQ*, Vol. 78. No. 4 (Winter 1994), 763-64.

⁴³² Drago, “Georgia’s First Black Voter Registrars,” 783.

⁴³³ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 237, 238.

In southwest Georgia, in Savannah, and in other plantation areas where freedmen were already organized, “the majority of black workers all but ignored” these middle-class blacks. “Much to the annoyance of both Freedmen’s Bureau and civil authorities,” they focused on “seizing control over peacekeeping and judicial apparatus and investigating and resolving all cases of ‘injustice and ill treatment’.” In Fort Gaines, they defended the Union League president arms in hand. In Cuthbert, they charged the Bureau commissioner with crimes against the freedmen he was supposed to assist and helped blacks arrested on spurious charges break out of jail. The Leagues “began to assume responsibility for organized regulation of public affairs,” notes Saville. Such actions “inevitably shoved against local structures of power.”⁴³⁴

In the countryside, the Leagues “more and more reflected blacks’ hopes for freedom from planters’ economic and social control.” In southwest Georgia, “laborers by the ‘thousands’ aggressively confronted their employers head-on and, with weapons often in hand, demanded more liberal terms of work” or went on strike. “They imposed new limits on employers’ power to command, enlarged laborers’ rights of refusal, scared off with threats of violence civil authorities and private citizens who tried to call them to heel, and as a result of their ferocity, drove incidents of white-on-black violence down to their lowest regional levels since freedom.”⁴³⁵

“Nothing was more widespread than the association of registration with land.” In southwest Georgia, “Turner’s belief in the sanctity of private property hardly accorded with freedpeople whose grapevines continued to vibrate with wistful reports of free soil.” Unlike middle-class white and black Republicans, freedmen had no illusions that the rebel ruling class

⁴³⁴ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*; 239; Saville, *Work of Reconstruction*, 150-51.

⁴³⁵ Fitzgerald, *Union League Movement*, 66; O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 240.

would accept collective bargaining or black equality, let alone confiscation and land redistribution, without a fight. Freedmen believed that the return of the Confederate states to military rule meant that the army was going to complete the job it had left undone in 1865. With former soldiers in the lead, drilling intensified in areas where it had already begun and spread into new areas. Freedmen wanted to be prepared for the major confrontation with the planters which they could feel in their bones lay ahead.⁴³⁶

“Marching nightly through their plantation quarters with ‘guns and sticks’ propped over their shoulders and drums thumping out an accompaniment,” black workers in southwest Georgia “announced that . . . the removal of land from white ownership to black” was on the agenda. In the Ogeechee, Solomon Farley and Paul Keller, who had been in the US army together, drilled dozens of freedmen with arms, “drum and orders after dark” throughout the summer and fall of 1867. Pinckney Patterson, a planter’s son, observed that Farley would “put them through the manual of arms.” “I heard them say that the rebs thought they could rule the country now, but they couldn’t do it, and that they wanted to get them back into slavery, but before they would do that they [the negroes] would fight knee-deep in blood.” In the summer of 1867, notes Hahn, “the entire plantation South appeared to pulse with militant and quasi-military activity.” The freedmen’s implicit message to the Republican Party was: ‘Give us arms and

⁴³⁶ Fitzgerald, *Union League Movement*, 195-96; O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 246. See also Gottlieb, “The Land Question in Georgia,” 369-75.

incorporate us in the army or a state militia in order that Reconstruction has a chance of succeeding.’⁴³⁷

By late October, there were 253 white Union League councils in Georgia with 27,830 members and 300 black councils with 53,000 members. The extraordinary growth of the Union Leagues/Loyal Leagues in 1867 was like nothing seen in American history before or since. The Leagues became the glue binding together all the institutions of the black community. Their impact was felt in churches, fraternal organizations, and schools. Although membership was restricted to men, the Leagues involved wives, mothers, and children as well. The freedmen demanded equal rights, control over their pay and conditions of labor, land of their own, a government of loyalists rather than rebels. These demands were fully in keeping with the struggles for greater democracy growing out of the country’s Jeffersonian-Jacksonian tradition. They were demands necessary to complete the social revolution which began with the opening guns of the Civil War and accelerated with black emancipation, the defeat of the Confederacy, and Congressional Reconstruction.⁴³⁸

From the point of view of the rebel ruling class, the growing organization and politicization of the freedmen was a major threat. Blacks constituted a majority of the population

⁴³⁷ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 237; *SMN*, Jan. 22 and 28, 1869; Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 177.

⁴³⁸ Olive Hall Shadgett, *The Republican Party in Georgia: From Reconstruction through 1900* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1964), 4. By the end of the summer, 93,457 blacks—over ninety percent of eligible black men—were registered to vote. See Elizabeth Studley Nathans, *Losing the Peace: Georgia Republicans and Reconstruction, 1865-1871* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 34; Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 198. See also Roberta F. Cason, “The Loyal League in Georgia,” *GHQ*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (June 1936), 125-53.

in many Georgia counties. If they were allowed to vote, planters feared that their control over politics, the economy, indeed their whole way of life would be overturned. Their opposition to black registration was fierce. In *A Nation Under Our Feet*, Steven Hahn describes how

hostile white landowners, complaining that the new political opportunities ‘demoralized’ labor and courted upheaval, struggled to maintain the freedpeople in ignorance, to prevent them from attending political meetings, and to confuse them about the meaning and objectives of registration. . . . Interested freedmen had been threatened with personal violence or dismissal, or had been warned that registration would bring reenslavement, military impressment, higher taxes, or ‘another war upon the country.’⁴³⁹

Planters complained that the freemen “have become neglectful and disrespectful to employers, go armed at their work, and attend political meetings.” The *Savannah Republican* protested that “companies of colored men are nightly parading in citizen’s dress, and being drilled in the use of arms and in military evolutions. The sound of drums is heard on every pleasant moonlight on the outskirts of our city.”⁴⁴⁰

As the class confrontation intensified in the countryside, disenfranchised rebel leaders began a virulent campaign against Congressional Reconstruction. In June, Benjamin Hill, a former Confederate senator and one of the state’s most prominent politicians, launched a sustained public attack on ex-Governor Brown’s argument that southerners had no choice but to submit to Congressional Reconstruction. In a series of newspaper articles titled “Notes on the

⁴³⁹ Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 191-92, 203. Letters written by John Costin and Henry Turner to the Union Republican Congressional Committee in July 1867 describe the extraordinary difficulties they encountered in organizing Union Leagues in rural Georgia. See Richard Abbott, “Black Ministers and the Organization of the Republican Party in the South: Letters from the Field,” in *Hayes Historical Journal*, Volume VI, Number 1 (Fall, 1986).

⁴⁴⁰ *Columbus Daily Sun*, June 16, 1867, cited in Gottlieb, “The Land Question in Georgia,” 172; *SDR*, July 27, 1867.

Situation,” he denounced military “despotism” and black suffrage. The goal of the “Radicals,” he insisted, was to disfranchise, impoverish, destroy and drive off “all the true, and noble, and manly, and country-loving of the Southern people . . . delivering over our bright and beautiful land to the riotous rule and miscegenating orgies of negroes, Yankees and base apostates.” Rather than giving in to “negro rule,” southern whites should defend their honor, democracy, and the Constitution. Hill’s diatribes along with those of former Georgia governor Herschel Johnson were reprinted by conservative and Democratic newspapers throughout the state and across the South.⁴⁴¹

In the spring and summer of 1867, northern Republicans sent prominent spokesmen to the South to assess developments there and help build the new Republican parties. They addressed big public meetings in major southern cities from Richmond to New Orleans. They were particularly focused on luring urban businessmen and professionals into the party with promises of northern investment. Arriving in the South, they quickly realized they were in the midst of a social revolution. Huge numbers of freedmen attended their meetings, enthusiastically pressing their hopes for real freedom: an end to racist violence from the planters and rebels in authority, black suffrage, labor as well as civil rights, and—most of all—the promise of land.

The visiting Republicans took aim both the “utopian” hopes of the freedmen and the extreme opposition of the planters and their allies to the new Reconstruction Acts. New York lawyer Asa Wentworth Tenney was the keynote speaker at the founding of the Georgia Republican Party in Atlanta on July 4 and at a big Republican meeting in Savannah’s Chippewa Square on July 10. He spent most of his time lecturing the freedmen on the importance of being

⁴⁴¹ *SDNH*, July 1, 1867. See also, Benjamin Harvey Hill, *Senator Benjamin H. Hill of Georgia* (Atlanta: H. C. Hudgins & Co, 1891), 740-43. For Georgia’s ruling class, Republicans were “Radicals” by definition.

good workers. He advised the freedmen to “be industrious, temperate and frugal. . . . Save your money Buy lands while they are cheap. Do not wait for confiscation.” But he added a warning to the planters: if the South remained “in antagonism to Congress and the party of the North, that will see your property confiscated and your homes deserted.” He counselled them “to gracefully submit to the will of the majority.”⁴⁴²

Pope and the Freedmen’s Bureau also took aim at both the freedmen and the rebels. O. H. Howard, sub-assistant commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau in Albany, circulated a tract to the freedmen in southwest Georgia in early June. The idea that they were to receive land had been spread by “persons who are disposed to do evil,” insisted Howard, and were “calculated to unsettle labor and give rise to disorder and suffering.” The freedmen’s formation of “military organizations and drilling” were “perniciously wrong.” They “must be disbanded at once.” Contracts must be rigorously followed. During the six-day work week, “your time is not your own but your employer’s. . . . You must labor industriously, obeying all reasonable orders promptly and cheerfully.” Howard admonished the freedmen to “[r]emember always to avoid everything which tends to stir up strife between you as a people and the white race.”⁴⁴³

General Pope targeted the virulent opposition to Reconstruction from Hill and Herschel Johnson. In a letter written to Grant the end of July, he described the united stance of “the leading politicians of the South” against Reconstruction. If southerners continue to follow the lead of men like Hill, he said, “it may well become a question whether reconstruction on any

⁴⁴² *SDR*, July 11, 1867. See also Foner, *Reconstruction*, 310 and *SDNH*, June 4, 1867, which reprints an article from the *Richmond Dispatch* on Congressman William D. Kelley’s speech in Danville, Virginia.

⁴⁴³ O. H. Howard, “Circular to the Freedmen of Dougherty, Lee and Terrell Cos., June 10, 1867, Letters received, Roll 20, Image 500, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872, Georgia, RG 105, NA.

reasonable terms is possible so long as these unrepentant and reactionary political leaders are suffered to remain in this country.” If the disfranchised leaders returned to power once the southern states were readmitted to the Union, he warned, they would put in place “a condition of things produced which bears no resemblance to free government except in name.” His letter, which was printed in newspapers around the country, was all too prescient:

If hastily or partially done, reconstruction will drag with it a train of evils to this country which can never be remedied. . . . These [southern] politicians are wily and sagacious. They will make no laws which are not equal on their face to all men. It is in the execution of these laws which seem to bear equally on all, that wrong will be done. . . . Social exclusion, withdrawal of business relations, open exhibitions of hostility, if not indeed actual hostile acts, interruption of or interference with the freedmen’s and other schools maintained by charitable contributions from the North; these will be the weapons used against Union men and the colored race. Acts of wrong and violence will meet no sufficient redress if indeed any redress at all in the courts. . . . Unless reconstruction is accomplished . . . by decisive majorities, we will simply have reproduced and perpetuated in the South what we sought to destroy. . . . [T]here is little doubt that they would resort at once to the intimidation and violence which long practice has made a habit, if they dared to do so in the presence of the military forces of the United States.”⁴⁴⁴

By midsummer, due to the deepening of the class struggle in the countryside, the attempt of Georgia’s Republican Party to win a significant layer of ruling class whites to the new party had stalled. Moderate and conservative Republicans in the North were becoming increasingly worried about the militancy and organization of the freedmen. They were beginning to look at the growing conflicts between the freedmen and their employers in light of the developing class conflict in the North.

⁴⁴⁴ Pope to Grant, July 24, 1867, published in *SDNH*, Aug. 21, 1867. The *New York Times*’s response to Pope’s letter mirrored Tenney’s warning to the planters. “Should events necessitate harsher measures to secure the ends aimed at by Congress,” said the *Times* editorialist, “the banishment of the agents of disaffection” or even “a general scheme of confiscation” were both “within the scope of the Congressional opportunity.” See *NYT*, Aug 20, 1867.

In August 1866, 65 delegates from local and national unions, trades assemblies and eight-hour leagues from several northern states met in Baltimore. The workers formed the National Labor Union (NLU) and adopted a program in support of the eight-hour day, the organization of all working men and women into trade unions, and a National Labor Party. In a major step forward from previous labor meetings, delegates vowed to organize black workers. “The interests of labor are one,” they insisted. “[T]here is but one dividing line—that which separates mankind into two great classes, the class that labors and the class that lives by other’s labor.”⁴⁴⁵

In the first five months of 1867, cities in New England and the Midwest were buffeted by a wave of strikes and demonstrations for a shorter workday. On May 1, a massive labor demonstration and strike for the eight-hour day in Chicago turned violent. When Republican officials and factory owners called in the police to break up the strike, notes David Montgomery, “workers armed themselves, many recalling their recent military experience in the nation’s service.” In Massachusetts, speakers at a big labor rally in Boston in mid-May called on workers to desert the Republican Party and support independent labor candidates.⁴⁴⁶

One of the core beliefs of Republicans was that that both labor and capital profited equally in the wage labor system. “The people were behaving in a manner no Radical had anticipated,” notes Montgomery. “They were using their power to pursue class interests.” Conservative Republican newspapers like the *New York Times* and Radical publications like the

⁴⁴⁵ Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, 176-80.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 309-10.

Nation and the *New York Tribune* condemned the strikes and the demand for an eight-hour day as a violation of property rights.⁴⁴⁷

“The political actions of freedmen in the summer of that year made conservative and moderate Republicans begin to equate Southern ex-slaves with labor radicals who believed in class struggle,” explains historian Heather Richardson. The *Times* warned that recognizing the claims of labor against capital “if begun at the South, it will find its way into the cities of the North.” The paper was particularly concerned about freedmen’s demand for land. “An attempt to justify the confiscation of Southern land under the pretence of doing justice to the freedman, strikes at the root of all property rights in both sections. It concerns Massachusetts quite as seriously as Mississippi.” The freedmen in the Union Leagues and the Republican Party leadership were moving in opposite directions.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 302, 336. Montgomery goes into much more detail on the fight for a shorter working day and the souring relations between workingmen and Republicans in 1866 and 1867 in *Beyond Equality*, 277-311.

⁴⁴⁸ Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 48; *NYT*, July 9, 1867. See also Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, 338.

11 JULY–NOVEMBER 1867: HOPKINS AND BRADLEY PRESENT PROGRAM TO UNITE BLACK AND WHITE WORKERS

Throughout 1866, Hopkins concentrated on his job as federal tax collector in Savannah. His work brought him into daily contact with a broad layer of white businessmen, professionals, planters, federal officials, and recent arrivals from the North. As was the practice of the time, he staffed his department with relatives and political allies. His oldest son Charles Jr. (age 24) became assistant assessor in Chatham County. His youngest son Robert (age 19) was employed as a cotton weigher in Savannah. His brother Thomas S. became assistant assessor in Thomas County. He appointed his associate G. M. T. Ware as assistant assessor in Pierce County.⁴⁴⁹

In January 1867, the Freedmen's Bureau contacted Hopkins concerning the sale or lease of his Belleville plantation in Macintosh County. After being expelled from St. Catherine's and Sapelo islands by General Tillson in late 1866, Tunis Campbell and his followers were looking

⁴⁴⁹ *Georgia Weekly Opinion*, Nov. 19, 1867 (emphasis in original); "Charles Jr." and "Robert": *Savannah City Directory of 1867*, 102; "Thomas": *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, Oct. 25, 1866; "Ware": *SDR*, June 7, 1867. A big issue for Georgia planters in 1866 was the federal tax on cotton. The tax was a punitive one, forcing the devastated South to help pay for the federal debt incurred in the war. It was one more burden on getting the economy moving and was extremely unpopular, not only among the large planters but also many small farmers who depended on cotton as their cash crop. As federal tax assessor, Hopkins had to collect that tax, but he took steps to ease the burden as much as possible. In September 1866, Hopkins helped organize a meeting in Macon of the Georgia assessors and collectors of Internal Revenue to establish more convenient locations for weighing cotton, with the aim of saving cotton growers "the extra expense and trouble." In November, he worked with the assessor in Florida's first district to allow bonded cotton to cross state lines without impediment. Such steps helped solidify Hopkins's links with cotton factors, planters, and farmers throughout the region. See *SDR*, Sep. 9 and Nov. 29, 1866.

for a new home. Campbell wrote Bureau Commissioner Howard “about the purchase of a plantation on which to establish a colony of freedpeople.” Howard instructed the new Georgia Assistant Commissioner Colonel Caleb Sibley to allow Campbell and his freedmen’s colony “to settle on the plantation of Mr C. H. Hopkins . . . provided the terms of sale be reasonable.” It would be a “test case” to see if such colonies were viable. Sibley should offer “sufficient corn for said colony for five months & take a lien on a portion of the ensuing crop,” with the proviso that Campbell draft “regulations to be accepted by the members of the colony” and “put up a school house” and “get a teacher.”⁴⁵⁰

On March 4, 1867, Campbell formed the Belleville Farmers Association, with himself as president and general agent, his son Tunis Jr. as one of the vice-presidents, and his stepson Edward Howard as secretary. Freedmen from the islands began settling on the plantation. Hopkins declined to sell Belleville to Campbell, instead agreeing to lease it to the freedmen “until the first of January 1868, with the understanding that if they can pay for it in several instalments they can purchase it for \$15,000. My object is not to drive them off at the end of the present year, but to make the collony permanent, if there should be at that time, a prospect of their being able to pay for it.” In return for leasing the plantation to the freedmen, Hopkins was to receive one-third of all the cotton and corn raised on the plantation in 1867. In subsequent

⁴⁵⁰ Summary of letter from J. G. Campbell, 25 Jan. 1867, vol. 40, Registers of Letters Received, ser. 14, Washington Hdqrs., RG 105; Maj. Gen. O. O. Howard to Col. C. C. Sibley, 22 Feb. 1867, H-213 1867, Letters Received, ser. 631, GA Asst. Comr., RG 105. Many of the most important documents on the Hopkins-Campbell negotiations concerning Belleville in 1867 are contained in Hahn, *Land and Labor, 1865*, 966-73.

negotiations, Hopkins agreed that the Bureau would have first lien on the crops in repayment for rations it advanced to the freed people over the course of the year.⁴⁵¹

Hopkins's lease of Belleville to Tunis Campbell was an act of political solidarity. By turning over his plantation to freedmen, Hopkins was breaking the pact of coastal planters to refuse to sell or lease land to blacks. Moreover, he was leasing his historic plantation to Tunis Campbell, whose notoriety among area whites as a troublemaker was second only to that of Aaron Bradley.⁴⁵²

Absent from politics for over a year, it took Hopkins some time to realize the extent of the changes in the political situation brought about by Congressional Reconstruction. He was one of the speakers at the April 1 meeting in Savannah. The speech he gave was similar to the one he had given in Blackshear in 1865. He had opposed the war, Hopkins proclaimed, "with a pistol at my head, a sword at my breast, and a musket hanging over me." "Every one was apparently a

⁴⁵¹ Declaration of the Belleville Farmers Association, 4 Mar. 1867, Miscellaneous Records ser. 1021, Savannah GA Subasst. Comr., RG 105; C H Hopkins to Lieut. Col. Hoag, 12 Mar. 1867, H-212 1867, Letters Received, ser. 631, GA Asst. Comr., RG 105; Contract between T. G. Campbell and 1st Lieut. J. Murray Hoag, 4 Apr. 1867, filed under "McIntosh County," Labor Contracts, ser. 1018, Savannah GA Subasst. Comr., RG 105.

⁴⁵² In his 1877 autobiography, Campbell claimed that Hopkins agreed to sell Belleville to the freedmen and that he had given Hopkins \$1,000 as down payment. Campbell's biographer, Russell Duncan, argues that "for Hopkins, the agreement provided financial salvation from the devastation of war." The image of the rich white planter profiting off the exploitation of poor black men infuses Jones's portrayal of Hopkins in *Saving Savannah*. The documents on the negotiations and lease of Belleville in the *Documentary History of Emancipation* should lay that notion to rest. See Tunis G. Campbell, *Sufferings of the Rev. T. G. Campbell and his Family in Georgia* (Washington, D. C.: Enterprise Publishing Company, 1877), 8; Duncan, *Freedom's Shore*, 40 and 129, fn 61; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 286-87, 293, 317; Hahn, *Land and Labor, 1865*, 966-73.

sympathizer with him,” noted the reporter of the *Savannah Republican*, “as he told his tale of devotion to the Union amidst the storm and opposition of his fellow citizens.” “Experience has proven you capable of self-government,” Hopkins told the blacks in the audience. To the whites in the audience, he asked: “Do you want another war?” If not, “obey the laws and submit.”⁴⁵³

Many men who supported Reconstruction, including his brother Thomas, were prevented from voting or running for office by the disability clauses. Most of these men resisted being associated with the Republican Party. With the support of the *Savannah Republican*, Hopkins appealed to all “Loyal” men who supported the Military Bills in the six counties of the first district to meet at a convention in Blackshear on June 4.⁴⁵⁴

The “convention” was small: seventy-five according to the *Savannah Republican*, but only nineteen according to an “unofficial reporter.” Several of those present were men Hopkins had hired as assistant tax assessors in the counties of the first district, including his brother Thomas and his long-time ally G. M. T. Ware. Other attendees included judges from Brunswick and Pierce County, a lawyer and newspaper reporter from Savannah, and special guest F. R. Fildes, editor of the *Quitman Banner*. In his opening remarks, Hopkins called it “the most important convention ever held in this district.” “Let us draw a veil of oblivion over the past,” he urged. If we accept the reconstruction acts “as a whole with dignity and fortitude,” he argued, “we shall be again a united, prosperous and happy people.” Participants established the Constitutional Reconstruction Party of Georgia. They adopted resolutions accepting the congressional resolutions “as a finality.” Once the people of Georgia met all the requirements,

⁴⁵³ *SDNH*, Apr. 2, 1867.

⁴⁵⁴ *SDR*, May 24, 1867. The six counties were Chatham, Pierce, Brooks, Ware, Thomas, and Lowndes.

attendees insisted on “immediate amnesty and the repeal of all disability laws now in force” for loyal men.”⁴⁵⁵

But there was no room in Georgia in 1867 for a third party between the Republicans and the rebel opposition. The death knell of the party was sounded in an article written by Fildes shortly after the Blackshear meeting. He argued that attendance at the convention was small because people confused it with the “Black Republican Party Convention.” He defended the new organization as necessary to defeat “the politicians of the Sumner-Stevens school” who, together with the “Union leagues and other similar diabolical societies,” were working “to elevate the dark child of Africa above the fair Caucasian race.” Fildes’s white supremacist views were diametrically opposed to those of Hopkins. The Constitutional Reconstruction Party was dead in less than a month.⁴⁵⁶

Days after the Fildes article, Hopkins attended the founding meeting of the Chatham County Republican Party on July 1. The one hundred and fifty blacks in attendance were members of Savannah’s black elite: leaders of the AME, GERA, and the colored Union League. A large percentage of the thirty white men in attendance were federal officers, Union army veterans, or recent arrivals from the North. There were few white men born in the South in attendance. As the most prominent native Georgia politician present, Hopkins was named one of the five vice-presidents of the meeting.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁵ *SDR*, June 6 and 7, 1867.

⁴⁵⁶ *SDR*, June 18, 1867.

⁴⁵⁷ *SDR*, July 2, 1867. On Savannah’s black elite, see Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 47-48, 314-15. Prominent white Republicans at the meeting who had recently moved to Savannah from northern states included Captain Frank

Captain Frank S. Hesseltine, a former Union officer from Maine, chaired the meeting. The main speaker was a visiting black Methodist preacher who spoke about his second-class treatment aboard the *Lizzie Baker* steamer on the way to Savannah. “Traitors to the flag of our Union were . . . at the white table, eating, drinking, and making merry, while dark loyalists, as gentlemanly as they were, stood in the wet. He asked the Republican party to give a place to the blacks everywhere, and not to traitors first.” The minister honored Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner to “terrific applause” from the attendees.⁴⁵⁸

It was probably the first time Hopkins had participated in a meeting with blacks as equal participants, with a black man as the main speaker, and with a sharp attack on white supremacy as a major theme. There were many men in this meeting with whom Hopkins could work. But a party led by and largely composed of former Union army officers and relatively well-to-do Savannah blacks, mostly mulatto, many freed prior to the war, could not hope to defeat the rebel white elite entrenched in power at the city and county level. Elected as a delegate to the Republican Party convention in Atlanta, Hopkins did not attend, nor was he appointed to the county leadership committee on July 10. The Chatham County party represented only one wing of the Republican movement in the area. Hopkins was looking to unite broader forces.⁴⁵⁹

Bradley was in Boston when Radical Reconstruction began. The defeat of the land occupations in January weighed heavily on him. Without a job, perpetually short of cash, he

S. Hesseltine, Dr. Joseph Clift, Col. A. L. Harris, Col. H. T. McDowell, Capt. E. S. Nixon, Col. Thomas P. Robb, Capt. F. Sandroe, Col. Grantham I. Taggart, Capt. Henry S. Wetmore, and Col. Alexander N. Wilson.

⁴⁵⁸ *SDNH*, April 30, 1867; *SDR*, July 2, 1867. The name of the black Methodist preacher who spoke is illegible.

⁴⁵⁹ *SDR*, July 2 and 7, 1867; *SDNH*, July 8 and 11, 1867.

petitioned Major General G. H. Thomas, temporary military commander of Georgia, to grant him permission “to Practice Law for my People.” He convinced Charles S. Spencer, chairman of the Republican Central Committee of New York, to request that he be admitted to the bar in New York. When he returned to Georgia in May, Bradley continued his job search, urging Pope to oust Judge Fleming and establish “civil Tribunals” staffed with “Loyal Colored & White men” as “judges, jurors and lawyers,” and petitioning the Superior Court of Chatham County to admit him as an attorney.⁴⁶⁰

Back in Georgia, Bradley plunged into political activity in Savannah’s Colored Union League. The central leaders of the League were quite conservative, but the organization itself was decentralized and had many members in clubs in and around Savannah. Bradley knew League members in the rice plantations along the Ogeechee and the Savannah rivers. He had worked with James Mackey and others in support of the dockworkers’ strike. He was welcomed into the League’s Baker Council No 9 by Reverend Ulysses Houston, the organizer of the occupied plantation on Skidaway Island which had so impressed Bradley on his arrival in

⁴⁶⁰ Aaron Bradley to Maj. Gen. G. H. Thomas, Mar. 21, 1867, A-209, Letters Received, Bureau of Civil Affairs, 3d Military District, RG 393, pt. 1, NA.; *New York World*, Apr. 16, 1867; *New York Atlas*, Mar. 16, 1867; Aaron Bradley to Maj. Gen. John Pope, May 21, 1867, A-417, Letters Received, Bureau of Civil Affairs, 3d Military District, RG 393, NA.; *SDR*, June 6, 1867. See also Aaron Bradley to Maj. Gen. John Pope, May 28, 1867, A-481, Letters Received, Bureau of Civil Affairs, 3d Military District, RG 393, pt. 1, NA. and Aaron Bradley to Maj. Gen. John Pope, June 5, 1867, A-562, Letters Received, Bureau of Civil Affairs, 3d Military District, RG 393, NA. It appears that Bradley was grieving over the death of his mother’s husband. In a plaintive coda to his May 21 letter to General Thomas, Bradley added: “Is there no help for the widows son.” He repeated his plea of help for the “widows son” in letters written on May 28 and June 5 to General Pope. See also Reidy, “Aaron A. Bradley,” 292.

Savannah in 1865. Bradley quickly became secretary of the Baker Council. In his letter to Pope on May 21, he identified himself as “Aaron A. Bradley, Union League, Colored.”⁴⁶¹

Unlike Hopkins, Bradley did not attend the founding convention of the Chatham County Republican Party. Leaders of the new party had stood by silently when he was on trial in 1865 and was expelled from the state. They had not supported the fight of the rice plantation workers and dockworkers he had led earlier in the year. Many of the former Union Army officers leading the party were friends of the Army officers and Freedmen’s Bureau agents he had confronted in those battles. Nor were Republicans eager to welcome Bradley into their organization. He was an extremist, a rabble-rouser, and did not have the moderate image the Chatham County leadership wanted to project.⁴⁶²

When Baker Council No 9 decided to organize a big parade of Union League members on Independence Day, Bradley threw himself into building it. On July 4, at least seven hundred members of Baker Council No 9 marched through town accompanied by bands, banners, and flags. Council members were smartly dressed with distinctive badges. Black women played a prominent role. Miss Louisa McIntosh addressed the crowd and credited Council members for protecting blacks in Savannah from massacres like those in Memphis and New Orleans.⁴⁶³

At the end of the march, a long list of speakers addressed the crowd. The first two speakers were the president of the Board of Registration Captain H. S. Wetmore and Assistant Registrar Dr. J. W. Clift, both of whom encouraged registration and voting. Following them was

⁴⁶¹ *SDR*, Sept. 6, 1865; James Mackey to Col. C. C. Sibley, [early 1867]; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 87-88, 218, 225, 229; Bradley to Pope, May 21, 1867.

⁴⁶² Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 275.

⁴⁶³ *SDR*, July 6, 1867; *SDNH*, July 6, 1867.

Henry Eden, a white Baker Council member who had been driven out the city in 1866 when he used his position as county coroner to prosecute two white men who murdered a freedman.

Aaron Bradley gave the main speech at the rally, lauding black accomplishments throughout history. Hannibal was a Negro; the Atlantic Ocean was named after Atlantus, a negro; the first martyr in the Revolutionary War was a negro; the French Revolution was caused by the negro insurrection in St. Domingo; Alexander Dumas was a negro (negroes had to take back seats to hear his plays in Savannah); and “the colored troops [in the Civil War] fought nobly.” It is not hard to imagine the enthusiastic response to this speech from the overwhelmingly black crowd.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶⁴ *SDR*, July 6, 1867; *SDNH*, July 6, 1867. Born into a prominent Savannah family, Henry Eden had been secretary of the Oglethorpe volunteer fire company, a member of the state legislature, and a colonel overseeing the Savannah militia during the war. In January 1866 Eden became the coroner-elect of Chatham County. His career came to a screeching halt in July 1866. A drunken white man, Lawrence Craney, beat a black man, Mingo Reynolds, senseless over a right of way dispute at a bridge in southeast Savannah. A large group of freedmen, led by Sampson Whitfield, tried to detain Craney and another white man, William Allen, until the police arrived. Pursued by the crowd of blacks, Allen shot and killed Whitfield. An all-white coroner’s jury ruled the death of Whitfield “justifiable homicide” and released the two men. Eden did not go along with the jury’s verdict and “commenced civil prosecution.” This proved to be a life-changing decision. Prosecuting a white man for the murder of a black man against the decision of an all-white jury in Savannah in 1866 was downright traitorous. The trial of Allen and Craney was an extraordinary event in Savannah’s history. For three days, eyewitnesses to the events, six white and six black, testified in court. Judge Levi Russell declined to enter any evidence on behalf of the defense. The presiding judge, Levi’s father P. M. Russell Sr., quickly ruled the murder of Whitfield “justifiable homicide” and released Craney and Allen. Eden was forced to resign his post as coroner and “ordered to leave the city, being a Black Republican, Abolitionist, and nigger lover.” He fled Savannah for New York. On August 2, 1866, he wrote a letter to the *Brooklyn Union* which recounted what had happened. The *Savannah News and Herald* responded in a

Over the summer, Bradley, Eden, and other members of the Baker Council took the lead in organizing new Union League branches in the city and the county. Bradley also traveled to other areas of south Georgia to build the Leagues, meeting for instance with blacks in Thomasville. With Simms and other Chatham County Republican leaders engaged in building Republican Party units elsewhere in Georgia, the Savannah party stagnated.⁴⁶⁵

Republican Party leaders presented different programs depending on which audience they were addressing. Among yeomen and poor whites in north and wiregrass Georgia, Republicans campaigned for “Convention and Relief”—stay laws, homestead exemptions, and public schools. Men who shared ex-Governor Brown’s views entreated businessmen and planters to acquiesce in Congressional Reconstruction. Once the state was back in the Union, they could do what they wanted about black voting rights. In south Georgia, Republicans and black leaders promoted suffrage and promised the freedmen civil rights: the right to hold office, to sit on juries, to equality in public transportation, to receive an education.

front-page article, denouncing the “degradation” and “discreditable conduct” of Eden the “renegade.” Eden’s treatment by Savannah’s ruling class was a warning to all white men. It doesn’t matter what your position you hold or what accomplishments lay in your past. If you take the side of the negro against us, this is what you can expect! Eden’s return to Savannah and decision to join Baker Council No. 9 showed the profound change wrought by the 1867 Reconstruction Acts. See “fire company”: *SMN*, July 8, 1855; “legislature”: *Savannah Georgian*, Feb. 9, 1856; “colonel”: *SMN*, July 20, 1858; “militia”: *SDN*, Aug. 6, 1863; “coroner”: *SDNH*, Jan. 1 and Mar. 7, 1866; “Craney,” “Reynolds,” “Allen,” and “Whitfield”: *SDNH*, July 13 and 14, 1866; “prosecution” and “letter”: *SDNH*, Aug. 14, 1866; “trial”: *SDNH*, July 17, 18, 19, and 21, 1866. Jones recounts the story of Craney, Allen, and Whitfield in *Saving Savannah*, 263. She does not mention Eden’s role in the conflict.

⁴⁶⁵ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 237.

As the Savannah Leagues grew, Hopkins and Walter Clift, a younger brother of registrar J. W. Clift, met with Bradley to come up with a common program and slate for the elections. The first indication that Bradley and the Baker Council were turning in a more political direction came with their response to a particularly provocative editorial in the pro-Johnson *Savannah Republican*. Editor John Hayes had railed all summer long against universal suffrage, Union League drilling, and alleged black “atrocities,” and warned of the threat of “negro supremacy.” In an editorial on August 31, he lampooned the very idea of “Congressmen of Color.” Behold “your *barbarian* Lycurgus,” “your swarthy Solon,” he wrote. “Take your Fourteenth Amendment . . . a looming, breathing thing, tangible, visible, *odiferous!* Take your ‘irresistible genius of Universal Emancipation,’ redeemed from all but *ignorance*, regenerated in all but *vice*, disenthralled from all but *imbecility*.”⁴⁶⁶

This was a racist attack on all blacks. When the Republican Party failed to respond, the Baker Council acted. Three “quite intelligent looking colored men” delivered a letter to Hayes demanding he quit printing racist editorials “or one thousand members will take such Legal and Natural means to stop you; as the Law and the God of nature have been pleased to place within our power.” Although the letter was signed by Union League President Jackson Brand and Secretary Paul S. Reynolds, these conservative black businessmen had nothing to do with it. This was Bradley’s letter—Hayes recognized Bradley’s handwriting and spelling—and an indication that a split of the militant base of the Baker Council from their conservative leadership was not far off.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁶ *SDR*, Aug. 31, 1867. Emphasis added.

⁴⁶⁷ *SDR*, Sep. 2 and 3, 1867.

In mid-September, Bradley, Hopkins, and Clift presented their program. Bradley printed “a good-sized poster” and “pretty thoroughly distributed [it] among the colored people of Effingham, Chatham, Bryan and several other counties.” It called for a “Grand Republican and Relief Mass Meeting” to be held in Chippewa Square on September 30th. Speakers at the meeting were announced as ex-Governor Johnson, William Markham, Hopkins, Bradley, and Walter Clift. The text of the poster is worth citing in full:

All the white and colored people in Effingham, Chatham, and Bryan counties are requested to attend this meeting who love the United States and are in favor of a State Convention, equal rights to colored voters and poor white persons without property, or the reading and writing qualification.

Homesteads for all men of families in the county and town in which they belong (paying the State in seven years) to stop pauperism and dignify labor.

Eight hours shall be a day’s work – after hours paid for.

We would reduce rents in cities to ten per cent on the taxed value of all houses let; and no arrests should be made on means process.⁴⁶⁸

The Savannah flyer broke completely with the Georgia Republican leadership’s strategy of different programs for whites and blacks. In four short sentences, it presented key elements of a *class* program, a program for working people, people who rented rather than owned, white as well as black. It demanded equal rights not just for blacks, but for “colored voters and poor white persons without property.”⁴⁶⁹

It was a *legislative* program: demands which could be undertaken by elected bodies, not a call for confiscation or revolution. It spoke, not in the “glittering generalities” of the Georgia Republican Party’s program, but in the concrete demands of working people. It called for homesteads, not just for blacks, but “for men of all families.” Land currently being offered to the freedmen by Congress was located hundreds or thousands of miles from where they lived and at

⁴⁶⁸ *SDR*, Sept. 17, 1867. Effingham, Chatham, and Bryan counties comprised Georgia’s First District.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

unaffordable market rates. The program demanded homesteads “in the county and town in which they [the families] belong.”⁴⁷⁰

High rents were a major issue for white workers in Savannah’s municipal elections in 1866. The program’s formula for rent reduction would benefit both whites and blacks. “No arrests should be made on means process”: Bradley had been fighting against blacks being jailed due to inability to pay fines or debts since his Boston days. At a time when conservative Republicans, North and South, were turning against universal manhood suffrage in favor of “impartial” suffrage for educated men only, the program opposed the “reading and writing qualification.” Support for the eight-hour day linked the program with the central demand of working people and labor reformers in the North and West.⁴⁷¹

The program was a big step forward for both Hopkins and Bradley. It was the product of the fights they had been engaged in since 1865: the fight of poor whites against the Confederate army, the battles of the freedmen to hold onto their land, the Savannah dockworkers strike, the militancy and drilling of the Ogeechee freedmen. Hopkins had previously expressed his general support for black rights, but his public speeches had been directed at white politicians and businessmen. Now he put himself on record supporting specific measures aimed at blacks as well as white workers. Bradley’s whole focus, until now, had been the liberation of the freedmen. Now he championed the cause of white working people as well.

Hopkins hoped the program would unite the three distinct political groupings who supported Congressional Reconstruction in Savannah. Johnson and Markham were invited to speak from the Reconstructionist wing, Bradley from the Union Leagues, and Hopkins and Clift

⁴⁷⁰ *SDR*, Sept.17, 1867.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

from the Republican Party. A few days later, a handbill nominating eight candidates of the “Republican Relief Ticket” was printed and “extensively circulated.” Hopkins and Bradley were the only two candidates identified with the program of the September 30 meeting. The ticket included ex-Governor Johnson and five candidates associated with the Republican Party: three white lawyers (D. Hall Rice, G. I. Taggart and F. S. Hesseltine) and two black preachers (Reverend David Waters and Simms).⁴⁷²

The new alliance of Hopkins, Clift, and Bradley and the September 30 program landed like a bombshell on Savannah’s ruling class. They didn’t consider the Chatham County Republican Party or ex-Governor Johnson much of a threat, and they presumed Republicans wouldn’t dare link up with the “disreputable” Bradley. Earlier in the year they had faced the trauma of the “January revolution”: the armed revolt of blacks on the plantations and the strike of white as well as black dockworkers. Now they were presented with a team of Hopkins and Bradley and a program aimed at working class whites as well as freedmen. Hopkins, a respected politician and a native Georgian, was in contact with bankers, businessmen, politicians, and white voters throughout the region. If this new team was able to win white workers to support for the Republican Party, together with Bradley’s support among the freedmen, the rebel ruling class was in trouble.

The *Savannah Republican* brayed that Savannah’s “financial and commercial circles” were worried by a meeting “for the avowed purpose of advocating confiscation and inculcating

⁴⁷² *SDR*, Sept. 17, 1867; *SDNH*, Sept. 27, 1867. I use the term “Reconstructionist” here as shorthand for men who believed the legislature should adopt the Fourteenth Amendment but did not join the Republican Party and opposed blacks holding office or serving on juries. Ex-Governor Brown was the leading Reconstructionist in Georgia in 1867 and early 1868.

agrarian ideas among the colored population. . . . Nothing could be more disastrous . . . than a derangement or disturbance of the labor system under these circumstances.” It noted that “between three and four thousand able bodied laboring colored men” could be drawn by “such a *tempting and profitable* programme.” Mayor Anderson wrote a letter to General Pope saying that Savannah’s “merchants, planters and business men are seriously disturbed” by the meeting.⁴⁷³

The *New York Herald*, a leading national Democratic Party newspaper, reprinted the September 30 rally program in full, along with a statement by Edward Hulbert supporting relief. “The radical plot for the Africanization of the South is gradually but surely developing,” reported the *Herald*’s correspondent from Columbus, Georgia. “Every device is being resorted to in order to seduce the ‘poor whites,’ as they are called, into the new political clubs and leagues.” The reporter emphasized the danger that these “agrarian doctrines” in the South “gradually extend to the States of the North.” Think of the dangers to the economy should the blacks and the poor whites unite: “all the horrors of St. Domingo re-enacted in these Southern States.”⁴⁷⁴

The *Savannah Republican* and Mayor Anderson called on General Pope to ban the meeting. Democrats couldn’t very well motivate such a ban based on the ideas in the flyer, all of which were not only legal but, as the *Savannah Republican* noted, had wide popular support. They needed to find some other reason. The meeting, Anderson insisted, would bring into the city “an influx of ignorant negroes, who, under the mischievous lead of Bradley and his confederates, will indulge in license and disorder.” He called on Pope to ban the meeting. Pope

⁴⁷³ *SDR*, Sept. 17, 1867 (emphasis added); E. C. Anderson to Gen. John Pope, Sept. 18, 1867, S-99 1867, Letters Received, 3d Mil. Dist., RG 393, NA.

⁴⁷⁴ *New York Herald*, Sept. 27, 1867.

agreed that the military should be on hand to aid “municipal authorities to prevent any disturbance of the peace.”⁴⁷⁵

The *Savannah News* designated the men on the ticket the “Mongrel ‘Relief’ Candidates.” It confidently asserted that the “white men whose names appear will disclaim any authorization of the publication.” If they did not do so, threatened the newspaper, “they will lose the respect of all decent people, North or South, black or white.” Johnson and Rice promptly announced they were opposed to the ticket. Rice noted that he had only wanted to be found “in respectable company.” While he favored equal legal rights for all men, Rice opposed the September 30 platform because he supported “protection of property, freedom in investing capital, and efficient administration of justice.” Simms and Waters likewise removed themselves from the ticket.⁴⁷⁶

Mayor Anderson needed some pretext to prepare the army for a violent meeting. Unfortunately, Bradley provided him with an opening. On September 21, Bradley went to a printshop to have handbills printed. He explained that the handbills were for “men who had their shirt sleeves rolled up.” Shortly before leaving, Bradley asked the two white printers if they were opposed to the meeting. When they responded yes, Bradley allegedly said that he “had an order from General Pope to arrest all who were opposed to the meeting, and then said he intended to have a big meeting, a big shooting or big blood.” The printers signed an affidavit which included this ‘quote’ and rushed it to the mayor. Under normal circumstances, the supposed “order” from Pope like the supposed “threat” of “a big shooting” would be treated as idle braggadocio. But

⁴⁷⁵ Anderson to Pope, Sept. 18, 1867; Mayor Anderson to Capt. P. H. Houlihan, Sept. 23(?), 1867 in Capt. H. C. Cook to Lt. John E. Hosmer, Oct. 3, 1867, S-109 1867, Letters Received, Bur. of Civil Affairs, 3d Mil. Dist., RG 393.

⁴⁷⁶ *SDNH*, Sept. 27, 28, and 30, 1867.

this was no normal circumstance. Bradley's ill-considered comment played right into Anderson's hands. The affidavit from the two printers was used by Mayor Anderson to prepare US Army officers for a violent rally on September 30.⁴⁷⁷

The leaflet gave conservative blacks an excuse to break with Bradley and ingratiate themselves with Savannah's ruling class. Union League leaders Brand and Reynolds, speaking on behalf of the "respectable colored men of this city," denounced the September 30 meeting as "inflammatory" and its demands as "impractical." They demanded that Bradley resign his position as recording secretary.⁴⁷⁸

The threat posed by Hopkins and Bradley prompted some members of the city's ruling class to a desperate action. Four days before the rally, after a meeting at an AME church, Bradley returned late in the evening to his rented room. He was accompanied by Moses Mossman and Mossman's two brothers acting as bodyguards. Armed with stones, pistols, and dirks, a group of six men—five mulattoes and one white man "in citizens clothes" — laid in wait. They began their attack by throwing large stones at Bradley and his party. Bradley was pushed to the ground and hit by the white man armed with a policeman's club. The men got a bag over Bradley's head and tried to heave him onto a bread wagon. One of the assailants cried "let me shoot him [Bradley]." The attempt to kidnap Bradley was not successful. Mossman was able to pull him off the wagon. Bradley hollered "murder" and the commotion began to rouse neighborhood blacks. Bradley and Mossman "heard policemen's rattles sprung." On hearing the rattles, the wagon was driven off and the attackers ran away. Bradley and Mossman recognized three of his attackers:

⁴⁷⁷ *SDNH*, Oct. 1, 1867; Cook to Hosmer, Oct. 3, 1867.

⁴⁷⁸ *SDR*, Sept. 17 and 19, 1867.

William Pollard, Richard Johnson, and Peter Cavellier. All three were well known Savannah mulattoes. Pollard had been a delegate to the Republican Party convention in Atlanta.⁴⁷⁹

The attempted kidnapping of Bradley marked a qualitative change in the situation. The white man's leading role in the assault, his use of a policeman's club, and the policeman's rattle ending the attack were all indications of ruling class involvement. The policemen would not have acted without a go-ahead from city authorities. Members of the city's ruling class had resorted to deadly violence, a nighttime attack, against a leading Republican.

The white establishment rushed into damage control mode. The morning after the attack, Mayor Anderson called Bradley to his office. He asked Bradley what had happened the previous night, the details of which he was obviously aware. Even though, as he later admitted, the Mayor's Court had no jurisdiction over cases of kidnapping or attempted murder, Anderson had the three attackers arrested and set a trial date for the men before his court. Newspaper articles immediately proclaimed the assault an example of "black on black violence." "The Mobbing of a Negro Meddler by His Own Color" ran the headline in the *Savannah News*. The *Savannah Advertiser* complained of the inability of civil or military authorities to jail the "pestilent agitator" Bradley.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ Bradley deposition, Jan. 31, 1868, and Moses Mossman's testimony before the Board of Officers in Savannah, Feb. 3, 1868, in E-13, Letters Received, Bureau of Civil Affairs, Third Military District, RG 393, NA; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 288, 381. Policemen used rattles in those days when trouble arose.

⁴⁸⁰ Bradley deposition and Mossman testimony, Jan. 31 and Feb. 3, 1868; *SDNH*, Sept. 27, 1867; *Savannah Advertiser*, Sept. 30, 1867, reprinted in the *Charleston Daily News*, Oct. 2, 1867. Years later, Anderson gave his own version of events. In his account, Bradley was attacked by a rival faction of black Republicans and was rescued by a courageous policeman. See *Testimony taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of*

The trial afforded Bradley and Mossman a golden opportunity to explain exactly what had happened. On the day of the trial the courtroom was packed, with “coal black” freedmen who supported Bradley on one side and the “intelligent-looking countenance of the copper colored and white” supporters of the three “respectable colored citizens” on the other. The *Savannah Advertiser* noted “among the spectators . . . a number of our leading merchants, who have known the accused from boyhood.” The trial was scheduled to begin at 10 am.⁴⁸¹

Bradley was not in the courtroom at 10 am. His failure to appear on time saved the day both for the arrested men and for those who organized the attack. Anderson promptly dismissed the case and assigned court costs to Bradley. When Bradley arrived minutes later and learned that his attackers had been released, he appealed to the Freedmen’s Bureau, the County Court, and Judge Smith to hear the case, but to no avail. Anderson’s dismissal of the case meant that the details of the kidnapping attempt were never made public. They were only revealed months later in statements by Mossman and Bradley before a closed military commission.⁴⁸²

The threat of black on black violence was used by Savannah newspapers to whip up an atmosphere of violence and hysteria against the September 30 meeting. Hopkins and Clift received death threats. They decided against speaking at the meeting. Holding it would not only put both themselves and the freedmen attending it in danger. Violence at the meeting would discourage support from working class whites and set back the task of uniting all area

Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States: Georgia. Volume I. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 176.

⁴⁸¹ *SDNH*, Sept. 30, 1867; *SDA*, Sept. 30, 1867.

⁴⁸² *SDNH*, Sept. 30, 1867; *SDA*, Sept. 30, 1867; Bradley deposition and Mossman testimony, Jan. 31 and Feb. 3, 1868.

Republicans for the upcoming elections. Bradley himself, furious at the mayor's dismissal of the charges against his assailants and not wanting to appear to be backing down under threat, decided to go ahead regardless.⁴⁸³

On September 29 and 30, thousands of freedmen made their way to Savannah. The night prior to the meeting, they "kept watch and ward over [Bradley's] house, patrolling and picketing the neighborhood for two squares, on every side." On September 30 "Chippewa Square was densely filled as was also the streets around it." Many freedmen were "armed with clubs, or sharpened ramrods, or bars of iron, or sections of gas pipes." The square was surrounded by "the entire Savannah police force, along with U.S. troops and the mayor, sheriff, and other city officials." "The troops were well provided with ammunition, with a couple grape-loaded field pieces at the barracks, and a reserve to fall back on."⁴⁸⁴

Bradley arrived accompanied by two hundred "club-bearing" negroes acting as his bodyguard. Police seized firearms from the assembled freedmen: a total of sixteen old muskets and pistols. Bradley explained that the other speakers were not present "because certain midnight assassins had threatened to shoot them" if they appeared. He criticized Hopkins and Clift for not having the "courage" to appear by his side. As for himself, "there was a principle involved, and he was ready and anxious to die for a principle." Bradley presented the program and candidates

⁴⁸³ *SDNH*, Oct. 1, 1867.

⁴⁸⁴ "kept watch": *SDR*, Oct. 1, 1867; "densely filled": Capt. H. C. Cook to Lt. John E. Hosmer, Oct. 3, 1867, S-109 1867, Letters Received, Bur. of Civil Affairs, 3d Mil. Dist., RG 393, pt. 1, NA; "police force": Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 291; "armed with clubs" and "well provided": *SDNH*, Oct. 1, 1867.

of the Relief ticket. He vowed to confiscate “a portion of the lands of the rich whites in the State of Georgia and divide it among the colored gentlemen and the poor whites.”⁴⁸⁵

Bradley could have helped turn this tense situation around had he told the crowd that the men who attacked him were the tools of the police and city authorities, that the city rulers were trying to turn blacks against mulattoes. He could have noted that there were many mulattoes—like himself—who supported the freedmen and black rights. He could have warned them against being provoked, warned them against any actions which would allow the police to attack the meeting.

But, still enraged by the attempted kidnapping, Bradley fell into the trap set by the city’s ruling class. He called out “aristocratic mulattoes” alongside bankers, millionaires, and merchants as enemies of the freedmen. He denounced mulattoes as the men who had attempted to assassinate him. When he made “some insulting remarks against the Union League, several members of that organization who were present, made a rush for the stand.” When Bradley’s security forces resisted the attack, the police had the pretext they had been waiting for. They charged into the crowd. Rather than arresting the “conservative Savannah negro[s]” who were disrupting the meeting, the police bloodied Bradley’s supporters. Captain Cook’s infantry seconded the police, confronting rally participants—men, women, and children—with muskets and fixed bayonets. “A series of combined charges was soon made, which resulted in a large number of arrests and the complete dispersion of the crowd.” Commented the *Savannah Daily News*, “It was a gratifying sight to look at a company of blue-coats and a company of grey-coats, side by side, acting without the least disagreement.”⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁵ *SDNH*, Oct. 1, 1867; *SDR*, Oct. 1, 1867.

⁴⁸⁶ *SDNH*, Oct. 1, 1867; *SDR*, Oct. 1, 1867.

“The crowd shortly after this assembled at Bradley’s house” from which “they were once more dispersed by the police force, but not until several arrests were made.” Forty of Bradley’s followers were arrested. Trials of the “black rioters” began the following day in the Mayor’s Court. Two women were sentenced to 20 days in jail for protesting the arrests; three men were sentenced to 30 days imprisonment in Fort Pulaski or the US barracks for possession of revolvers or riotous conduct.⁴⁸⁷

The conservative and racist media had a field day. The *Savannah Republican* ran banner headlines: “A confiscation-Homestead Pow-Wow! The great “Wauhoo” on the War Path!! Almost a Riot!!” It saluted the “exemplary conduct” of the city negroes (who had successfully disrupted the meeting) and the “moderation” of the aggrieved planters. Articles praising the police assault were reprinted by Democratic Party newspapers across the country. On October 2, Savannah’s city aldermen adopted a resolution congratulating Pope, the military, and the mayor for preventing riot and bloodshed at the September 30 meeting, which it termed “agrarian and revolutionary in its character.”⁴⁸⁸

The *New York Times* joined the Democratic Party press in the attack on Bradley and the freedmen. In articles on the “Riot in Savannah,” the *Times* denounced the “incendiary mulatto” and his support for “a distribution of lands” and his “agrarian politics.” It noted without comment

⁴⁸⁷ *SDNH*, Oct. 1 and 2, 1867.

⁴⁸⁸ *SDR*, Oct. 1 and 3, 1867. For articles praising the police attack, see the *New York World*, Oct. 5, 1867, and the *Wilmington Daily News*, Oct. 11, 1867. “Wahoo” or “Wauhoo” would become the *Savannah Republican*’s favorite moniker for Bradley (and those who supported him) and was soon picked up by Democratic newspapers around the country. The ever-literate editor Hayes presumably adapted the term from Lawrence Sterne’s *Gulliver’s Travels*. Sterne portrayed the “yahoos” as “the most unteachable of all animals,” “filthy,” “detestable,” “cunning, malicious, treacherous, and revengeful.”

that the “better class among his hearers” “disapprove of Bradley and threaten to assassinate him.” The newspaper offered some friendly advice to southern planters and capitalists: treat their employees fairly and see that they are educated. For the freedmen, it offered the iron fist. It hailed the “restrictions which Congress has seen fit to impose on the South,” which could now be turned against men like Bradley. “For if the habeas corpus could be invoked in such cases,” it argued, “what is to prevent her worst enemies from keeping her ignorant masses in constant turmoil and readiness for outbreak.” For the *Times*, the “worst enemies” were no longer the former rebels, but Bradley and the “ignorant” freedmen.⁴⁸⁹

The rout of the September 30 meeting was a major setback for Republican forces in Savannah and strengthened the hand of the local ruling class. Blacks had been turned against mulattoes; the most militant freedmen had suffered beatings and jail terms; the Republican forces were more divided than ever. Bradley and the freedmen who supported him were portrayed as prone to violence, making it much more difficult to win white workers and progressive businessmen to their side.

Savannah’s ruling class had adeptly turned Bradley, the victim of an attempted kidnapping, into the criminal. They had been helped immensely by Bradley’s own political errors. Bradley had proved to be a courageous and energetic agitator in his support of the freedmen’s fight to hold onto their land. He had benefitted at key moments from Radical “friends” in high places—Stanton in 1865, Wade in 1867—as well as during the Union League summer of 1867, when all seemed possible. But he remained a product of the slave system. The years he spent as an outcast in the segregated ghettos of the North taught him to put up a good front, don’t let yourself be dissed, don’t ever back down. Pride and self-image, braggadocio and

⁴⁸⁹ *NYT*, Oct. 1 and 3, 1867.

bravado, proved poor guidelines when the task of the day was winning over white workers and building alliances with men who did not share his views. In the space of ten days in September, Bradley had made four major political errors: bragging to the printers, showing up late at trial, insisting on holding the September 30 meeting, and falling for the “black on black violence” ruse by denouncing mulattoes. These were all ultraleft errors. Bradley reacted to events emotionally rather than thinking things through politically. The ruling class would take full advantage of Bradley’s political immaturity in the months to come.

Anderson emerged from the bungled kidnapping operation stronger than ever. He decided the time was right to deal the freedmen and the Republicans some further blows. A week after the September 30 meeting, Chatham County Republicans voted to hold a meeting and torchlight procession in Chippewa Square. The *Savannah Daily News*, *Savannah Republican*, and assorted “concerned citizens” demanded the meeting be called off. Blacks meeting at night was dangerous, they argued. They could set fire to the city. The Mayor promptly issued a proclamation forbidding “any such assemblage or procession in the streets or other thoroughfares after nightfall . . . without the written permission of the Mayor” due to the danger that such “gatherings and processions at night . . . would be likely to result in riot and conflagration.”⁴⁹⁰

The strongest protest against the mayor’s proclamation came, not from the Republican Party, but from Aaron Bradley. In a letter to Pope, he argued presciently that Anderson’s order would be used by the mayor against any and all nighttime gatherings. It “is designed to brake up your Republican Clubs, League Hall, Freemason Lodge, and even your church meetings.” He attached a copy of the new ordinance, along with a quote from Pope’s letter to Grant in which Pope insisted that “freedom of speech . . . equality before the law, and in political rights and

⁴⁹⁰ *SDNH*, Oct. 8 and 9, 1867; *SDR*, Oct. 14, 1867; *NYT*, Oct. 14, 1867.

privileges, are the essentials of any satisfactory reconstruction in the South.” Bradley’s plea fell on deaf ears. The Republican meeting was cancelled.⁴⁹¹

Steps had to be taken fast to repair the damage inflicted by the violent breakup of the September 30 meeting and the subsequent banning of the Republican Party rally. Hopkins met with the leaders of both Republican factions to propose a united front rally to demonstrate that Republicans were united, and that whites were going to work with and run for office alongside black candidates regardless of the pressure. Chastened by their recent setbacks, Bradley and leaders of the Republican Party joined with Hopkins to plan a mass meeting of “loyal Republicans” on October 21, a week before the elections.⁴⁹²

As they had on September 30, a “vast multitude” of freedmen arrived for the meeting aboard bateaux and plantation boats from plantations on both sides of the Savannah River and from the Ogeechee neck, along with large numbers of blacks from Savannah. All the proper authorities were notified of the meeting—mayor, army, police, and sheriff—and all were present. The meeting was a show of unity by the Bradley-led Union Leagues and leading members of the Chatham County Republican Party. Bradley called the meeting to order. He read from the poster announcing the meeting, which called for support from “all Loyal League Men, Republican Clubs, and Fire and Axe Companies.” City registrar Dr. J. W. Clift called on all those who had registered to vote for the Republican candidates in the coming elections. Hopkins was the main speaker. With the conservative newspapers presenting blacks and Republicans as bent on rape, arson, pillage, and civil war, he attempted to “throw a little oil on the troubled waters.” Whites

⁴⁹¹ Bradley and J. H. Grant to Gen. Pope, Oct. 17, 1867, A-1868, Letters Received, Bur. of Civil Affairs, 3d Mil. Dist., RG 393, pt. 1, NA.

⁴⁹² *SDNH*, Oct. 22, 1867.

needed to work together with blacks in carrying out the tasks of reconstruction, he said. “He had been born and reared in Georgia; his family for generations have been buried beneath her soil, and though his white brethren should slight him for his political faith, he would be buried beneath the same soil, though none but colored people were left to carry him to the grave.” The main black orator was not Bradley but Moses H. Bentley, one of the founders of the Union League on the Grove Hill plantation. Other speakers included Republican Party leaders A. W. Stone and Walter Clift (described by the *Savannah News* as “Radical up to the handle”). After the meeting, some 1,500 blacks followed Bradley to his rooming house to receive tickets for the elections. Savannah policemen, frustrated by their inability to make arrests during the meeting, arrested three freedmen in front of Bradley’s home for “attempting to create an excitement.”⁴⁹³

Hopkins tried his best to form a united slate of all Republican forces in Savannah. The Bradley-Hopkins slate, calling itself the “Loyal Republican Ticket,” included a majority of Republican Party members. It was racially balanced with four white candidates and four black candidates. In addition to Bradley, Hopkins, and Walter Clift, there were two white

⁴⁹³ *SDNH*, Oct. 22, 1867; *SDR*, Oct. 22, 1867; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 254, 292. Conservatives hoped to derail this meeting the same way they had done to the September 30 rally, with another incident of “black on black” violence. On October 17, they brought Aaron Hurt, a black man from Columbus who travelled around the state on their behalf, to speak against the elections. Several blacks took the bait. Hurt was lured into the woods, beaten, and tarred and feathered by four or five black men. Three men were arrested: January Stewart, Charles Bland, and Moses Mossman, the man who had helped Bradley fight off the kidnappers a month earlier. The “Tar and Feathering Case” was a front-page item in the *Savannah News* on October 21.

Republicans—A. W. Stone and Isaac Seeley—and three blacks—Bentley, W. H. D. Reynolds, and Reverend James Stewart.⁴⁹⁴

The attempt to unite Republican forces was unsuccessful. Simms and other members of the Chatham County Republicans refused to have anything to do with Bradley. They announced their own slate, which included Simms, Stone, Houston, and Rice, but not Hopkins or Bradley. To counter “the present demoralized condition of the Republican party in the city,” Simms organized an election meeting in Chippewa Square with General Washburn. Only 300 blacks showed up for the meeting. When told that Washburn was not going to speak, the meeting dissolved. Noted the *Savannah Republican*, “Aaron [Bradley], himself, sat upon the park fence, kicking his heels, and enjoying the discomfiture of his political opponent. It was the greatest fizzle that has come under our notice.” Lacking significant support, the city’s Republican Party decided to forego running candidates.⁴⁹⁵

Concerned that the Bradley-Hopkins slate would be the only one in contention, the *Savannah Republican* called for the formation of “a pure white ticket, of respectable men.” A white slate was quickly cobbled together. Headed up by James Johnson, the ticket included Harris and Stone along with former Freedmen’s Bureau assistant commissioner Davis Tillson, who had set himself up as a planter in Liberty County.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ *SDR*, Oct. 22, 1867. When Stone begged off the ticket at the last minute, another prominent white Republican, Asa L. Harris, replaced him. Jacqueline Jones states that there were only two blacks on the Bradley-Hopkins slate, erroneously listing both Reynolds and Stewart as white. See Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 293.

⁴⁹⁵ *SDR*, Oct. 21 and 28, 1867; *SDNH*, Oct. 26, 1867.

⁴⁹⁶ *SDR*, Oct. 28, 1867; *SDNH*, Oct. 28, 1867.

Georgia's ruling class did its best to sabotage the elections. In Savannah and throughout the state, freedmen were told that if they voted they would lose their jobs and their homes. Intense pressure was also put on white workers and farmers to stay away from the polls. Whites who dared vote would be shunned as traitors to the race. Names would be taken. Economic consequences would be dire. Conservatives hoped that if the majority of those registered failed to vote, the convention would be cancelled and black suffrage repealed.⁴⁹⁷

In south Georgia, few whites voted. Many poor whites saw little at stake for them at the polls and stayed away. Others who favored the Republican relief program succumbed to the pressure exerted by the rebel ruling class and did not vote. But freedmen defied all the threats. A white Republican described the voting in Columbia County:

The negroes were obliged to go armed, and in many cases political meetings were broken up, and the negroes driven away. Had it not been for Gen. Meade's soldiers, there would have been no voting at all in many counties, and blood shed in many others. . . . Many stayed away from the polls through fear of the rebels, upon whom they depended for work, but great numbers have boldly, and in the face of death, marched up and deposited their ballots for freedom and republicanism. History furnishes us with but few instances of moral heroism like this.⁴⁹⁸

In Savannah, on the first day of the elections the *Savannah Republican* headline read "the Bradley ticket sweeps the field." Here is the description from the *Republican*:

Among the colored people the excitement has been raging for some time past, and crowds have assembled daily in front of the residence of Bradley, their God and religion, to receive tickets. On Monday there was a large gathering there all day, and as the evening advanced the colored people could be seen streaming down

⁴⁹⁷ O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 248.

⁴⁹⁸ Charles Stearns, *The Black Man of the South, and the Rebels; or, The Characteristics of the Former, and the Recent Outrages of the Latter* (New York: American News Co., 1872), 188. The man quoted by Stearns incorrectly identifies General Meade as the commander of Army troops during the elections. General Pope was in charge.

Broughton street, all on their way to obtain tickets from their prophet (not profit). Until late in the night they still kept coming after ballots, and when the day dawned yesterday they again were coming in still larger numbers.

On Monday evening the country voters commenced pouring into the city, and ere the night had far advanced an immense body has arrived. At daybreak yesterday every avenue leading to the city was filled with colored men, all making their way hither to deposit the precious ballot. Trudging along on foot, mounted on antiquated mules, seated in rickety carts – they came from all parts of the country. . . .

At daylight there was an immense crowd in front of the Court House, and when the doors were thrown open there were probably some three or four thousand present. It was an eager and excited crowd. Such a rush as was made at the opening of the doors is indescribable. They pushed and jostled and shoved one another, in the scramble to reach the goal of their hopes. They conversed with and advised each other. . . . It was a gala day to the blacks.⁴⁹⁹

This was no ordinary election, and these were no ordinary voters. These were men who had fought arms in hand to keep their land. Men who had braved economic and physical threats to be there. Men who had made a collective decision, and were now arriving in organized groups, ready to defend their votes and defend their rights.

At half-past-eight, fifteen hundred men from the Ogeechee “marched down Bull street in column,” with “sticks in their hand and tickets in their pockets.” At nine am, fifty or sixty more freedmen “tramped into Court House square.” Commented the reporter for the *Savannah Daily News*, “They were commanded by a person who wore a blacker coat, a blacker expression of face, and a blacker skin than the rest. . . . It was rather amusing to watch old darkies, with gray wool, tattered clothing and shaky step, pacing about like raw recruits, stick at shoulder arms, and eyes fixed.” Reporters also noted the “palsied, ignorant African, with a gorilla-like face, armed with a rod of iron” along with “three young blacks, evidently field hands, each bearing a short knotty club.”⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁹ *SDR*, Oct. 30, 1867.

⁵⁰⁰ *SDR*, Oct. 30, 1867.; *SDNH*, Oct. 30, 1867.

When asked what he was voting for, one freedman told the *Savannah Republican* “Bradley—he’s a great Massachusetts lawyer. He’s got forty acres of land for us, and mules. He knows what for us to do.” A day later, the newspaper reported that “with the continuance of the election the original demands have been increasing. Three hundred acres and two mules are to be provided by the Convention now.”⁵⁰¹

Bradley “paid occasional visits to the Court House where the colored men were very enthusiastic over him.” He “was here, there and everywhere, drumming up voters.” On the second day, “Bradley is working hard, and bringing in voters from all quarters.” Henry Eden was also very prominent in the streets, mixing it up with the freedmen and promoting the Bradley-Hopkins ticket. In a complete rebuke to the violence-baiting of the freedmen by the mayor and the Savannah newspapers, “the best of order prevailed throughout the day. The people seemed good behaved, and collected in little squads and talked together. . . . Not a single arrest was made during the day by the police.” Commented the *Savannah Republican*, “this has been altogether the quietest election ever held in this city.”⁵⁰²

Some conservative blacks resorted to more desperate tactics. On the first day of the elections, a “mulatto man” tried to scratch Bradley’s name from the tickets of freedmen arriving from the Ogeechee. The freedmen refused to be provoked and pushed him aside. Later he appeared at the courthouse “with about fifty followers.” In Effingham County, “a colored man, a member of the Board of Registration,” attempted to scratch Bradley’s name from the voting lists.

⁵⁰¹ *SDR*, Oct. 30 and 31, 1867. See also Capt. Henry Brandt to Maj. E. Deane, November 1, 1867, South Carolina, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872, Freedmen’s Bureau, RG 105, NA.

⁵⁰² *SDR*, Oct. 30 and 31 and Nov. 1, 1867.

Simms, for his part, “expressed his determination to vote the white ticket rather than swallow Bradley’s dose.”⁵⁰³

In a desperate move, on the fourth day of elections, state Superintendent of Registration Hulbert telegraphed his operative in Savannah to “put one or two leading anti-Bradley negroes on your white ticket and get out a full vote. We [must] have the colored vote.” With only a handful of whites voting, most of the votes for the “white ticket” came from conservative blacks.⁵⁰⁴

When the final results were announced, the Bradley-Hopkins ticket trounced the “white ticket.” Hopkins topped the ticket with 4,176 votes; all other members of the original ticket received 4,151 votes or more. The highest vote total for the white slate was that of James Johnson, who received 164 votes; Tillson got 158. Ninety-eight percent of voters selected the Bradley-Hopkins slate; only two percent chose the white ticket. It was an extraordinary victory for Hopkins, Bradley, and the most radical wing of the Republican Party in Savannah.⁵⁰⁵

The massive turnout of black voters in plantation Georgia, combined with heavy voting by whites in north Georgia, defeated the attempt of the rebel ruling class to sabotage the referendum. A majority of registered voters took part, so Georgia would hold a constitutional

⁵⁰³ *SDR*, Oct. 30 and 31 and Nov. 1, 1867.

⁵⁰⁴ Telegram, Hulbert to A. N. Wilson, November 1, 1867, Miscellaneous Letters Received, 1867-68 (No 5783), Bureau of Civil Affairs, 3rd Military District, RG 393, NA. Cited in Drago, “Georgia’s First Black Voter Registrars,” 787.

⁵⁰⁵ *SDNH*, Nov. 4, 1867. A. L. Harris was placed on the Bradley-Hopkins ticket late in the first day of voting due to the Amherst Stone’s belated withdrawal of his name from the list. Harris received 3,138 votes; Stone received 394 votes.

convention. The rebel boycott in south Georgia meant that a big majority of delegates to the convention identified themselves as Republicans.

Freedmen had extremely high hopes in the elections. One black man voting in Selma, Alabama summed it up well when he held his red ticket and shouted “Forty acres of land! A mule! Freedom! Votes! The equal of the white men!” Blacks believed that the Republican Party, the party which had defeated the slaveowners in the Civil War, which had emancipated them from slavery and given them the right to vote, was now going to complete the job by ousting the rebels who remained in power and giving them their forty acres and a mule.⁵⁰⁶

The men they elected to the constitutional convention had no such illusions. In north Georgia, yeomen and poor white Union Leaguers voted for planters, businessmen, and lawyers who supported relief measures. All of the Democrats and most Republican delegates elected from this region were opposed to blacks holding office. In Augusta, Macon, and older plantation areas, inexperienced black voters deferred to Radicals and black ministers who urged them to support white candidates. They elected a diverse mix of businessmen, carpetbaggers, planters, a few Radicals, even some opportunistic Democrats. On the coast, in Columbus, in southwest Georgia, and in a few other counties with strong Union Leagues and large black majorities, blacks elected men who had led them in struggle, men like Tunis Campbell of McIntosh County, Philip Joiner in Dougherty County, Charles Ashburn in Columbus, Hopkins and Bradley. Even though freedmen constituted an overwhelming majority of Republican voters, only 37 blacks were elected out of a total of 165 delegates. Leadership of Georgia’s Republican Party rested in the hands of ex-Whig politicians and businessmen from Augusta, Atlanta, and north Georgia.

⁵⁰⁶ *Selma Sentinel*, cited in *SDNH*, Oct. 31, 1867.

The task of the convention would not be an easy one. The nighttime attack on Bradley in September showed the willingness of the rebel ruling class to use any means necessary to maintain their power. The refusal of the courts to jail the perpetrators, followed by the joint attack of bluecoats and greycoats on the freedmen who supported Bradley, were omens of the battles which were to come.

12 NOVEMBER 1867–MARCH 1868: GENERAL MEADE, REPUBLICANS TURN AGAINST BRADLEY AND THE UNION LEAGUES

The elections of 1867 were a turning point for the Republican Party. In the South, the Radical program of suffrage for the freedmen and sanctions on the rebels had not worked as planned. Although Republicans had won a few ruling class figures to the party, the southern ruling class had largely boycotted the elections and become more defiant. The freedmen, on the other hand, far from being satisfied with voting rights, contested the planters in the fields, engaged in military exercises, and elected men like Bradley to the constitutional conventions. In the North, the Republican Party suffered a major setback in off-year elections in the important swing state of Ohio. Instead of the big victory they had expected, Rutherford B. Hayes, the Republican candidate for governor, won by a narrow margin, and a heavily promoted amendment on black suffrage lost by tens of thousands of votes. This followed a string of setbacks for the party in other northern and western states. Conservative and moderate Republicans blamed their electoral losses on the Radical wing of the party and its emphasis on black rights.

The elections “set the limits on reform in reconstruction” explains historian Michael Les Benedict. “They confirmed leadership of the party in conservatives. They convinced Republicans that radicalism was not a viable political creed.” The Army changed course in the South. Republicans would try to win over ‘moderates’ in the southern ruling class by going after the Union Leagues. There would be no more talk about confiscation, no leniency shown toward

protests in the fields or drilling. Contracts would be imposed. Radical Reconstruction was over. It had lasted barely eight months.⁵⁰⁷

In Georgia, the change was obvious in the Savannah area, where the radicalization and organization of the freedmen was the most advanced. Less than a week after the elections, Commander of the Army Ulysses Grant directed the “Commanders of Military Districts in the South to disband and suppress all armed military organizations, whether composed of negroes or white men.” Four leading Ogeechee planters and two prominent rice factorage firms promptly sent a letter to US Colonel Maloney and Mayor Anderson protesting the “armed military organization among the freedmen” along the Ogeechee. The freedmen, they said, vowed “to resist such rules and regulations as have been established by the contracts made with the approval of the Freedman’s Bureau, and to protect them in their own estimate of their rights, without regard to those of the landed proprietors.” The freedmen “are under the influence of the

⁵⁰⁷ Michael Les Benedict, “The Rout of Radicalism: Republicans and the Elections of 1867,” *Civil War History*, 18, no. 4 (December 1972), 344. There were a number of other reasons for Republican Party losses in the North and West. The recession of 1867 caused large-scale unemployment and wage reductions for workers and major hardship for midwestern farmers. Such conditions often lead to big losses for the governing party, and Republicans had been in power in most of these states for seven years. While leading Republicans opposed the eight-hour day movement, Democratic Party candidates opportunistically posed as friends of labor and farmers. In Connecticut, Democrats included support for the shorter working day in their program. According to David Montgomery, “clearly . . . the labor question tipped the party balance in 1867” in the state. In Ohio, Democratic candidate George Pendleton championed soft money (paying the bondholders with greenbacks) as the answer to farmers’ problems, which shifted votes to the Democrats in that state. See Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, 301; Irwin Unger, *The Greenback Era: A Social and Political History of American Finance, 1865-1879* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 84. See also Foner, *Reconstruction*, 307-16.

notorious demagogue Bradley,” the letter complained, “and are impressed with the belief that the lands are to be divided among them.”⁵⁰⁸

The planters alleged that there were “organized companies” on five plantations. The “commanding officer of this would-be army is named Solomon Farley . . . and is styled ‘general’ by the negroes.” Meetings were “frequent” and involve “most of the laborers (often attended by their families) in utter disregard of the directions of the planters and their overseers. . . . They are armed generally with muskets, the officers having swords, generally provided with ammunition and drums. . . . Drills take place nearly every night of late . . . and discipline is preserved by a system of fines which are rigidly enforced.”⁵⁰⁹

The letter received prominent coverage in the press. The *Savannah Daily News* called on the government to “suppress the movement at once.” The *Savannah Republican* claimed the negroes, under the leadership of “wicked” white and black “ring-leaders,” were buying arms and ammunition in preparation for an insurrection. Hayes argued that “all outrages upon colored people committed in this district for the past two years . . . were provoked and warranted under the circumstances.” The Radical Republican publication *The Nation* agreed with that sentiment. Bradley “and others of his sort,” said *The Nation*, were “low adventurers who constitute, perhaps, the very most odious class of demagogues now anywhere existing. . . . There is no denying that an appreciable part of the obstinacy of the Southern whites as regards reconstruction can be best accounted for by a consideration of the words and acts of men [like Bradley] . . . and

⁵⁰⁸ *SDR*, Nov. 11 and 15, 1867; *SDNH*, Nov. 16 and Dec. 10, 1867.

⁵⁰⁹ *SDR*, Nov. 11 and 15, 1867; *SDNH*, Nov. 16 and Dec. 10, 1867; *Albany Tri-Weekly News*, Nov. 26, 1867.

it is not very hard to justify that part of their [the whites'] action which can be so accounted for."⁵¹⁰

The planters' and factors' letter was a declaration of war by some of the richest and most powerful men in the Savannah area on the Ogeechee Union Leagues. The Leagues' crime was attempting to organize what amounted to a labor union. Armed with old muskets, they defended their union with training and guards. Using drilling as an excuse, the planters were demanding the US Army bust up the black workers' proto-union. Captain Henry Cook was sent to look into "matters connected with the formation of these military companies, and report to headquarters." It was the beginning of a months-long joint campaign by the Army and the planters to destroy the Ogeechee Leagues.⁵¹¹

At the same time as army troops were taking on the Leagues in the Ogeechee, South Carolina authorities were taking steps against rice workers on the other side of the Savannah River. These were the freedmen who, under Bradley's lead, had occupied plantations in January 1867. They were thrilled by Bradley's election to the Georgia convention. Most were registered to vote in the South Carolina referendum on November 19 and 20 in the town of Jonesville. Z. Haynes, the town's election manager, noted that "in this section of the state, every negro is armed & armed with muskets many of them new. Organizations are formed in different parts of this vicinity, and drilling with drums beating & flag flying." Worried by the freedmen's organization and enthusiasm, US Army Captain Brandt wrote his superior to "urgently

⁵¹⁰ *SDNH*, Nov. 16, 1867; *SDR*, Nov. 15, 1867; *Nation*, Nov. 21, 1867.

⁵¹¹ *Albany Tri-Weekly News*, Nov. 26, 1867.

[recommend] the employment of mounted men in his district as patrols to arrest disturbers of the peace and to maintain order.”⁵¹²

On the morning of November 19, “the negroes of the vicinity were out in force.” Haynes showed up, but the other election manager assigned to Jonesville did not. The freedmen called on Haynes to open the polls with the assistance of men who could read and write, but he declined. Haynes cancelled the vote on the 20th for the same reason. Denied their right to vote, the freedmen were understandably upset, and Haynes heard volleys of gunfire in anger.⁵¹³

Neither Haynes nor the army expressed any concern over the denial of the suffrage to thousands of registered black voters. But they were terrified by Aaron Bradley and the Union Leagues. In the days after the vote, Haynes heard that “some of the leading negroes on this side of the Savannah River went over to the city of Savannah to consult . . . Aaron Bradley.” Bradley allegedly told them that “they should have stripped Haynes and administered ‘a severe whipping’.” Being mindful of the “mutinous character of the negro population, & the utter inefficiency of the Freedman’s Bureau to suppress insurrectionary movement,” Haynes wrote a letter to General Canby asking for the US government to protect him “from the consequences of such incendiary teachings.” Captain Brandt was ordered to investigate the claim that blacks had guns at the election precinct, provide names of the “Principal offenders,” and report on the

⁵¹² *NYT*, Nov. 13, 1867; Z. Haynes to Gen. Canby, Nov. 30, 1867, S-109, H-69 1867, Letters Received, Dept. of the South, 2d Mil. Dist., RG 393, NA. In the Beaufort District, 934 whites were registered and 6,273 blacks.

⁵¹³ Haynes to Canby, Nov. 30, 1867.

“illegal advising of the freedmen” by Bradley. In addition to opposing collective bargaining, the Army was being used to repress blacks who insisted on their right to vote.⁵¹⁴

To confront the Union Leagues, several of the biggest Ogeechee plantations banded together under the unified command of former Confederate Major J. Motte Middleton. In December, Middleton tried to replace workers on the Grove Hill plantation with freedmen brought from a plantation he owned in nearby Bryan County. Led by Vice-President Jack Cuthbert, Union League members drove them off. “The League quotes Bradley as its authority,” said one newspaper account, “and refuses to allow any negroes to work in the neighborhood, save those who belong there.” Middleton complained to a Savannah judge, who sent a constable to arrest Cuthbert. As the constable was returning to Savannah with Cuthbert in tow, the men were intercepted by Union League President Solomon Farley and forty freedmen and Cuthbert was released. Captain Cook was once again sent to let the Grove Hill workers know that they were claiming rights “which no white man is bound to respect.” Cook “told them the State laws were paramount, and that they had no right to assume direction of the labor of the country.” If they broke any laws, “the military would support the civil officers.” There must be “no more picketing of roads or interfering with civil officers.”⁵¹⁵

For the rebel press, the most reviled and dangerous men were the scalawag “traitors” who, they argued, had turned the freedmen against their owners. While planters and the US Army were moving against Bradley and the Union Leagues, US Attorney Henry Fitch, a Johnson appointee, took on the job of ousting two of the most prominent native-born Republican

⁵¹⁴ Haynes to Canby, Nov. 30, 1867; H. Brandt to Major Edw. L. Deane, Dec. 23, 1867, Letters Received, A-E, 1866-1867, Image 256, Freedmen’s Bureau, Records of the Asst. Com., South Carolina, RG 105, NA.

⁵¹⁵ *SDNH*, Dec. 19, 1867; Brandt to Deane, Dec. 23, 1867; *GWT*, Jan. 3, 1868.

politicians in the state: Augusta mayor and postmaster Foster Blodgett, who was also chairman of the Executive Committee of Georgia's Republican Party, and Charles Hopkins.

To qualify for their positions as postmaster and federal tax collector respectively, Blodgett and Hopkins had had to swear that they had never willingly supported the Confederacy. In late November, Fitch brought cases of perjury against the two men before the grand jury in Savannah. In a letter to President Johnson, he acknowledged the political character of the cases. "The Radical party of the State was itself on trial and the leaders fully appreciated that fact," he noted. "The weal or woe of Georgia for many years depends in my judgment upon breaking the political prestige of these Official Radicals who if retained in office will command sufficient patronage to control the coming Convention."⁵¹⁶

The Republican as well as Democratic press launched a smear campaign against Hopkins. The Georgia correspondent of the *New York Times* slandered Hopkins as "an extreme Radical of the most vindictive and violent character," a man who "loves to express his desire to witness the hanging of all rebels, the confiscation of their estates and the beggary of their families. He contemplates with particular gratification the hanging of Mr. A. H. Stephens." *Savannah Republican* editor Hayes denounced Blodgett and Hopkins as dishonest men, "parasitical vines . . . who haven't the moral courage to confess their mistakes."⁵¹⁷

Hayes's slander of their father was too much for his sons, Robert, 19, and Charles Jr., 21, whose jobs were also on the line. On the day the article appeared, they entered the *Republican* office and whipped Hayes. They were arrested, charged with "assault with intent to murder," and

⁵¹⁶ Fitch to Johnson, Dec. 1, 1867, in Bergeron, ed, *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, Vol. 13, 276-77.

⁵¹⁷ *NYT*, Dec. 14, 1867; *SDR*, Dec. 14, 1867. The only element of truth in the *Times* correspondent's slanderous caricature of Hopkins was the latter's support for the confiscation of rebel estates.

jailed in the army barracks. Both men had trouble dealing with the stress of being the sons of the most reviled white Republican in the city. Days after his father spoke at the April 1867 rally, Robert accidentally shot and killed a young black prostitute, Anna Gardner, during a confrontation with a drunken intruder, Alexander Hardee, in the stairwell of his office. Though Hardee acknowledged that Robert had fired in self-defense, he was indicted for murder. The charge still hung over Robert in December. His sons' attack on Hayes was an additional burden for Charles Hopkins. As the *Savannah Daily News* pointed out, it "will heap odium on the assailants, injure still more the reputation they attempted to defend, and benefit, in the almost unanimous sympathy of the community, the individual they strove to injure."⁵¹⁸

Fitch's case against Hopkins was tenuous in the extreme. It was based on his running for the Confederate Congress in 1863 and speaking in favor of increased pay for Confederate soldiers. As one of the few well-known Unionists in south Georgia, Hopkins was stunned to find himself charged with violating the iron-clad oath. His opposition to secession and assistance to deserting rebel soldiers were widely known. Asked by the grand jury what he would have done had he been elected to the Confederate Congress, Hopkins told them he would have immediately crossed Union lines, taken his seat in the US Congress, and denounced the Confederacy.⁵¹⁹

Hopkins was required to post a \$10,000 bond to ensure his appearance for trial at the next term of the court. This was an enormous sum in 1867 and part of an attempt to squeeze him financially. But Hopkins had powerful friends in Savannah's ruling class. His surety bond was guaranteed by Edward Padelford, a cotton broker and former director of the Marine Bank; Hiram

⁵¹⁸ *SDNH*, Dec. 16 and 17, 1867; *WAI*, Dec. 25, 1867. On Robert Hopkins's accidental killing of Anna Gardner, see *SDNH*, April 8 and 9 and May 15, 16, and 17, 1867; *SDR*, April 9, May 16, and July 6, 1867.

⁵¹⁹ *SDNH*, Dec. 21, 1867; *New York World*, Dec. 7, 1867.

Roberts, president of the Merchants and Planters Bank and a former Savannah alderman; and David Dillon, an exchange broker and moneylender. These wealthy and powerful men had all opposed secession. Their backing of Hopkins was a good indication of support for the Republican Party by a small section of the ruling class in Savannah.⁵²⁰

Hopkins wrote to Senator Charles Sumner asking him to intervene. Reminding Sumner of his persecution during the war for his pro-Union activities and his flight to Hilton Head, Hopkins insisted that “if there was a loyal man in Georgia I was one.” His efforts were in vain. President Johnson suspended Hopkins from his post in late December. He was replaced by Lloyd Waddell, a former US Army Colonel and Ogeechee planter.⁵²¹

Far from promoting moderation, the backtracking of the Republican party encouraged the most reactionary forces in the rebel ruling class. A large number of former Confederate generals and other high-ranking officers had concluded that the radicalization of the freedmen could not be overcome through peaceful means alone. Several had bitter personal experience with their newly empowered black workers. After the war, General Nathan Bedford Forrest, a brilliant

⁵²⁰ *AWI*, Dec. 11, 1867; “Padelford”: Walter J. Fraser, Jr., *Savannah in the New South: From the Civil War to the Twenty-First Century* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018), 19 and 46, and Avery, *History of the State of Georgia*, 340; “Roberts”: Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 238, and William Harden, *A History of Savannah and South Georgia. Vol. 1* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1913), 397, 451; “Dillon”: Barry Sheehy and Cindy Wallace, *Savannah Immortal City. Volume I: Civil War Savannah* (Austin: Emerald Book Company, 2011), 197.

⁵²¹ C H Hopkins to Hon Charles Sumner, Dec. 19, 1867, Papers of Charles Sumner, Houghton Library, Harvard University. See also Hopkins to Sumner, Dec. 31, 1867 and Feb. 17, 1868, Papers of Charles Sumner, Houghton Library, Harvard University; Hugh McCulloch to Andrew Johnson, Dec. 26, 1867, in Bergeron, *Papers of Andrew Johnson, Vol. 13*, 364, 365.

Confederate military commander, returned to a cotton plantation he owned in Coahoma, Mississippi. In March 1866, he got into a fight with one of the freedmen he employed. The freedman wound up dead, and Forrest found himself alone in his house surrounded by his angry workers. He sold the plantation and moved to Memphis. General John B. Gordon, Georgia's greatest military hero, bought a rice plantation in Brunswick after the war. In the spring of 1867, a dispute over "how the rice should be cultivated" resulted in Gordon's overseer being driven from the field. The Freedmen's Bureau and soldiers had to be called in to resolve the dispute. Gordon moved to Atlanta.⁵²²

When Radical Reconstruction began, Forrest and Gordon joined the Ku Klux Klan, a secret organization based in Tennessee which called for using force and violence to counter the Union Leagues. Forrest agreed to lead the organization as grand wizard; Gordon would head up the Klan as grand dragon in Georgia. Military structure would impose discipline; secrecy would protect it from prosecution by US military or Republican authorities.⁵²³

This new political current first appeared at a meeting of "conservative" leaders called by Benjamin Hill which met in Macon in early December. The failure of the election boycott weighed heavily on the proceedings. The mood of many attendees, including Hill, was somber, "sadly suggestive of fallen fortunes and submission to usurped power." Major General Ambrose R. Wright, editor of the *Augusta Chronicle & Sentinel* and an ally of Gordon, offered a different perspective. "For the first time since the close of the war he was hopeful," Wright declared. The fight was on "for the great principle which underlies the foundation of this Government—that

⁵²² Jack Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 272-75; Allen P. Tankersley, *John B Gordon: Study in Gallantry* (Atlanta: The Whitehall Press, 1955), 234.

⁵²³ Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest*, 284-87; Tankersley, *John B. Gordon*, 249.

this is a white man's Government. Rouse! Rally and fight on this issue." Wright "urged the organization of clubs in every county—Conservative Clubs or Democratic Clubs, or whatever they should be called—and that every man should work in concert." Wright "held up the exemplary conduct of other Southern states [i.e. Tennessee] as examples to Georgians." Younger delegates spoke of organizing "secret hidden conclaves." The perspective of forming Democratic Party clubs to lead the fight for white supremacy and "kill radicalism" won the day.⁵²⁴

The new direction of the Democratic opposition was promoted in the rebel press. "We must organize our forces to meet Radicalism in every shape it may appear," intoned the *Savannah Daily News*, "to inflict upon it a deadly blow wherever it may raise its monstrous head." The newspaper called on the "young men especially" to "organize if you would not see your property pass into the hands of strangers . . . [T]ake full and instant part in this the battle for your very existence."⁵²⁵

Georgia's Constitutional Convention began on December 9. At caucus meetings on the first day, Hopkins was a top contender for convention president among Radical delegates and the leading choice of the black delegates. But there was never any doubt about the forces leading the convention. Augusta Mayor Blodgett opened the convention by insisting that "[l]abor and capital should be friends. The convention should be wise, just and moderate." Relief for white property-owners, he said, was the convention's top priority. The next day, north Georgia lawyer J. R. Parrott was elected president.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴ *SDNH*, Dec. 9, 1867; *NYT*, Dec. 10 and 11, 1867; *GWT*, Dec. 13, 1867.

⁵²⁵ *SDNH*, Dec. 6, 1867.

⁵²⁶ Candler, *Confederate Records*, Vol. 6, 200; *WAI*, Dec. 11, 1867; *SDNH*, Dec. 10, 13, and 14, 1867.

Though Hopkins and Bradley sometimes sat together, they approached the convention very differently. Hopkins understood that the future of Reconstruction in Georgia depended on the strength of the Radicals in Congress and on the willingness of the state's army commander to defend democratic rights. The loss of his tax assessor job showed the weakness of the Radicals in Washington. He also had to take account of the huge political differences within Georgia's Republican Party, the extreme and growing hostility of the state's ruling class, and the volatility of the situation in Savannah as demonstrated in the breakup of Bradley's September 30 meeting. Hopkins decided early on to use his considerable experience to overcome divisions, make whatever compromises were necessary to ensure that the convention adopted a progressive constitution, maintain the closest possible relations with the state's army commander, and work for a Republican victory in the upcoming election. He was appointed to several of the most important standing committees at the convention, including those on the Bill of Rights, corporations, finance, and relief.⁵²⁷

Bradley, on the other hand, saw himself as the spokesperson for the revolutionary-minded freedmen in Savannah and throughout the state. They wanted fundamental change. It was due to their votes that he and the other Republican delegates were in Atlanta. There was also a strong element of personal redemption in his massive election victory in Savannah. Speaking at the September 30 rally, Bradley explained that "it was of the utmost importance that young and intelligent lawyers, like himself, should be members of the convention, because they were the only persons who understood the legal meaning of words."⁵²⁸

⁵²⁷ *Christian Recorder*, Dec. 28, 1867.

⁵²⁸ *SDNH*, Oct. 1, 1867.

Bradley urged the convention to revolutionary action: “Congress had decided there was no legal government in the state. It was illegal and void. . . . These laws were pigmies in our hands to crush in our hands as we choose—stretching out his arms full length and opening and shutting his fingers—we can make them or unmake them at our pleasure.” No one seconded his plea. Bradley treated convention rules with contempt and refused to await acknowledgement from the chair before speaking. He spoke early and often, raising points of order, offering opinions on every conceivable subject. He interrupted other speakers and could be particularly sarcastic toward other black delegates.⁵²⁹

Bradley’s prominent role in the convention worried Republicans. The *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* counseled Bradley to be “both modest and graceful, not to say wise and prudent, . . . to allow the white gentlemen present to perform this work. . . . One unwise member of the race may create a prejudice against the whole.” It didn’t take long for white delegates’ opposition to Bradley and other black delegates to come to a head. On the seventh day of the convention, Bradley proposed an ordinance “to prevent discrimination by common carriers on account of color.” If Georgia did not have such a law, he said, it “would bring on war.” Taking the floor immediately after Bradley, George Burnett, a conservative Republican who had been the largest slaveholder in north Georgia before the war, introduced a resolution declaring that the territory of the US and Georgia were “secured by the white man, whose laws were created by the white man, and over whose destinies the white man shall preside.”⁵³⁰

⁵²⁹ *SDNH*, Dec. 15, 1867.

⁵³⁰ *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, Dec. 16, 1867; *GWT*, Dec. 20, 1867; *Report of the Joint Select Committee*, Vol. 7, 950; *New York Herald*, Dec. 22, 1867. Emphasis added.

“It was a bombshell,” noted the *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*. Several white delegates applauded Burnett. Black delegates rose to have Burnett’s remarks expunged from the *Journal of the Convention*. The uproar was quickly extinguished, but the issue of white supremacy was now before the delegates, and it had been placed there by a self-proclaimed Republican. It did not bode well for the future of the convention.⁵³¹

Another bombshell dropped days before the Christmas break was to begin. Governor Charles Jenkins and his cabinet had long maintained that the Military Reconstruction Acts, the elections, and the Constitutional Convention were illegal. When convention delegates requested that the state pay convention expenses, Georgia Treasurer John Jones refused. This was no small matter. The convention could not go on without finances. Black delegates and many white delegates could not continue paying for rooms in expensive Atlanta hotels. The convention went into recess and members returned to their homes in disorder. The conservative press was jubilant. “The Great Unconstitutional will never meet again. . . . Thank God, that dog’s dead,” crowed the *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*.⁵³²

The fragility of the convention and Georgia’s Republican Party was fully exposed. They were totally dependent on the federal government and the US Army. Was the convention even going to be able to reconvene in January? Hopkins fired off letters to Sumner, Stevens, and Senate leader John Sherman demanding their aid. “The struggle of the union men here is a hard one,” he wrote Sumner, “and unless Congress supports them their cause and the cause of reconstruction must go down in another rebellion.” He told Stevens that “unless Congress affords

⁵³¹ *GWT*, Dec. 20, 1867.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, Dec. 27, 1867.

the delegates to the Constitutional Convention immediate relief we shall all be compelled to leave the State. . . . Our only hope is in Congress—for God’s Sake protect us.”⁵³³

With the coming of the new year, both the freedmen and the rebel ruling class prepared for the confrontations to come. Despite the recent arrest of Jack Cuthbert, the Ogeechee League held a meeting and parade on the Grove Hill plantation at Christmas and sang “Union Forever.” On January 1, Savannah freedmen and unionists celebrated the fourth anniversary of emancipation in style. To the beating of drums, thousands of freedmen marched to the dedication ceremony of the Beach Institute, a new freedmen’s school. Contingents of Union League branches from Savannah and the rice fields paraded with flags, streamers and banners. Black fire and axe companies marched and marshals rode on horseback, with women and children in the rear.⁵³⁴

After the dedication, some 2,000 assembled at a meeting ground south of Forsyth Park. A banner proclaimed the themes: “Relief. Universal Suffrage. Homestead. No Imprisonment for Debt.” Master of ceremonies Moses Bentley encouraged the audience “to not sign any contracts for the coming year unless they contained an express provision that, on all election days and on days when political meetings were to be held, the laborer should have a holiday.” Bradley was the featured speaker. He proposed double taxation on untilled land, which would force the owner to sell it or cede it to the state. He asserted the right of blacks “to ride in cars and sit at meals with whites.” He denounced imprisonment for debt: “Think of how many votes the stone wall

⁵³³ C H Hopkins to Hon Charles Sumner, Dec. 31, 1867, Papers of Charles Sumner, Houghton Library, Harvard University; Palmer, ed, *Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens*, Vol. 2, 339-40; *SDNH*, Jan. 15, 1868.

⁵³⁴ *SMN*, Jan. 27, 1869; *SDNH*, Jan. 3, 1868; *SDR*, Jan. 4, 1868. The *Savannah Daily News and Herald* changed its name to the *Savannah Morning News* in September 1868.

over there [the prison] had deprived us of.” He promised to fight for these demands in the Convention. Hopkins proclaimed his support for universal suffrage “as long as there was a drop [of blood] in his body.” The rally was “orderly and good natured” with no trace of violence.⁵³⁵

Hayes wouldn’t let matters rest there. Having succeeded in provoking a violent reaction by the Hopkins brothers to the slanderous article he wrote two weeks earlier, he tried to elicit a similar response from Bradley. In his article on the meeting in the *Savannah Republican*, he rendered Bradley’s speech in demeaning dialect: “bruderins and sistern: I am wid you once again. I has been to Atlanta” The mocking continued for several paragraphs.⁵³⁶

On the day the article appeared, Bradley passed Hayes on the street and casually remarked: “Hayes you were rather hard on me this morning.” Itching to provoke a fight, Hayes responded: “You remember you are talking to a gentleman, you damned n___r son of a bitch. If you speak to me again I’ll put a bullet through you. I would just as soon shoot you as a skunk.” It was the kind of insult guaranteed to infuriate Bradley. He returned later that day to the *Republican* office, accompanied by six or eight supporters. With his hand on a gun in his breast pocket, Bradley shouted: “Hayes come out here. You threatened to put a bullet though me. Now come out and see if you will do it.” Hayes had what he wanted. He immediately swore out a warrant, accusing Bradley of threatening him and inciting a mob, and Bradley was arrested.⁵³⁷

The next day, “an immense crowd of negroes assembled in and about” Mayor’s Court for the trial. Bradley acted as his own counsel. Hayes did not deny that he had threatened to shoot

⁵³⁵ *SDNH*, Jan. 3, 1868; *SDR*, Jan. 4, 1868.

⁵³⁶ *SDR*, Jan. 4, 1868.

⁵³⁷ *SDNH*, Jan. 4 and 9, 1868. The January 9th article affirmed that these were Hayes’s exact words as reported by an eyewitness.

Bradley first. Bradley pointed out he had permission from Judge Russell to carry a pistol after his attempted kidnapping in September. Witnesses testified Bradley never drew his gun, nor was there any riot. But there was to be no impartial justice in this mayor's court. Anderson rejected the testimony of Bradley and his witnesses. Bradley, Anderson said, was "a man of revolutionary and incendiary character, who had been continually stirring up trouble." He sentenced Bradley to a fine of \$100 or 30 days in jail.⁵³⁸

Bradley was marched to jail, initially accompanied by 300 to 400 blacks. The crowd continued to grow and soon the police were completely surrounded by blacks. Some of the women in the crowd shouted that Bradley must be freed, and that "if the men were not armed, they were, and would help to do the work." A confrontation was only averted when Hopkins drove up, "talked with the crowd and advised them to go back." Bradley's skillful court appearance, the massive response by the freedmen to his sentence, and Hopkins's role in averting a riot paid off. A day later, Bradley's fine was paid and he was released from jail.⁵³⁹

The *Savannah Daily News* blamed Hayes for not shooting Bradley. The *Savannah Republican* lamented that Bradley's release "cannot but be regarded as a complete triumph of the Bradley and Hopkins party." News of Bradley's jailing, trial, and release made headlines across Georgia and around the country. Soon "Bradley was about the streets, driving a fast-going team, and seemingly of double his former importance in the colored world."⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁸ *SDNH*, Jan. 4 and 7, 1868; *SDR*, Jan. 7, 1868; Bradley deposition, Jan. 31, 1868, file E-13, Entry 5738, Letters Received, 3rd Military District, 1867-1868, RG 393, Part 1, NA.

⁵³⁹ *SDNH*, Jan. 7 and 8, 1868; *SDR* Jan. 7 and 8, 1868.

⁵⁴⁰ *SDNH*, Jan. 8, 1868; *SDR*, Jan. 9, 1868; *NYT*, Jan. 7, 1868; *Edgefield Advertiser*, Jan. 15, 1868; *New York World*, Jan. 13, 1868.

The rebel ruling class was also active. In southwest Georgia, planters hired half as many workers as they had the year before, and they cut wages in half for those they hired. In January and February 1868, Klan attacks spread in Tennessee. Klan-inspired actions were launched against Republicans and blacks in several regions of Alabama. The rapid growth of the Klan in neighboring states deeply impacted Georgia. “Democrats organized in January and February of 1868 with a thoroughness and determination which contrasted strikingly with their apathy of the previous fall,” notes Nathans. “From Greensboro to Hawkinsville to Albany, Dawson, and Fort Gaines, white men revived local chapters of the Democratic Party,” notes O’Donovan. “They also whetted their blades and loaded their rifles.”⁵⁴¹

The new Democratic clubs did not reflect a rise in racism among poor and yeomen whites. They were organizations of Georgia’s ruling class to counter the Union Leagues and the Republican Party. Pulaski County was typical of the counties where a new club was formed. “The meeting that organized the Committee of Seven was presided over by former slaveholders and secessionists and Confederate officers,” notes historian Mark Wetherington. They were “the same conservative planters and town professionals who had spearheaded the secession and war mobilization movements in 1861.”⁵⁴²

Pope had fallen out of favor with Republicans as well as Democrats with his call for tougher measures against Georgia’s ruling class. Over the holidays, he was replaced as

⁵⁴¹ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 252, 254-55; Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Ku-Klux: The Birth of the Klan during Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 64-68; Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest*, 294; Nathans, *Losing the Peace*, 81-82. Nathans could not understand the reason for the growth of the Georgia Democrats, attributing it to “some obscure process.” On the Klan in Alabama, see Fitzgerald, *Union League Movement*, 200-33.

⁵⁴² Wetherington, *Plain Folks Fight*, 256, 273-74.

commander over the Third Military District by General George Meade. This was a consequential change, similar in impact to President Johnson's ouster of Saxton and appointment of Tillson in 1865. Once again, a military commander who leaned in the direction of the freedmen gave way to one who leaned in the direction of the planters. Like his immediate superior, General Grant, and other conservative Republicans, Meade believed that Republicans in the South had alienated "the intelligent and active population, the whites," with their radical policies and militant black supporters. Concessions had to be made to "insure a larger proportion of what must be the governing class" remained in charge of the state.⁵⁴³

Meade would make this change in direction known soon after his arrival in Atlanta. Unable to convince Governor Jenkins and the state treasurer to pay convention expenses, Meade removed them from office and installed Brigadier General Thomas Ruger as governor. Lest this extraordinary step be interpreted by Republicans as the prelude for a wholesale ouster of Georgia state officials who opposed Reconstruction, Meade issued an order outlining his view of the proper relation between the army and civil authorities.

Meade's General Orders No. 10 began by noting "the frequency of reported outrages, and the accompanying expression of opinion of subordinate officers, that no justice is to be expected from the civil authorities." He made it clear that this was not his position. "The trial and punishment of criminals," he insisted, "is to be left to the civil authorities." He desired "to impress on the officers under his command the exercise of a sound discretion and good

⁵⁴³ *SDNH*, Apr. 3, 1868 (quoting a letter from Meade to Grant); Meade to Brevet Major General John A. Rawlins, Oct. 17, 1868, in Report of Major General Meade's Military Operations and Administration of Civil Affairs in the Third Military District and Dept. of the South (Atlanta: 1868), 86. For Meade's long ties with Grant, see William S. McFeely, *Grant: A Biography* (W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 1982), 156-59.

judgment. *It is his determination to afford the civil authorities every opportunity to discharge their duties untrammelled by any action on the part of the military, but such as they, the civil authorities, may invite and desire.*” It would be up to the Major General Commanding, i.e., Meade himself, to determine what action to take if the civil authorities did not perform their duty.⁵⁴⁴

Two days after Meade issued General Order 10, Freedmen’s Bureau agent O. H. Howard posted a notice to the freedmen in Albany, Georgia. He warned freedmen who were “refusing to make contracts . . . awaiting some action of the Convention now in session in Atlanta which will better your condition.” Those who advise you not to make contracts, he said, will not feed and clothe you. Bureau agents, “as officers of the United State Government, . . . tell you that you should go to work at once.” Bearing in mind “the distressed condition of the planters here,” Howard promised to get for the freedmen “the best contracts possible.” “If you do not contract now,” he threatened, “it is more than likely . . . that you will not be wanted and cannot get employment.”⁵⁴⁵

Meade’s insistence that the military defer to the planters and to the rebels in charge of city and county government—a policy supported by Grant and the national Republican Party—had devastating effects on the freedmen. In February, Ogeechee freedmen “refused to accept the

⁵⁴⁴ *Report of Major General Meade’s Military Operations*, 91-92. Emphasis added. Meade’s policy paralleled that of General Winfield Hancock, who replaced General Philip Sheridan in Texas and Louisiana. See Detlev F. Vagts, “Military Commissions: The Forgotten Reconstruction Chapter,” in *American University International Law Review*, Vol. 23 (Issue 2, 2007), 245-46.

⁵⁴⁵ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 252; “O. H. Howard “To the Freedmen in the Sub-District of Albany,” January 17, 1868, Letters received, Dec 1867-Apr 1868, Image 499, Freedmen’s Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872, Georgia, RG 105, NA. See also *GWT*, Jan. 31, 1868.

contracts Middleton offered them, which only gave the freedmen a one-third share of the crop instead of the half share they thought they deserved.” In response, Middleton dismissed a large number of workers, including Farley, and banned meetings of the Union League. When the fired workers refused to leave, Captain Hoag sent a detail of US soldiers to arrest Farley. The alliance of the Army with the planters succeeded in crushing the League. There were no further meetings or drilling in the Ogeechee in 1868.⁵⁴⁶

Under General Pope, when employers refused to abide by the terms of contracts with the freedmen, Sibley allowed agents to seize and sell their property and pay the freed people. But General Meade, according to black leaders Philip Joiner and Robert Crumley, “would allow no property sold only by *his* order, and his order was rarely ever obtained.” Meade’s policy of reliance on the civil courts had similarly disastrous consequences. In southwest Georgia, “crime against freed people at once became more frequent and more aggravated.” “We have information of 46 cases of murder or attempted murder against freed people from the 1st of January 1868, to 24th of March, 1868, in the 15 counties [of southwest Georgia],” said Joiner and Crumley, “all of which were brought to the notice of bureau agents, and in no case was the white criminal subjected to any punishment either by civil or military authority.”⁵⁴⁷

Over the holiday break, black and Radical delegates to the convention were made aware of the desperate economic situation facing freedmen and the escalating threats of violence from

⁵⁴⁶ *SMN*, Jan. 20 and Jan. 26, 1869; Bryant, “Surrounded on all Sides,” 71; Bell, “Ogeechee Troubles,” 385; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 304-05; *Evidence before the Committee on Reconstruction Relative to the Condition of Affairs in Georgia* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1869), 37, accessed Sept. 4, 2020 at <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112047597106>.

⁵⁴⁷ “Condition of Affairs in Georgia,” 93. Italics in original.

the newly formed Democratic/conservative clubs. Tensions were particularly acute in the industrial city of Columbus. In addition to its large black population, the city was a center of white working-class discontent. A Mechanic's and Workingmen's Ticket had won the municipal elections in October 1863, shocking the city's ruling class. The Republican Party in the city was led by George Ashburn, a native-born Georgian who had joined the Union army during the war. The only lodging Ashburn could find in his own hometown was in a black-owned boarding house, earning him the sobriquet "stinkee" in the rebel press. His second-in-command was a white workman. Democrats feared that the Republicans' relief proposals would win support from the city's white workers.⁵⁴⁸

When the convention reassembled, Ashburn complained that conditions for Republicans in Columbus "could only be appreciated by someone who has been in hell a few days." With Meade's removal of Georgia's governor and replacement by a Union general in mind, he proposed that the convention remove disloyal men from the "enemy's strongholds at Savannah, Macon, Atlanta, and Columbus. . . . The enemy cannot be vanquished until routed from his fortified positions. Let us do this and turn his own guns upon him." Offices would be filled by supporters of Reconstruction.⁵⁴⁹

Ashburn's proposal polarized the convention. Blacks and Radicals supported Ashburn, as did the businessmen of the Augusta ring, who owed their municipal offices to Pope. North Georgia Republicans and Democrats were strongly opposed. They saw it as an attempt by the Augusta Ring to use their slim majority in the convention to place themselves and worse yet,

⁵⁴⁸ See Virginia E. Causey, *Red Clay, White Water, and Blues: A History of Columbus, Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), Chapter Two.

⁵⁴⁹ *SDNH*, Jan. 16, 1868; *GWT*, Jan. 17, 1868; Candler, *Confederate Records*, VI, 389.

Radicals and black men, in office prior to the elections. Convention President Parrott insisted that “the measure the gentleman [Ashburn] seeks to accomplish had not been recommended by Wilson, Kelley, Chase, or even Thad. Stevens, or other Republican leaders.” Opponents referred to Meade’s General Order 10 to counter Ashburn’s proposals. “General Meade was invested with sufficient authority to remove any official who may have acted illegally,” insisted Parrott. “It was not the proper course to say turn out all the officials because they were opposed to reconstruction.”⁵⁵⁰

A split of the equally divided convention over Ashburn’s proposal was narrowly avoided. Hopkins helped the convention come up with the face-saving compromise. During the Christmas break, he had written Republican Senate leader John Sherman pleading for help. Sherman replied that “Congress will unquestionably do all that is necessary for your protection. *If additional legislation is needed, state what it is, and it will be furnished.*” Sherman’s note became the basis for a resolution calling on Congress to authorize the convention to vacate state offices and fill them with supporters of Reconstruction. The impotence of the convention was apparent. Georgia Republicans could only take steps against rebel control of local government if the US Congress or US Army agreed to help, and such help was not forthcoming. Equally ominous, opposition to Ashburn’s proposal brought together the Brown wing of the Republican Party with the Democrats, a white ruling class bloc born under the aegis of General Meade.⁵⁵¹

Aaron Bradley also took note of Meade’s ouster of Governor Jenkins. While Ashburn’s proposal was being debated, he circulated a petition demanding that Meade remove “the Mayor of the city of Savannah and the aldermen, as cruel and unjust rulers.” Over the holiday break he

⁵⁵⁰ *GWT*, Jan. 17, 1868; *SDNH*, Jan. 17 and Jan. 24, 1868.

⁵⁵¹ *SDNH*, Jan. 15 and 24, 1868. Emphasis added.

had gathered information on the conditions facing black prisoners in the Savannah jail. His former bodyguard Moses Mossman, who had been jailed in the fall of 1867, told Bradley stories about the suspicious deaths of two cellmates after treatment by a prison doctor, of a black woman brutally beaten by guards, of four black men jailed for months after being exonerated of murder charges by a Union general. Bradley's petition cited these cases as well as Anderson's refusal to try the men who had attacked him in September. The petition was signed by Isaac Seeley and fifteen black delegates. The convention adopted a proposal by Tunis Campbell that Bradley's petition be sent immediately to General Meade.⁵⁵²

The threat to the Democratic Party stronghold of Savannah was quickly picked up by the media. The *Atlanta Weekly Opinion* noted that "the term of the present Mayor expired in October last, and he only continues to exercise the functions of his office by the sufferance of the Military authorities of the Third District. . . . [B]oth the Mayor and the Chief of Police resigned positions in the US Army and Navy at the beginning of the war" and were therefore unable to fill the positions they occupied if new elections were held.⁵⁵³

Something had to be done to undermine Bradley. On January 18, an article in the *Atlanta Intelligencer* noted that Bradley had served two years in Sing Sing after being convicted of a felony. George Burnett, the conservative Republican who had championed white supremacy in December, cited the *Intelligencer* article to propose an investigation into the facts of Bradley's trial and imprisonment. Delegates immediately recognized the seriousness of this charge. If

⁵⁵² *GWT*, Jan. 24, 1868; *SDNH*, Nov. 16, 1867 and Mar. 3, 1868.

⁵⁵³ *Atlanta Weekly Opinion*, Feb. 4, 1868. See also *SDR*, Jan. 31, 1868. White voters had reelected Anderson to a one-year term as mayor in October 1866.

Bradley was a convicted felon, it could be sufficient grounds to expel him from the convention. A committee of seven was selected to investigate the charges.⁵⁵⁴

Support for Bradley's petition by convention delegates forced Meade's hand. But instead of simply ousting Anderson, as Bradley had hoped, Meade set up an army board of inquiry in Savannah to investigate Bradley's charges. It was anything but a neutral body. The board was headed by Brevet Colonel Malony. He and the two other officers on the panel had spent the previous months trying to tamp down freedmen's unrest on the Ogeechee rice plantations, unrest widely attributed to Bradley. Upset by this turn of events, Bradley told the convention that "[i]f the military commander . . . don't give Savannah relief within one month, more than three thousands persons will relieve themselves." It was an empty threat, similar to his remarks in the printshop before the September 30 rally. The *Savannah Daily News* denounced Bradley's comment as "a threat of insurrection" while expressing confidence that the military authorities would maintain order.⁵⁵⁵

With his status in the convention in question, Bradley stayed in Atlanta. He hired a radical white lawyer, J. S. Powell from Lee County, to prosecute the charges against Anderson. Hopkins, hopeful for a positive outcome at the tribunal, decided to go to Savannah. He informed Meade of his decision. Meade had worked closely with Hopkins on convention finances. Concerned that the response of the freedmen to the panel's investigation might get out of hand, Meade encouraged Hopkins to "address the negroes [in Savannah] on the issues of the day."⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁴ *AWI*, Jan. 18, 1868; Candler, *Confederate Records*, VI, 428-30.

⁵⁵⁵ *GWT*, Jan. 31, 1868; *SDNH*, Jan. 29, 1868.

⁵⁵⁶ *SDR*, Apr. 6, 1868; *SDNH*, Feb. 6, 1868; Candler, *Confederate Records*, VI, 469, 477. When the convention reconvened in January, Hopkins informed delegates that he could arrange a loan of \$40,000 for the use

Hopkins's hopes in the tribunal quickly faded when Anderson submitted his response to Bradley's allegations. Mossman's two cellmates had died of cholera. The female prisoner's allegations of mistreatment had already been investigated by a military board and declared groundless. The prisoners held for months were state prisoners, the city having nothing to do with their case. As for the men charged with assaulting Bradley, their case was dismissed because Bradley did not show up in court on time. Although prison conditions were indeed terrible, Bradley's allegations were little more than prison gossip, indefensible in a court of law. When the Board of Officers announced their verdict on Bradley's charges against Anderson at the end of the hearings, they predictably "discovered nothing sustaining the charge of malfeasance in office preferred against the Mayor."⁵⁵⁷

Hopkins hoped to refocus the freedmen's desire to change conditions in the jail and oust Anderson from the tribunal to the upcoming municipal elections. On the evening of February 3, he addressed a boisterous gathering which Bentley called "the largest assemblage I have ever seen" in the New Street church. Hopkins and Eden encouraged the audience to attend a rally the next day in Chippewa Square which would kick off Hopkins's campaign for mayor of Savannah.⁵⁵⁸

of the convention. His proposal to negotiate a loan was adopted. However, northern lenders wouldn't extend funds until a new government was in place, so Hopkins worked together with Meade and Brown to find some other solution to the problem. In mid-February, Meade disbursed some money to the members and officers of the convention. It amounted to about \$100 per member for three months of work. See *SDNH*, Jan. 13, 16, and 23, 1868; *NYT*, Feb 22, 1868.

⁵⁵⁷ Testimony on Charges against Anderson, Jan.-Feb. 1868, File E-13 1868, RG 393 Part I, Entry 5738, Letters Received, Third Military District, 1867-1868, NA; *SDNH*, Mar. 3, 1868.

⁵⁵⁸ *SDR*, Apr. 1 and 6, 1868; *SDR*, Feb. 6, 1868; *SDNH*, Feb. 7, 1868.

Anderson saw an opportunity to strike a blow at his likely Republican opponent for the mayoralty. In October he had posted a notice requiring twenty-four hours' notice before any "public political meeting." Though Hopkins had the go-ahead for public meetings in Savannah from Meade and US Army Colonel Emory, he apparently neglected to notify Anderson. On the afternoon of the fourth, as a crowd was beginning to gather in Chippewa Square, Anderson declared the rally "forbidden as contrary to existing military orders and the proclamation of the Mayor." One thousand to fifteen hundred blacks along with a few whites left the square and reassembled at the New Street church. Hopkins spoke inside the church, telling the audience that he "hoped the day was near at hand when every prison door would be opened and their inmates let free."⁵⁵⁹

Outside the building, Eden was reading a "long placard . . . to the crowd of blacks around him." Police Chief Robert Anderson, Mayor Anderson's nephew and a former Confederate Brigadier General, ordered Eden's arrest for "disorderly behavior." After arresting Eden, he announced that the meeting was banned. If that didn't suffice to stir up the crowd, the *Savannah Daily News* reported that "a negro drew and brandished a pistol, and called on the crowd to resist, telling them to shoot the damned police." Shots were fired and the Andersons had the riot they were looking for. Police arrested 26, including Eden, Bentley, and at least three black women.⁵⁶⁰

Though there was no hint of violence either at the park or at the church prior to the arrest of Eden, the *Savannah Daily News* headlined its article "Negro Riot and Bloodshed." "The course of the police force was characterized by great forbearance," the editorialist insisted, "and

⁵⁵⁹ *SDNH*, Oct. 23, 1867, Feb. 11 and Mar. 3, 1868; *SDR*, Feb. 8, 1868.

⁵⁶⁰ *SDNH*, Feb. 5 and Feb. 11, 1868.?

had it not been so a second New Orleans massacre might have been the result.” The *Savannah Republican* blamed the violence on the “evil influences and machinations of the notorious Hopkins and his vicious crew of disreputable black and white followers.” Police Chief Anderson’s report called Hopkins “a foe to the peace and good order of this community” who should be arrested. Articles on the “riot” appeared in the *New York Times* and other newspapers.⁵⁶¹

Meade’s support saved the day for Hopkins and his supporters. Mayor Anderson was forced to remand all charges relating to the February 4 events to military authorities and Hopkins returned to Atlanta. The military returned a split decision. Colonel Maloney and the Savannah Board, noting that Hopkins had not received official permission for the meeting, concluded that the measures of the police were “justifiable.” Meade disagreed. In General Orders No. 32, he insisted that “if the meeting proved quiet and orderly, it should have been allowed to proceed undisturbed.”⁵⁶²

In Atlanta, Bradley was becoming increasingly unhinged. The hearings on his charges against Mayor Anderson in Savannah were going badly. Anderson was arresting his supporters

⁵⁶¹ *SDNH*, Feb. 5 and 6, 1868; *SDR*, Feb. 6, 1868; *NYT*, Feb. 5, 1868. What actually happened to provoke the police assault on the Republican meeting on February 4 will never be known. It is possible that some undisciplined black man pulled a pistol. If so, he could well have been an agent provocateur working with the police, similar to what happened at Bradley’s September 30 meeting. It is also possible the story of a black man threatening the police was pulled out of thin air. Savannah’s daily newspapers made no pretense of objectivity. For Mayor Anderson, the Democratic Party, the police, and the Democratic press, Republicans were responsible for all acts of violence which took place. The only thing certain in this and similar incidents is that the city authorities used the occasion to beat and imprison pro-Republican blacks.

⁵⁶² *Columbus Weekly Sun*, Mar. 3, 1868.

in Savannah, and Middleton and the Army were dealing blows to the rice workers in the Ogeechee. Worse still was the convention committee's investigation into his seduction conviction in New York and his imprisonment in Sing Sing. Serving time in jail on such a charge was, for Bradley, the ultimate humiliation. It was simply not something he could accept or admit. Feeling isolated and alone, he lashed out in ever more irrational and emotional ways.

During a discussion on relief, Bradley "made a speech in which he knocked the arguments of all other speakers on the subject of relief into *smash*." He appealed to the anti-Yankee sentiments of the white southerners who were bringing the charges against him. "He looked upon the original owners of the land as superior to the New York speculator, because when the Southern man became the friend of the colored man he stood up bold and firm, but the Yankee . . . stooped his head and looked and sneaked around." Many of the Yankees, said Bradley, "come from their low dens of infamy in the North, and from the houses of correction, Sing Sing, and such like." Hoping for sympathy on account of his mixed race parentage, he attacked the reporter of the *Atlanta Intelligencer* for referring to him as "Bradley negro, falsely so called because he is not a negro." "He hurled the most gross abuse and the most violent and flagrant sarcasm" at convention delegates, commented the reporter, "and by his general demeanor showed an utter disrespect for the community at large."⁵⁶³

With Bradley rattled and even Radicals turning against him, Burnett decided the time was right to bring in his minority report from the committee investigating Bradley's past in New York and Boston. He produced a statement from the City Clerk of Brooklyn attesting to Bradley's conviction for seduction and time served in Sing Sing, along with a statement from the

⁵⁶³ *SDNH*, Feb. 6, 1868. Emphasis in original. See also *SDNH*, Feb. 10, 1868.

Superior Court of Suffolk verifying Bradley's disbarment for malpractice in 1856. Burnett moved to expel Bradley from the convention on the grounds of his "criminal conduct."⁵⁶⁴

The committee majority, which included Bryant, Whiteley, and Costin, argued that "there is no law fixing any qualifications for membership in this body, except the act of Congress of 2d March 1867." "It is true that act prescribes conviction for felony at common law as a disqualification of a voter," they noted. But "seduction is not felony at common law; nor is simple seduction felony by the laws of Georgia. It appears to us that this Convention would be adopting a dangerous rule to prescribe guilt of any offense a disqualification for a seat." Then they added the kicker: "Perhaps half of the members of this Convention, as well as that of 1865, are held by the United States to have been guilty of treason. It is true they have been pardoned, but we greatly doubt if the pardon is at all necessary to make them eligible. This Convention has, without doubts, power to expel a member guilty of a serious crime whilst a member; but we are not clear that it can . . . go behind the vote of the people and expel him."⁵⁶⁵

Henry Turner, the most conservative black delegate and a man whom Bradley had treated with disrespect on more than one occasion, addressed the larger issues posed by the attempt to oust Bradley. He began by dealing with the charge of seduction. Bradley was sentenced by "a negro hating Judge and Jury, and New York has but a few others," insisted Turner. "If seduction was felony everywhere else under heaven it should not be in negro-killing, Democratic, copperheaded, and viper-tongued New York, where vice has no bounds, and licentiousness no safeguards, save the wildest forms of prostitution." Bradley was sentenced at a time when he was

⁵⁶⁴ *Augusta Daily Constitutionalist*, Feb. 11, 1868.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

“not a citizen,” but rather “a mere chattel, and the New York courts had no more right to try him than it had to try a horse.”⁵⁶⁶

“What right have you to go back into the dark and brutal days of slavery and recall the lives, and rights or wrongs, of slaves who were only responsible to the will of a master?” Turner asked. If anyone “was to move that a negro should have a single right, that white men should respect, some presses in Georgia would have the unconscionable audacity, to call it revolutionary in its purposes, and infamous in its character.” “I thank God from the bottom of his heart that the South did rebel, that she fought to the bitter end, and then I thank and laud God’s holy name, that she was subjugated, whipped, and humbled in the dust. Had not this been done, my race would not have been freemen and citizens today.” While he wanted no “vindictive measures” against southerners, “are there not members of this very convention today whose garments are dripping with the blood of the nation’s defenders?”⁵⁶⁷

“What right have you to take the people’s representatives and absolve their connection” with the convention, Turner asked. “When a man who received the largest vote likely of any other man in the house is assailed by presses whose hate and venom can find no equal on earth, members rise up and clamor for his blood. Savannah today is surcharged with the lava of riot and revolution.” “Take care that his constituents do not rise in the majesty of their strength and indignation, and either demand his return, or thunder in terrible fury, and hurl frightful missiles at this body.”

As for what the future held, Turner’s predictions would prove remarkably prescient. “If Mr. Bradley is expelled, I give notice that several more will be called upon to prove their right to

⁵⁶⁶ *Augusta Weekly Constitutionalist*, Feb. 19, 1868; *SDR*, Feb. 14, 1868.

⁵⁶⁷ *Augusta Weekly Constitutionalist*, Feb. 19, 1868.

seats on this floor, for I fear very seriously, that this is only the entering wedge that is destined to split our convention tree in twain.” “If [blacks] are inferior by nature, why fear us, why not be willing to leave us free, unfettered, and untrammelled. Why bleat over the country so much about negro rule, war of races[M]en who talk thus, I believe, are preparing to kill negroes themselves.”⁵⁶⁸

In conclusion, Turner urged the delegates to “let us rise above all personalities in this case. Let us act with Mr. Bradley the same as if we did not think he had been bothersome, sarcastic, satiric, insulting, abusive, dogmatical, foppish, or whatever fault you may charge him with. . . . There is too much at stake. . . . This is a life and death case, and let our action in the affair be well considered, thoroughly digested, impartially weighed in the balances of commiseration, and let each one retrospect his own life.”⁵⁶⁹

It was a remarkable speech and was so recognized even by the conservative press. “No man of the present day has ever seen its like,” exclaimed the reporter of the *Atlanta Intelligencer*. “No more eloquent effort has ever been made by any one man,” “this worthy advocate of his race.” The speech was printed in whole or in part in the *Intelligencer*, the *Augusta Weekly Constitutionalist*, the *Savannah Republican*, and other Democratic papers.⁵⁷⁰

A man in his right mind would have realized that after the committee majority statement and Turner’s speech, a majority of the delegates were prepared to vote against Bradley’s expulsion. A man in his right mind would have understood that hypocrisy and racist prejudice lay behind his conviction for seduction in 1850 and subsequent prison sentence. But Bradley was

⁵⁶⁸ *Augusta Weekly Constitutionalist*, Feb. 19, 1868.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

not in his right mind. He denied all the charges and demanded his right to be heard by the convention. Then he fell for a ruse, one planted by the very men who had conspired to oust him.⁵⁷¹

Shortly after the committee began its investigation, Bradley received an anonymous letter. The letter writer claimed that other men in the convention were guilty of a similar offense. “There is one delegate in the Convention who . . . seduced his wife’s sister, and got a child by her,” said the anonymous correspondent. “If they try to expel you, bring this up—call upon them to expel all who have seduced negro and white women too.” The writer said that President Parrott knew about this delegate and named four Cartersville men who could testify to the truth of the allegations. Bradley brought the letter to north Georgia Republican leader Henry Farrow, who said he would investigate the charges.⁵⁷²

When it came time to defend himself before the delegates, Bradley declared that “I have a letter, which I could not find this morning, involving the delegate from Gordon [County] and the President of the Convention, and their families in a like offense. I do not wonder at the gentleman’s being nettled, but he should not murder me. I am not the man!”⁵⁷³

As one newspaper reporter put it, Bradley had “murdered himself.” His slanderous attack on the convention president and Leander Trammell, a prominent conservative lawyer from Gordon County, completely reversed the mood in the convention from Turner’s magnificent oration the day before. Bullock criticized Bradley’s “outrageous insinuations and charges” as “the malicious mouthings of an irresponsible person” and proposed his expulsion. It was a step

⁵⁷¹ *Augusta Daily Constitutionalist*, Feb. 11, 1868; Candler, *Confederate Records*, VI, 555.

⁵⁷² Candler, *Confederate Records*, VI, 577-82; *SDNH*, Feb. 15, 1868.

⁵⁷³ *SDNH*, Feb. 15, 1868.

too far even for those blacks who had supported Bradley a few days earlier. Henry Turner regretted “that one of my race should so far lose his rational balance, I am compelled to acquiesce in his expulsion.” Delegate Holcombe threatened Bradley: “If that creature had spoken of me as he has done of others in this hall, he would be a dead nigger right now.” Hopkins remarked that “this matter would end in bloodshed.” Bradley was expelled from the convention by a vote of 130 to 0.⁵⁷⁴

Bradley’s ouster was applauded in Democratic and Republican newspapers nationwide. The editorialist in the pro-Brown *New Era* newspaper made it clear that the real target of the ouster was not Bradley himself, but those freedmen who supported him. “At last this worthless and brawling negro has been expelled from his seat in the Convention,” said the article. “Now let him be ejected from the State. . . . While he is impotent to do evil among the intelligent classes of people, his gift of gab, his wily, scheming and perverse nature makes him a dangerous creature among those whom he can lead.”⁵⁷⁵

Bradley’s inability to acknowledge his seduction conviction and imprisonment in Sing Sing had led to his disbarment in Boston in 1856. It played the same role in his ouster from the Atlanta convention 12 years later. But the stakes were much higher in Georgia than they had been in Boston. Earlier in the month, political differences among Republicans led to the murder of a Radical delegate, a former officer of the Freedmen’s Bureau, by the secretary of the white Union League in Fulton County. Commented the *Weekly Constitutionalist*, “It is generally thought here that this rumpus is a declaration of war between the two antagonistic factions of

⁵⁷⁴ *SDNH*, Feb. 19, 1868; *Loyal Georgian*, Feb. 15, 1868; *Georgia Journal & Messenger* (Macon), Feb. 19, 1868; *Augusta Weekly Chronicle & Sentinel*, Feb. 19, 1868; Candler, *Confederate Records*, VI, 578-79.

⁵⁷⁵ *New Era*, Feb. 13, 1868.

Georgia radicalism, one wing led by Bullock and the other by Farrow.” A New York correspondent noted that “the bitterness of feeling between the Radicals and the Conservatives of all shades is becoming greater every day.”⁵⁷⁶

Bradley’s ouster from the convention put wind into the sails of the conservative Republican and Democrat bloc. The day after his expulsion, a Democratic delegate moved to strike out the section of the constitution making blacks eligible for office. This was the most divisive issue in the convention. For black and Radical delegates, it was their top priority. They agreed to support mortgage and debt relief, issues which affected relatively few blacks, precisely in order to win support from north Georgia Republicans for blacks’ right to hold office. Ex-Governor Brown, on the other hand, was categorically opposed. In a lengthy speech at the reopening of the convention, he told delegates that “[y]ou bring both Congress and the Republican Party into odium in the State when you go further than Congress has gone and confer upon the negroes the right to hold office and to sit in the jury box in their present condition, and you misrepresent nine-tenths of the white men who belong to the reconstruction party of the State.” Brown offered some words of advice to the black delegates: “If you are colored men, you had better be content to take what Congress has given you. You should trust to the wisdom of the conquering Government that made you free and *not attempt to grasp more than it has given you, lest perchance, you should lose all.*”⁵⁷⁷

That evening, thirty-nine Democrats met in caucus. The majority advocated withdrawing from the convention if the black office-holding provision was included in the constitution.

⁵⁷⁶ *Milledgeville Federal Union*, Feb. 18, 1868; *Augusta Weekly Constitutionalist*, Feb. 12, 1868; *Augusta Weekly Chronicle & Sentinel*, Feb. 12 and 19, 1868; GWT, Feb. 14, 1868.

⁵⁷⁷ *Daily New Era*, Jan. 11, 1868. Emphasis added.

Brown seized the moment. In a lengthy speech to the caucus, he argued against withdrawing from the convention. Instead, he urged the Democrats to use all their influence to defeat the constitution if the section on black eligibility for office passed. The caucus eventually agreed to Brown's strategy.⁵⁷⁸

The Republican caucus met after the Democrats had adjourned. Brown attended that meeting also. He informed the Republicans about the decision of the Democrats and urged them to change course. He stoked their fear that adopting the clause ratifying black office-holding would result in a defeat of both the constitution and Republican candidates in the upcoming election. Bradley's absence was keenly felt. Although Bryant, Akerman, and some black delegates "resisted the concession to the last," the caucus finally agreed to drop the clause, with the hope that even without it blacks would be allowed to take office.⁵⁷⁹

The next day, the provision guaranteeing black office-holding was stricken from the constitution by a vote of 125 to 12. Hopkins, most Radicals, and all but three black delegates voted to remove it. It was a stunning reversal. *New York Times* correspondent "Stone Mountain" noted that "two days ago no one could have expected that the majority would ever have agreed to strike out the tenth section of the franchise article of the Constitution Some new counselor behind the scenes must have been at work, who is a far more astute and skillful manager than any of those who undertook at first to direct the proceedings of the majority."⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁸ Candler, *Confederate Records*, VI, 596; *NYT*, Feb. 18 and 21, 1868. Democrats claimed to have the support of another 10 or 12 delegates who could not be present at the caucus.

⁵⁷⁹ *NYT*, Feb. 21 and 22, 1868; *Dawson Journal*, Mar. 5, 1868.

⁵⁸⁰ Candler, *Confederate Records*, VI, 598-99; *NYT*, Feb. 22, 1868. Section 10 read: "All qualified electors . . . shall be eligible to any office in this State."

It was Brown's convention now. Black delegates had given up the thing they wanted most: a guarantee of their right to hold office. "From being uncompromisingly and arrogantly radical and reliant on their numerical superiority on the floor," the Republicans "have become pliant, yielding and conciliatory, apparently anxious to remove rather than create obstacles to harmonious action," noted the *Times* reporter.⁵⁸¹

Georgia's new constitution included a few progressive measures. Delegates passed the "relief" plank the Republican leadership wanted for the elections, exempting \$2,000 in real estate and \$1,000 in personal property from levy and sale. Imprisonment for debt was banned, whipping as punishment was prohibited, and support was given for a public school system for all children. But the convention also mandated a poll tax to support the schools, which would be used "to disfranchise thousands of freedmen who could not afford to pay it." Other measures were adopted "making it unlikely that blacks would ever be voted into state offices." Judgeships were to be appointed, rather than elected, and "all state officials except the governor were to be elected by the General Assembly." Summing up the convention, a *New York Times* reporter said that "there has been more Conservatism and less Radicalism in the action of the Georgia Reconstruction Convention, than in that of any other State." "We got a constitution," Brown later boasted, "which soon placed the State under the permanent control of the white race."⁵⁸²

⁵⁸¹ *NYT*, Feb. 22, 1868; Candler, *Confederate Records*, VI, 715-22.

⁵⁸² *NYT*, Mar. 4, 5, 13, 16, and 17, 1868; *SDNH*, Mar. 10, 11, and 12, 1868; *Georgia Weekly Opinion*, Mar. 17, 1868; Drago, *Black Politicians and Reconstruction*, 43-45.

13 MARCH–APRIL, 1868: THE COUNTERREVOLUTION STRIKES THE FIRST BLOWS IN THE APRIL ELECTIONS

The convention's adoption of a new state constitution set the stage for the next step towards Georgia re-entering the Union. Meade called for an election on April 20 to vote on the constitution as well as to elect a governor, members of Congress and the state legislature, and various other positions.

Republicans were confident of an election victory. The debt moratorium, mortgage relief, and public school provisions in the new constitution were designed to win the vote of poor and yeomen whites. Their support for black suffrage guaranteed the vote of almost all blacks. To win the support of moderate Democrats, they had done their best to curb all traces of "Radicalism": ending support for the Union Leagues, clamping down on the freedmen's drilling and protests in the fields and in the streets, expelling Bradley from the convention, adopting a constitution with no provisions for blacks holding office or blacks on juries, and repudiating proposals to remove county officials or adopt harsher restrictions on rebel voting rights.

Having adopted his program, Brown and his allies finally joined the Republican Party. The most important posts were divided among the bourgeois leaders of the party in Augusta and Atlanta. Bullock was nominated for governor. Brown, Parrott, and Farrow supported Bullock's nomination in return for promises of high office.

Freedmen remained confident that the election of a Republican state government would improve their lot in life. They continued to mobilize in large numbers. But the atmosphere had changed since the November 1867 ballot. The conservative shift of the Republican Party, combined with the intensification of repression in the countryside and towns, had diminished expectations. With no more hope of confiscation, there was less clamor for forty acres and a mule.

The air no longer hummed with the sound of drilling and military exercises. Meetings, while still large, were smaller and more restrained than they had been the previous year. Freedmen continued to mobilize to protest murders of black leaders and police brutality. But the Union Leagues as alternate sources of power, acting on many fronts, had been replaced by elections as the focus of all black hopes. Many Leagues had disappeared, replaced by pro-Bullock or Republican committees.

Led by Charles Hopkins, Savannah Republicans united behind the party program. Bradley now shared the stage with James Simms, who had refused to vote for the Bradley slate six months earlier. Simms was the publisher of a new Republican newspaper in Savannah, the *Freemen's Standard*, which reflected the views of middle-class black leaders. The newspaper was critical of blacks being jailed on vagrancy charges and opposed police disruption of peaceful political meetings.

Hopkins was the main orator at a mass meeting on March 14. He “spoke of the reforms he would make after his election—in the reduction of taxes—the doing away with badges.” Tunis Campbell held the new constitution of Georgia in his hand during his speech. Bradley was master of ceremonies. He proudly proclaimed himself “a Radical of the deepest (black) dye. You are told that he is a Wauhoo, a nigger, a stirrer up of strife and confusion. This is the man you have nominated to represent you in the State Senate.” At a Union League meeting in late February, he promised “that ere long the reign of police clubs and police authority would be abolished, and a blow struck which would stun even a policeman.” The meeting nominated Dr. Clift as the Republican candidate for US senator, Bradley for state senate, Charles Hopkins for

mayor, Simms and James Porter for the state legislature, Charles Hopkins Jr. for tax collector, and Robert Hopkins for tax receiver.⁵⁸³

The hopes of party members were reflected in a letter Hopkins wrote to Charles Sumner announcing his nomination for mayor of Savannah, a city he called the “*Fort Fisher* of the South.” “There can be no permanent peace in this State so long as this stronghold is in the hands of our *enemies*,” Hopkins explained. “We are advancing slowly, but *surely* upon *them*. Hostility between the opposing parties is intensifying every hour. . . . Should I be elected *Mayor*, we intend to *invite* you to visit Savannah.”⁵⁸⁴

Savannah Democrats paid little heed to the more moderate tone of the city’s Republicans. They worked to create an atmosphere of crisis. “The seditious teachings of the Bradley, Hopkins and Clift incendiaries,” blared the *Savannah Republican*, have made the “naturally docile” freedmen “desperate and intractable.” “They would see our homes laid in ashes and our streets run in gore.” A big conservative rally March 24 was billed as “the meeting to save our city.” Businessmen closed their shops and escorted their employees to the rally site. In contrast to Republican meetings, the mood at the Democratic rally was “solemn.” The key speakers were former high-ranking Confederate officers. This “assemblage of wealth and intelligence” assailed their Republican opponents as “men of no property—idlers and adventurers,” “vultures,” “ravenous worms,” “swarms of locusts.” “Do they possess capital?” asked General Jackson. “Put

⁵⁸³ *SDNH*, Feb. 28, Mar. 17, and Apr. 20, 1868; *SDR*, Feb. 13 and 17 and Mar. 17, 1868; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 307. Bradley now proudly claimed the title of “Wauhoo” originally pinned on him by Hayes and the *Savannah Daily Republican*.

⁵⁸⁴ C H Hopkins to Hon Charles Sumner, Mar. 19, 1868, Papers of Charles Sumner, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Emphasis in original.

them in power, and what becomes of the credit of Savannah? They will bring ruin and starvation upon you.”⁵⁸⁵

The *Savannah Advertiser* called on its readers “to drive out of employment, and if possible, out of the city, all men, white or colored, who vote the Republican ticket.” This was no idle threat. As an article in the *National Republican* explained,

nearly the entire colored population are employed by Democrats. It is safe to say that there was not one employer in twenty five of this class that did not notify his or her employees that if they voted the Radical ticket they could eat no more of their meat and bread. The merchant was notified that ... he would receive no more patronage. The white mechanic was threatened with dismissal, and persons refused to speak to—and if they did speak, it was only to bitterly curse—those who were known to favor reconstruction.⁵⁸⁶

Rebel hardliners knew that economic sanctions were not going to be enough to prevent the freedmen and many poor whites from voting Republican. The freedmen were not cowed. They remained intent on fundamental changes in the system. The most far-sighted ruling class leaders understood that, no matter how moderate the Republican program or candidates, if the Republicans came to power at the state, city and county level, the freedmen and poor whites—the base of the party—would be emboldened, and would continue to exert pressure for fundamental change. Tennessee methods were what was required. Black organizations had to be broken up, their moderate leaders terrorized and forced to step down, their drill leaders and militants killed or driven out of the state, all hopes of fundamental change obliterated.

⁵⁸⁵ *SDR*, Mar. 23 and 25, and Apr. 1, 1868; *SDNH*, Mar. 25 and Apr. 15, 1868; *Augusta National Republican (ANR)*, Apr. 8, 1868. Dr. Clift noted that the speakers at the Democratic rally were the “identical men who carried the State out of the Union.” See *SDR*, Mar. 27, 1868.

⁵⁸⁶ *SDA*, Apr. 2, 1868; *ANR*, May 6, 1868.

Given the go-ahead by Forrest in a March visit to Atlanta, young Democrats posted Ku Klux Klan handbills in Atlanta, Columbus, Macon, Augusta, and Savannah. “The dark and dismal hour will soon be here. Some live today; tomorrow die,” read their Savannah poster. In Columbus, Klan signs with death threats were posted on the houses of Charles Ashburn and other prominent Republicans. The simultaneous appearance of the handbills in Georgia’s biggest cities indicated that this was a state-wide operation, one prepared over a considerable period of time. The young men posting the placards were from rebel ruling class families: the sons of doctors, lawyers, businessmen, planters, and elected officials. Democratic newspapers reprinted the handbills and wrote articles extolling the actions of the Klan in Tennessee. “The Ku-Klux troops are very fond of negro meat,” exulted the *Savannah Republican*, “and the Great Grand Beef Major has just issued ten days’ rations of Union Leagues, which destroyed the Radical majority in two whole counties [in Tennessee].”⁵⁸⁷

The initial response of Republicans to the Klan threat was a strong one. The *Augusta National Republican* advised readers to meet Klansmen with firearms. Republicans in Columbus were defiant: “We have before passed through the fires of the vigilance Committees, and will go on in doing our duty in spite of General Forrest and his rascally followers.” Bradley circulated a handbill notifying “all BAD Men of the City of Savannah, who now threaten the lives of all the LEADERS and NOMINEES of the Republican Party, and the President and Members of the Union League of America. If you Strike a Blow,” your houses “will be burned to the ground.” In response, the *Savannah Daily Advertiser* warned Bradley to “recollect that there are a good many rifles and revolvers lying quiet in Savannah. . . . Bradley, recollect that the K.K.K. may be

⁵⁸⁷ *Atlanta Daily Intelligencer*, Mar. 14, 1868; *Atlanta Daily New Era*, Mar. 18, 1868; *SDNH*, Mar. 30, 1868; *SDR*, Apr. 1, 1868.

nothing after all, but the action of an incensed and outraged community. Bradley, recollect that you are creeping on the edge of the crater of a volcano.”⁵⁸⁸

In Columbus, the threats Democrats had been making for months against Charles Ashburn—the “stinkee”—moved from words to deeds. On March 31, hours after he and Turner spoke at a large and enthusiastic Republican rally in the city, Ashburn was assassinated by a large group of poorly disguised white men. Any Republican hope in “normal” elections was over. A new period of counter-revolutionary violence had begun.⁵⁸⁹

There was no mystery about the identity of the assassins. Columbus Army Captain William Mills reported to Meade *on the day of the crime* that it was committed by “the better class of citizens.” Within days Mills had identified and arrested leaders of the mob. They included the chairman of the executive committee of the Democratic Party in the city, the Democratic candidate for clerk of court, merchants, a lawyer, the chief of police, and at least two policemen. Mills noted that “good citizens are accessory to this outrage, and I cannot trust any civil authority.”⁵⁹⁰

A short time later, five young Democrats exploded a keg of dynamite beneath the courthouse in Valdosta while Dr. Clift, the Republican candidate for US Congress, was speaking to a large, mainly black audience. The assailants included the son of a Confederate state senator, a deputy sheriff, a merchant, and a doctor’s son. Though no one was killed, those fleeing the

⁵⁸⁸ *ANR*, Mar. 29, 1868; *SDNH*, Apr. 2, 1868; *SDA*, Apr. 2, 1868.

⁵⁸⁹ *SDA*, Apr. 2, 1868; William Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South: Race and Remembering in the Civil War’s Aftermath* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 94-96.

⁵⁹⁰ *Major General Meade’s Report on the Ashburn Murder* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1868), 6, 9-10, 100-01.

explosion were “fired upon by a gang of white men outside, who had surrounded the building.” Meade had the young men arrested and imprisoned in the military barracks in Savannah.⁵⁹¹

The coordinated Klan actions and the killing of a leading white Republican prompted Meade to action. He wrote to Grant: “I regret to report that within the last ten days a spirit of disorder and violence has manifested itself in both this State and Alabama. Anonymous placards and letters threatening the lives and property of Union citizens have been circulated. The assassination of Mr. Ashburn is the first murder, though there have been reported several cases of lynching.” He requested more troops to maintain order. The significance of Ashburn’s murder was recognized by northern Republicans. In an article on the assassination titled “Political Murders in the South,” the *New York Times* noted that “there is abundant reason for supposing that it may and will be repeated, more or less generally, throughout the Southern States. In this view of the case, the occurrence seems to us one of very great importance.”⁵⁹²

Both Meade and Grant agreed on the urgency of bringing the culprits before a military tribunal as soon as possible. Meade issued General Orders No. 51 blaming the assassination of Ashburn on the actions of “a secret organization . . . which seems to be rapidly spreading” in Georgia and Alabama. He directed military and civil officers to “organize patrols” and arrest all persons using “the secrecy of the night for executing their criminal purposes.” The Order forbid

⁵⁹¹ “The Booby Clift Affair in Valdosta,” Ray City History Blog, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://raycityhistory.wordpress.com/2018/10/06/the-booby-clift-affair-in-valdosta/>.

⁵⁹² George G. Meade to General U. S. Grant, April 4, 1868, in *Meade’s Report on the Ashburn Murder*, 8-9; *NYT*, Apr. 7, 1868.

newspapers and printers from printing any articles or papers “tending to produce intimidation, riot, or bloodshed.”⁵⁹³

Meade’s prompt arrest of the perpetrators and the threat of an army crackdown put Democrats on the defensive. Terrorist violence was not only opposed by freedmen and white workers and yeomen. It was also opposed by many leaders and supporters of the Democratic Party. The Democratic press denounced Ashburn’s murder, but insisted that the arrested men had nothing to do with it. They argued that Ashburn was murdered by his own low-life associates. They recast the Valdosta bombing into a “negro riot,” with the bomb being set off by Clift. Georgia’s “Grand Cyclop” posted an announcement in the Democratic press denouncing the “vicious” placards posted by “spies, traitors . . . and other unprincipled wretches.” The Klan, he said, was a purely “peaceful and charitable” organization.⁵⁹⁴

The killing of Ashburn gave the Army and the Republican Party a golden opportunity to stop the Klan and similar forces in their tracks. The Klan was at its very early stages of development. Decisive Army action against the Klan and paramilitary forces organizing in southwest Georgia and elsewhere could have dealt them a body blow. Georgia Republicans could have organized defense guards or a state militia and pressed for a united front of Democrats and Republicans against terrorist violence.

But Meade’s crackdown did not extend beyond Columbus and Valdosta. No new troops were sent. Nor did Georgia Republicans rally their forces against terror and in support of Ashburn. Republicans North and South were too invested in their strategy of concessions to elite

⁵⁹³ *SDNH*, Apr. 7, 1868.

⁵⁹⁴ *SDNH*, Apr. 2, 10, and 15, 1868; *SDR*, Apr. 4, 1868; *Augusta Weekly Chronicle & Sentinel*, Apr. 15, 1868.

southern whites to change course. The *New York Times* spelled this out. Some, said the *Times*, favored a stepped-up military intervention to crush the perpetrators. But, the *Times* argued, the situation couldn't be solved by force. The problem was that the whites "comprise the great bulk of the brains, the enterprise and the energy of the Southern States." They were upset by black crimes against whites, by the Loyal Leagues and the threat of "negro supremacy," and did not accept the new constitutions. The government must "consult the feelings of the disaffected and discontented among its people [i.e., the well-to-do whites], and yield to them so far as it can with justice." During the previous twelve months, the paper had spelled out the concessions it thought proper: end all restrictions on former Confederates, disband the Union Leagues, "impartial" (i.e., restricted) suffrage for blacks.⁵⁹⁵

The major Republican newspaper in Georgia, the *Augusta National Republican*, urged calm. The Republican Party, it said, "will bide its time patiently and peacefully, unless the necessity for self-defence becomes too urgent." "Let the good and honest men—the lovers of peace—the supporters of law and order, come out from among the foul faction," pleaded the paper. "[I]f the Republican party is not now what they think it should be, make it by their adhesion what it ought to be." Two leading conservative Republican newspapers in the state did their best to distance themselves *from the victim*. "We make no defense of Ashburn," noted the *Atlanta Daily New Era*. "His faults were many." We "persist in expressing the conviction that no

⁵⁹⁵ *NYT*, Apr. 7, 9, 11, and 13, 1868. Link mistakenly argues that the *Times* "favored military intervention as a response." See Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South*, 97. For positions similar to those of the *Times*, see *The Nation*, Apr. 9, 1868, and the *New York Journal of Commerce* article on the Ku Klux Klan reprinted in *SDNH*, Apr. 7, 1868. The *Philadelphia Press*, one of the most prominent Radical Republican newspapers, viewed the impeachment of President Johnson as the solution to the problems of the South. See *NYT*, Apr. 7, 1868.

true-hearted Southern gentleman was engaged in the crime.” The *Georgia Weekly Opinion* went further, asserting that Ashburn was “a fanatic in politics, wholly wanting in integrity and a beast in morals.” There were no Republican rallies called to denounce Ashburn’s murder, no public statements by Bullock, not even a presence of leading Republicans at his funeral.⁵⁹⁶

The assassination of Ashburn was an acid test for the Republican Party. A party which cannot defend itself, its members and leaders has no future. If nothing else, the instinct of self-preservation should have kicked in. The Republican Party nationally and its new Georgia affiliate failed the test.

Meade added fuel to the fire. He vetoed the candidacy of Judge Augustus Reese, a moderate, as the gubernatorial candidate of the Democratic Party because Reese couldn’t take the test oath. With Reese out of the picture, the Democratic Party leadership, under heavy pressure from the youth and rebel hardliners, proposed Georgia Klan leader John Gordon for governor. Days after Ashburn’s assassination, Meade gave Gordon, Grant’s travelling companion in 1865, his okay.⁵⁹⁷

It was a fateful decision. A renowned Confederate army general, the head of the Georgia Klan, was now the gubernatorial choice of the Democratic Party. Republican newspapers, which had nothing good to say about the martyred Ashburn or Aaron Bradley, saluted Gordon’s

⁵⁹⁶ *ANR*, Apr. 7, 1868; *Atlanta Daily New Era*, Apr. 4, 1868; *Georgia Weekly Opinion*, Apr. 7, 1868. See also the article on “Moderation” in *Atlanta Daily New Era*, Apr. 3, 1868.

⁵⁹⁷ *Augusta Weekly Chronicle & Sentinel*, Apr. 15, 1868.

nomination. Brown praised him as a “gentleman and a good fighter.” The *Opinion* announced its support for Gordon for governor.⁵⁹⁸

Gordon presented himself as the friend of the “colored people of Georgia.” A letter which he had sent to the Trustees of the Colored School in Brunswick in 1867 favoring black schools was reprinted in Democratic newspapers across the state. Repudiate the “carpet-bag adventurers” and follow “the counsels of such men as General Gordon,” the *Atlanta Intelligencer* advised the freedmen, and you “may become a prosperous people.” Columbia County Republican Charles Stearns noted that “[b]arbacues’ were everywhere held and the colored people were invited to sit down and eat with the whites if they would only promise to vote the democratic ticket. Various sums of money were also offered the negroes on the same conditions.”⁵⁹⁹

Behind this liberal façade, Gordon gave the green light to the paramilitary forces within Georgia’s Democratic Party to strike at the party’s political opponents. His first major speech as gubernatorial candidate on April 2 began with a salute to the Confederate soldiers, men “bound together by the higher and holier ties of associations of the recent past . . . a glorious and an immortal past.” Who was responsible, he asked, for the problems they were having now, this time of “trouble and misfortune?” Not the black man, who stood by our families when we were at war. Not the Union soldiers, “the brave men that met us in the field” of battle. “The men who

⁵⁹⁸ Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 41; *ANR*, Apr. 10 and 23, 1868; *Atlanta Daily New Era*, Apr. 3, 1868.

⁵⁹⁹ *SDNH*, Apr. 11, 1868; Stearns, *Black Man of the South*, 203-04. For a similar appeal, see the “Address of the White People of Greene County, Georgia, to the Colored People of the same County” in *SDNH*, Apr. 7, 1868.

seek to oppress us were never in the army—never smelt gunpowder,” Gordon insisted. They were men “who deserted us in the hour of gloom and disaster.”⁶⁰⁰

The first name on Gordon’s list of traitors was a “man from our sister city (Savannah). I will not tell his name, but will say that it commences with H-o-p and ends with k-i-n-s, who, in conversation with a gentleman whom he thought a Radical, said that ‘we are going to fix things so that we will keep possession of all the offices for a long number of years’.” Hopkins and Georgians like him, said Gordon, were using universal negro suffrage for “the retention of power.” “Have nothing to do with them.” “If you are against me,” he concluded, “I must and can but regard you as an enemy to me, to my people and my State.”⁶⁰¹

Two days after the murder of Ashburn, Gordon placed Charles Hopkins at the top of the rebels’ hit list. As his campaign manager, he chose Georgia’s leading irreconcilable, General Robert Toombs. Toombs had preferred exile in Cuba and Paris to acknowledgement of Confederate defeat. Returning to Wilkes County in 1867, his avowed goal was a counter-revolution against Reconstruction.

Undeterred by Meade’s threats, violence and terror against freedmen and leading Republicans, were the order of the day in southwest Georgia. “Some of the Loyal Leagues are broken up voluntarily,” crowed the *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*, “and others invited Democratic orators to address them in their own halls.” Planters and leading blacks living in those counties,

⁶⁰⁰ *Augusta Weekly Chronicle & Sentinel*, Apr. 8, 1868.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*

explained Stearns, “could not be reached by our efforts, living in sections where it was not safe for a lecturer to go.”⁶⁰²

Meade tried to maintain a middle ground between “extremists” on both sides. Even as he continued to round up Ashburn’s killers and prepare for their trial, he launched another broadside against the black Union Leagues. “Complaints having been made to these Headquarters, by planters and others, that improper means are being used to compel laborers to leave their work to attend political meetings,” Meade’s General Orders No. 58 announced that “all such attempts to control the movements of laborers and interfere with the rights of employers, is strictly forbidden.” The same order banned “the assembling of armed bodies” at nighttime political meetings of laborers and required them to “notify either the military or civil authorities of these proposed meetings.” Finally, it proscribed “the wearing or carrying of arms” on election day. Meade gave the planters additional legal grounds to use against the Leagues. Not only did the freedmen have to inform their employers about their political meetings, they also had to abandon any effort at self-defense.⁶⁰³

Most Democratic Party leaders were confident that they would win the elections with a combination of threats, economic sanctions, and bribes. Concerned that the violent tactics of the Klan would provoke the army to take more decisive action, they believed that the “proper time” for “secret organizations” like the Klan had not yet arrived. An editorial in the *Savannah News and Herald* explained that “[t]he white race of the South are now earnestly striving to prevent the necessity of any such organizations by defeating the negro constitutions. . . . Until it [this

⁶⁰² *GWT*, May 1 and May 8, 1868; O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 256; Stearns, *Black Man of the South*, 208.

⁶⁰³ *SDNH*, Apr. 15, 1868.

strategy] is tested . . . they will endeavor to avoid all organizations looking to its defeat by violence.” But, the editorialist warned, “should they fail in their efforts, and negro governments be put over them, we doubt not but that every city, town, village and neighborhood in the South will have combinations of the white population to protect themselves against negro rule. . . . [I]f the Radical policy is successful throughout the South . . . a war of races is inevitable.”⁶⁰⁴

Chatham County Republicans campaigned in an atmosphere just short of war. On April 6, Bradley and Simms presided over a rally of 1,000. Hopkins was the main speaker. He declared himself “the champion of the revolution which had been inaugurated” along with Bradley and other “patriots,” and he paid tribute to the memory of Ashburn. If he were elected mayor, he “would lower the taxes immediately.” Hopkins denounced the attempt of the Democratic press to intimidate Republican supporters. “There were many merchants on the Bay who were true as steel to his party,” he said, “who were afraid to come out boldly, because of threats and fears of ostracism.” He noted that he kept “a guard of armed men around his house every night.” When the meeting ended, “100 negroes armed with sticks and clubs” escorted Bradley to his residence. In a letter written to Sumner a few days later, Hopkins explained that the Democrats “have offered \$30,000 for my head, and I am confined to my Head Quarters as in actual war.” Yet he remained optimistic. “If we carry the election which is almost *certain*,” he wrote Sumner, “Rebellion is dead in Georgia.”⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰⁴ *SDNH*, Apr. 22, 1868.

⁶⁰⁵ *SDNH*, Apr. 7, 8, and 15, 1868; *SDR*, Apr. 7, 1868; C H Hopkins to Hon Charles Sumner, Apr. 11, 1868, Papers of Charles Sumner, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Emphasis in original. Hopkins’s praise of Ashburn was echoed at another Republican meeting days later. Walter Clift hailed Ashburn as “a great friend to their party, and the truest Republican that ever lived.” See *SDR*, April 9, 1868.

On election day, freedmen were just as determined to elect Republicans as they had been six months earlier. In Georgia's largest cities, in coastal Georgia, and in many cotton belt counties, their resolve and the presence of Union troops resulted in Republican victories. Stearns described what happened in Columbia County north of Augusta, where blacks outnumbered whites three to one:

Our friends literally took their lives in their hands, and went forth to engage in this battle. Several of their number were brutally murdered, many more injured, and multitudes insulted almost beyond the power of endurance. . . . A blood-thirsty mob pursued a friend of mine ten miles, with threats of vengeance upon him, for his temerity in venturing into the lion's den. . . . But in spite of everything, the blacks did nobly. The great mass resisted every attempt to intimidate them, and marched boldly to the polls in the face and eyes of the rebels, and voted the republican ticket. . . . Out of 1,700 black voters in this county, only about 25 voted the rebel ticket.

The rebels "would have doubtless killed the blacks, if it had not been for the soldiers," he added.⁶⁰⁶

In Savannah, the "merchants and business men of the city" were told "to close their offices, stores and places of business during the days of election and to attend at the polls." The Central Railroad and the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad ceased work to allow their employees to vote. "Armed with sword canes, bowie knives, and revolvers," "hundreds and hundreds of the

⁶⁰⁶ Stearns, *Black Man of the South*, 205, 207-08. Democratic registrars, frustrated by their failure to prevent the blacks from voting, found another way to reduce the black majority. "When the returns were made out," Stearns complained, "the names of about four hundred of our voters were dropped" because their "names were not precisely alike those on the voting list."

first men in the city and county” formed a gauntlet to “intimidate and terrify the white and colored loyalists.”⁶⁰⁷

Freedmen were not intimidated. The *Savannah Republican* described the opening of the polls on April 20. “At early dawn the crowd commenced to assemble, from the rice fields and the cotton plantations, from the suburbs of the city and from its [center?], from South Carolina and apparently from every quarter there came the deluded and misled blacks, defiant and boastful, full of enthusiasm . . . determined to elect their candidates.” They believed “they were soon to receive not only mules and land, but every imaginable benefit.”⁶⁰⁸

To guarantee the freedmen’s right to vote, US troops established pickets around the courthouse and Savannah police were fully mobilized. “It was a strange sight in a so-called free Republic,” noted the *Republican*, “to see the bayonets glistening around the polls, and for the freemen to be allowed to deposit their ballots by the will of the strong arm of military power.” Union troops escorted the Republican candidates to their homes and “out of danger” every night. As in Columbia County, the presence of Union troops meant that, despite ruling class intimidation, the election did not dissolve into violence. The *Savannah News and Herald* admitted that “we have rarely seen a warmly contested election in our city pass off more quietly.”⁶⁰⁹

The number of “intelligent colored people” on whom Savannah Democrats were counting to vote for them was too small to make a difference. The massive black majority outside the city

⁶⁰⁷ *SDNH*, Apr. 23 and 24, 1868; *Freemen’s Standard*, Apr. 22, 1868, cited in Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 308.

⁶⁰⁸ *SDR*, Apr. 21, 1868; *SDNH*, Apr. 29, 1868.

⁶⁰⁹ *SDR*, Apr. 21, 1868; *SDNH*, Apr. 24 and 29, 1868.

voted Republican by a margin of 1,500 votes. Dr. Clift was elected US Senator in the First District. Bradley was elected to the Georgia Senate in a landslide, as was Tunis Campbell in McIntosh County. Democrats lost by 150 votes in the majority white city of Savannah.⁶¹⁰

The ruling class in the counties of southwest Georgia and in a number of other counties with large black majorities took another path. They knew that if blacks were allowed to vote, they would certainly lose. Nor were they worried about a response from the army. There were too few Union troops to monitor every polling place and in many areas they had the soldiers on their side. Rebels carefully planned election day “surprises” in many of the 22 counties of southwest Georgia’s Second Congressional District. “Black voters faced gun-toting mobs of white men,” notes O’Donovan, and “election managers openly opposed ‘Reconstruction’.” In Randolph County, Republican W. B. Dixon said that “our men were forced to vote against their will. . . . The police were against us.” In Quitman County, with 401 blacks registered, Bullock received only six votes. In Bainbridge, Georgia, Deputy Sheriff Brenner killed black leader Ike Sanborn on the third day of the elections. Sanborn had been a number one slave, explained a newspaper reporter, but “after becoming free, he aspired to be a politician. . . . [H]e became first an agitator, a disturber, and finally an incendiary,” which proved to be his death sentence. The deputy sheriff shot him, noted the article, “in self-defense.”⁶¹¹

In the fall of 1867, 95% or more of registered blacks voted in southwest Georgia. They elected eight black representatives. Six months later, blacks and Republicans were routed. “Of

⁶¹⁰ *SDNH*, Apr. 23 and 24, 1868; *SDR*, Mar. 23, 1868; Duncan, *Freedom’s Shore*, 52.

⁶¹¹ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 256; Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 49; *SDNH*, May 7, 1868.

twenty available seats in the state legislature, just seven went to Republicans and only one of these to a black man.”⁶¹²

It was a similar story in Houston County in central Georgia, where blacks outnumbered whites by two-and-a-half to one. Democrats made sure that the Republican candidate for Congress did not appear for his big meeting in Perry. Instead, the freedmen who attended were greeted by the plantation owners and their supporters, dozens of ex-rebels who “*urged* the poor deluded negroes to do what was right.” The reporter did not specify what methods of “urging” they used. On election day, “we went to the polls with the freedmen and saw their votes deposited,” exulted one Democratic leader. At least one thousand blacks voted for Gordon.⁶¹³

During the election in Elbert County north of Augusta, “there was a reign of lawlessness. . . . Ballots were snatched from our hands,” noted Republican Amos Akerman, “and democratic ballots substituted. . . . Pistols were drawn on negroes. . . . Hundreds of others abstained from voting altogether. . . . Even the few U.S. soldiers here took an active part in electioneering with negroes for the Democratic ticket. . . . The negroes were utterly cowed.” In a county with 866 registered black voters, less than 225 votes were cast for Bullock and the constitution.⁶¹⁴

Ruling class violence and vote manipulation in southwest Georgia and other plantation counties were not enough to defeat the Constitution or elect Gordon. The combination of the massive vote by freedmen for Republicans and the Constitution, the presence of Union troops at the polls, and a strong showing by Republicans among yeomen and poor whites in north Georgia

⁶¹² O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 256.

⁶¹³ *GWT*, May 8, 1868. Emphasis added.

⁶¹⁴ Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 49.

gave Republicans the victory. The constitution was adopted by a margin of nearly 18,000 votes. Bullock defeated Gordon by a much narrower margin of 7,000.⁶¹⁵

After the elections, Meade was bombarded with over one hundred letters from Republicans, army officers, and ordinary citizens complaining about Democratic violence and intimidation at the polls. But the state's Republican Party leadership did not press the issue. The *National Republican* acknowledged that the Democrats won a lot of majority black counties through "fraud, intimidation and bribery." Over 15,000 black men "have been forced and swindled into voting the disunion ticket." But, said the editorialist, "we care not how the majorities in these counties, like Houston, were obtained." The important thing was that "the Republicans have won their victory by the help of white votes, and their opponents have been reduced to solicit the aid of colored voters."⁶¹⁶

Brown's paper, the *Daily New Era*, went further. The elections, argued the paper's editor, proved that the Republicans were the real "white" party. Republicans were winning votes in the "white belt" and "repressing the anxiety of the blacks for prominent position." Democrats, on the other hand, were denouncing white Unionists as "scalawags, the scum of society" and "treating" the blacks, "taking them by the arm, and even in carriages, to the polls." In their first contested election campaign, Georgia's Republican Party leadership played by the Democratic playbook:

⁶¹⁵ On white voter apathy in the elections, see *Georgia Journal and Messenger*, May 19, 1868, and *SDNH*, May 7, 1868.

⁶¹⁶ *Georgia Journal and Messenger*, May 5, 1868; Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 49-50; *ANR*, May 2 and 5, 1868. Emphasis added. See also the article on the Savannah elections in *ANR*, Apr. 30, 1868.

campaigning as the white party, minimizing Democratic Party violence, and openly disparaging black voters.⁶¹⁷

Meade accepted the elections as free and fair. The *New York Times* gave its stamp of approval, asserting that “the much talked of coercion of and interference with the freedmen [in the Georgia elections] proves to have been without foundation.”⁶¹⁸

While Republicans savored their victory, Georgia Democrats had a much more accurate understanding of the election results. Democratic newspapers noted that several of those elected on the Republican ticket were in fact staunch Democrats. Many others were conservative Republicans who were as opposed to black elected officials as they were. As for the black vote, southwest Georgia showed the way. The second district “shows a negro majority of over seven thousand,” crowed the *Georgia Weekly Telegraph* editorialist, “and yet . . . the Democratic candidate for Congress is elected by about twenty-five hundred majority, while the majority for Gordon . . . is even greater. . . . The colored troops fought nobly!” The negroes “will swell the Democratic army of Georgia by thousands,” the paper predicted. The Republicans should “check their hallelujahs. . . . Even though the fruit may look promising . . . it will turn to ashes on their lips.”⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁷ *Atlanta Daily New Era*, May 1, 1868.

⁶¹⁸ *NYT*, May 11, 1868.

⁶¹⁹ *GWT*, May 1 and 8, 1868. See also Nathans, *Losing the Peace*, 92-96. Her chapter on the April 1868 elections is aptly titled “Pyrrhic Victory.”

14 MAY–JULY 1868: THE COUNTERREVOLUTION ORGANIZES

Decisive layers of Georgia’s rebel ruling class drew three important lessons from the April elections. (1) Democrats could not win elections in a free vote. (2) Winning was possible using violence and terror. (3) Neither the Republicans nor the Army would do anything to stop them.

The success of Democrats in southwest Georgia sparked an upsurge of interest in the Klan from ruling class whites across the state. Speaking before a Congressional commission in 1871, Gordon spoke of being approached “by some of the very best citizens of the State—some of the most peaceable, law-abiding men, men of large property” to join a “secret organization” “for self-protection.” “There was this general organization of the black race on the one hand, and an entire disorganization of the white race on the other,” he explained. “The first and main reason” for the Klan, he insisted, “was the organization of the Union League. . . . [O]verseers has been driven from plantations, and the negroes had asserted their right to hold the property for their own benefit. . . . It was therefore necessary, in order to protect our families from outrage and preserve our own lives to have something that we could regard as a brotherhood” “for the purpose of keeping down any general movement on the part of the Negroes.” Prominent Confederate generals were leaders of the “brotherhood” in Georgia: Alfred H. Colquitt in southwest Georgia, G. T. Anderson and General Wright in middle Georgia, and A. R. Lawton in Savannah.⁶²⁰

The special correspondent of the *Chronicle and Sentinel* commented that “[i]t only remains for the white men of Middle and Eastern Georgia, and particularly in the 4th and 5th

⁶²⁰ *Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States: Georgia, Vol. 1* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 308, 322, 324.

Districts, to do their whole duty and victory will be ours.” Answering the call, in the spring of 1868, Toombs’s son-in-law and law partner, General Dudley DuBose, became the Grand Titan of the Klan in the fifth district, composed of fifteen cotton plantation counties in central and eastern Georgia. DuBose recruited Captain John Reed, a defeated Democratic Party candidate and his “intimate personal friend,” as Grand Giant of neighboring Oglethorpe County.⁶²¹

In articles written decades later, Reed provided the most accurate description of the Klan in Georgia. He noted that the Klan’s organizational structure “was mostly fashioned upon that of the Confederate army.” Ku Klux commanders “were, as a body, picked ex-Confederate soldiers.” “In organizing I had to take only such men as could furnish themselves with good horses.” DuBose’s and Reed’s Klan was a hand-picked faction of mainly upper-class Democrats willing to use violence and terror against their enemies. In 1871, Gordon denied that the Klan had anything to do with politics or attacks on Republicans. Writing long after the defeat of Reconstruction, Reed could be more candid. The “motive and work of the order were political,” he insisted. The Reconstruction Acts “put the Southern negroes in politics. The Klan organized to put them out.”⁶²²

Not all Georgia Democrats were won over to violent methods. Men like Alexander Stephens and his brother Linton were concerned that such actions could cause Washington to send more troops. The counterrevolutionaries needed an issue which could unite all Democrats in common cause against Meade and the army. They found it in the defense of the men who had murdered Charles Ashburn.

⁶²¹ *Chronicle and Sentinel*, July 29, 1868; Reed, “What I Know of the Ku Klux Klan,” January 1908.

⁶²² *Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States: Georgia*, 323, 324; John C. Reed, “What I Know of the Ku Klux Klan,” January 1908.

Although Meade released on bail the men who bombed Dr. Clift's election meeting in Valdosta, he was determined to bring Ashburn's killers to trial. Meade's investigators complained that the city government in Columbus supported the guilty parties "heart and hand" and blocked the investigation "at every opportunity." At the end of May, Meade removed from office the mayor of Columbus, members of the city council, and other city officials. Army Captain Mills was installed as mayor. White supporters of Reconstruction filled the other positions. Meade hired ex-Governor Brown as lead lawyer for the prosecution.⁶²³

Meade's removal of the rebels from office in Columbus revived Democrats' fears of the army taking similar actions in other cities. They united in opposition. A front-page story in the *Savannah News and Herald* about Columbus was titled "The City Government Delivered Over to the Military and the Loyal League." "The property holders and tax payers of this city [Columbus] are filled with well grounded apprehension and alarm at this terrible and crushing blow at their interests," said the reporter.⁶²⁴

The Democratic press reframed Meade's prosecution of Ashburn's executioners into a story of the Republicans' persecution of innocent Columbus Democrats. During the month of June, a steady stream of articles carried news about the "deplorable" conditions of Columbus detainees in Fort Pulaski and the "kind attentions" Columbus prisoners were receiving from "many of the most prominent citizens" in Atlanta. A campaign seeking financial contributions for the legal expenses of the prisoners was launched in Democratic clubs across the state. A crack team of lawyers led by Alexander Stephens volunteered to defend Ashburn's killers. It was

⁶²³ *Report on the Ashburn Murder*, 20; *SDNH*, May 29 and 30, 1868.

⁶²⁴ *SDNH*, May 30, 1868.

a big step forward for the rebel hard-liners. Instead of leaders of both parties uniting against political assassinations, moderate Democrats now headed the defense of Ashburn's killers.⁶²⁵

Support for the "Columbus prisoners" became a national campaign of the Democratic Party. The party did its best to turn the criminals into the victims. "The atrocity of this case"—not Ashburn's assassination, but the imprisonment of his assassins—"is without parallel in the history of outrages in this country," proclaimed the *Louisville Courier*. Democrats protested their imprisonment in the US House of Representatives. A petition by the father of William D. Chipley, the man who led the mob that killed Ashburn, was presented to the US Senate. At the end of June, President Johnson sent General Hiram U. Grant to investigate the treatment of the Columbus prisoners.⁶²⁶

With opponents of Reconstruction on the offensive, Republicans continued to retreat. In Washington, Republican senators, worried about the possibility that the Radical Ben Wade could become president if Johnson were ousted, voted against impeachment. The *Savannah Republican* saluted this decision: "The last hair that held the sword of Radicalism over the trembling heads of an oppressed people has been severed, and the fall of the weapon has decapitated the head of the revolutionary party [Thaddeus Stevens]." ⁶²⁷

With impeachment out of the way, Republicans turned their attention to the party's national convention in Chicago, which would decide on their presidential candidate in the November elections. Hopkins and ex-Governor Brown were delegates to the convention from Georgia, with Brown acting as head of the state's delegation. In the eyes of Republican Party

⁶²⁵ *SDNH*, June 8 and 13, 1868.

⁶²⁶ *SDNH*, June 9, 18, and 25, 1868; *SDR*, June 29, 1868.

⁶²⁷ *SDR*, May 27, 1868.

leaders, Brown was the model of a “reconstructed” former Confederate governor. His presence was proof that their policies in the South were working. Brown was asked to address the convention on its opening day. After sharing his personal odyssey from states’ rights Democrat to supporter of Reconstruction, Brown turned to the question he considered most important. There was no danger of “negro supremacy” in the South, he insisted. The South has a “two hundred thousand majority of white men. There we have the advantage in education and experience. We claim that we have the superiority of race. . . . If our white race act properly in this matter there will be no difficulty. . . . [W]hile we grant to the colored people all their rights, civil and political, they have no right to hold office under our Constitution.” Brown’s oration was greeted with “great applause.” Excerpts from Brown’s speech opposing blacks’ right to office were highlighted in Democratic newspapers in Savannah and across the South.⁶²⁸

The convention rejected a Radical proposal calling for black suffrage throughout the United States. The Republican message, says Eric Foner, was one of “moderation, fiscal responsibility, and stable conditions for Southern investment.” As their presidential candidate, Republicans nominated General Ulysses Grant, the conservative war hero who had loyally served under Johnson for years. Grant had worked closely with Meade in crafting the Army’s policies in Georgia. His nomination confirmed that the Republican policy of concessions to win southern Democrats to the party would continue. With a counter-revolutionary assault on Republicans and black suffrage spreading across the South, Grant’s campaign motto was “Let there be peace.” The *New York Times* saluted Grant’s nomination and the convention’s rejection

⁶²⁸ *SDNH*, Apr. 29 and May 25, 26, and 28, 1868; *NYT*, May 21, 1868.

of universal male suffrage. Once back in the Union, argued the *Times*, the southern states should have the “complete control of their own affairs,” including all decisions about suffrage.⁶²⁹

In the fall of 1867, Klan leaders hoped that Grant would lead the Democratic Party ticket in 1868. Gordon believed that Grant “would be the breakwater between [the South] and the extreme men at the North.” By the time Grant became the Republican presidential nominee, the Klan’s ambitions had grown. Gordon and Forrest believed that Reconstruction could be overturned entirely. They pinned their hopes on another former Union Army general, Frank Blair.⁶³⁰

Members of the Blair family were nationally prominent conservative Democrats from Missouri. Frank’s brother Montgomery had been a member of the Lincoln cabinet. At the end of the war, Forrest became “warm friends” with Frank Blair when both men tried to rebuild their fortunes on cotton plantations in Mississippi. In September 1866, Frank wrote a letter to Montgomery seeking a presidential pardon for Forrest, a man with whom he had formed “a very great personal attachment.” After the Republican convention, Forrest wrote a letter to the *Memphis Appeal* encouraging proscribed Confederate officers to become more active in the Democratic Party and to work for the victory of Democratic candidates in the upcoming national elections. Klan supporters worked diligently to be elected as delegates to the Democratic National Convention in July.⁶³¹

⁶²⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 337; *NYT*, May 29, 1868.

⁶³⁰ *SDNH*, Oct. 16, 1867.

⁶³¹ *SDNH*, Oct. 16, 1867; *Augusta Weekly Chronicle & Sentinel*, Apr. 8, 1868; Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest*, 267; Brian Steel Wills, *A Battle from the Start: The Life of Nathan Bedford Forrest* (New York:

The Democratic offensive was on full display in Chatham County. For Savannah's ruling class, the huge turnout of freedmen for Bradley and the Republican Party in the April elections was the last straw. The *News and Herald* called the vote "an open declaration of unreasoning antagonism to the white people of Georgia" which "left no ground for hope of mutual good understanding and kindly relations hereafter. The white men now know what to expect from them in the future, and will govern themselves accordingly." The *Savannah Republican* chimed in: "We are not engaged today in a plain political contest . . . we are struggling for self-preservation. Whatever measures we may resort to in order to defeat this cruel crusade" are valid. As for the freedmen, "[l]ike sheep they marched to the slaughter of their future destinies, and laid the foundation for the destruction of their liberties."⁶³²

Despite their stunning electoral victory, Republicans and blacks were still second-class citizens in Savannah. With the support of Meade and the army, Mayor Anderson let them know right away that the rebel ruling class remained in charge. On the last day of the elections, a mob of 40 men surrounded Bradley's rooming house. His guards apparently fired four pistol shots to disperse the mob. Bradley requested protection from the Army. Mayor Anderson and Colonel M. Malony went to the rooming house, concerned not about the mob threatening the life of the newly elected state senator but about the pistol shots fired against Bradley's assailants. Anderson threatened to charge the rooming house owner with keeping a disorderly house if she did not expel Bradley within twenty-four hours. Bradley protested the expulsion order to Meade, explaining that "[t]he disorder is that I have distributed Republican ticket for 3 days and men have had to

HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 322-23; *NYT*, May 24, 1868. Blair had shared Gordon's hopes in Grant. See *NYT*, Jan. 14, 1868.

⁶³² *SDNH*, Apr. 21, 1868; *SDR*, Apr. 21 and May 1, 1868.

guard me to save my life. . . . Can I be protected under Law and Order or must I be driven from my home or murdered by the friends of Mayor Anderson[?]" Anderson justified Bradley's ouster by assuring Meade that "Bradley is a pest and a curse to this community and stands less in need of protection from the civil and military authorities than do the citizens of Savannah who are ceaselessly annoyed by the evil influence of his teachings upon the ignorant and untutored negroes."⁶³³

In the days after the election, a celebration in the Yamacraw area was broken up by police, who beat one black man to death, and the military was sent to investigate the "disorderly" conduct of "armed negroes" in the neighborhood of the Atlanta & Gulf Railroad station. The *Savannah Republican* threatened to release the names of whites who voted Republican "to an outraged public." Prominent merchants who were believed to support the Republicans saw their customers fall away.⁶³⁴

Leading members of the city's ruling class began to organize paramilitary units of armed civilians to counter Republican strength, supplement the police in control of the black population, and prepare to use more violent measures when needed. At the center of this effort was Philip M. Russell Sr. The Russell family occupied key positions in the city's legal/political establishment. Russell Sr. was a Democratic legislator and captain of state forces in the Civil

⁶³³ *SDNH*, Apr. 24 and 27, 1868; Bradley to Meade, April 24, 1868, including Anderson statement, dated May 2, 1868, File B-176 1868, RG 393, Part I, Entry 5738, Letters Received, Third Military District, 1867-1868, NA. Jones defends Anderson, attributing his expulsion order to "Bradley's endless provocations." See Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 309.

⁶³⁴ "Yamacraw": *SDR*, Apr. 25; "Atlanta & Gulf": *SDR*, May 4, 1868 and Maloney to Hosmer, May 3, 1868, in Bradley to Meade, April 24, 1868; "*Republican*": *SDR*, Apr. 30; "merchants": *SDR*, May 1, 1868.

War, the clerk of city council since 1849, chief of the fire department, and judge of the Superior Court. He was the judge in the Whitfield case which led to the flight of Henry Eden from the state. His son Levi Russell, lawyer and judge, was the defense lawyer for Allen and Craney in the case brought by Eden in 1866. Waring Russell Jr. was the longtime Savannah city jailor criticized for brutality by Bradley in his letter to Wade in January 1867. Philip Jr. was a prominent attorney, notary public, and local magistrate. Isaac was deputy sheriff of the city and a county constable. During the war, he was a captain on the staff of General Robert Toombs when Toombs was in charge of state troops. He had arrested Robert Hopkins after the accidental shooting of Anna Gardner.⁶³⁵

The first task of the rebel hardliners was to organize their supporters, both black and white. In early May, ex-Mayor Arnold sponsored the formation of “the Colored Conservative Laboring Association.” Former Colored Union Club leader Jackson Brand was elected president. At the same time, some 250 men attended the formation of the Young Men’s Conservative Club, dedicated to battling against the “domination of the ignorant and deluded followers of Bradley, Hopkins and others.” On June 1, a rifle club was formed. The forty members included members of the Russell, Sheftall, and other prominent families.⁶³⁶

⁶³⁵ Avery, *History of the State of Georgia*, 33, 262, 351; Harden, *History of Savannah, Vol. II*, 586-87; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 131, 243, 271, 316; Mark I. Greenberg, “Becoming Southern: The Jews of Savannah, Georgia, 1830-70,” *American Jewish History*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (March 1998), 72; *SMN*, Oct. 10, 1868. In 1865, the *Savannah Morning News* changed its name to the *Savannah Daily News and Herald* to indicate its break from its secessionist past. On September 29, 1868, the editors changed the name of the paper back to *Savannah Morning News* to reestablish its link with its fire-breathing past and the “doctrine of the supremacy of the white race.”

⁶³⁶ *SDNH*, May 7 and 8 and June 1, 1868; *SDR*, May 8, 1868. Later that month, when Frank McNeil, a “leader of the Conservative colored people,” assaulted “Radical” mulatto Edgar Lewis in the street, the *Republican*

Democrats paid particular attention to the city's volunteer fire companies, which brought prominent politicians and businessmen together with whites from all classes. In early May, the reorganized White Fire Company held its first annual parade. The parade was led by Oglethorpe Fire Company President Philip M. Russell Sr. At an evening ball, Colonel John Weems recalled the glorious history of Savannah's fight in the Civil War. "It was not against the Union, nor against the Constitution, nor against the people of the North, that the South ever waged a war," he insisted. "It was against the merciless exactions and the cruel and unjust oppressions of the now arrogant and dominant party of the Federal Congress. To its demands we will never willingly submit."⁶³⁷

Blacks in Savannah had no adequate response to the strengthening of their class enemy. A year earlier they had responded with their own collective organizations: with Union Leagues, mass mobilizations, nightly drilling. The attacks of the Army and the employers against the Leagues since the 1867 elections had taken their toll. Instead of mobilizations of freedmen in the fields against the employers, in the streets in opposition to police brutality, they were now reduced to petitions to the army to act on their behalf and voting for Republican candidates in elections.

Anderson's term of office had ended months earlier. Hopkins had pleaded with Meade to include mayoral elections on the April ballot in Savannah. But Meade acceded to the protests of Anderson and the city's Executive Committee and postponed mayoral elections once again. Had Meade allowed the elections, Hopkins would have been elected mayor. At a large rally in late

cheered the "good drubbing" administered to Lewis. White "friends" made sure McNeil served no jail time. See *SDR*, May 28, 1868.

⁶³⁷ *GWT*, May 8, 1868; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 310-11.

April, Hopkins returned to the question. Republicans’ “great army had now besieged the city of Savannah,” he declared. “If they only would stand firm, in ten days Savannah would be theirs, after the most violent campaign Georgia has ever seen or known. He had the official order from General Meade that the election would take place in a few days.” Hopkins’s hope for a municipal election was quickly squashed. “Prominent gentlemen from Savannah” met with Meade to ward off the threat. Bowing to their demands, Meade said he would leave the decision up to the legislature.⁶³⁸

Josiah Grant, a 25-year-old black carpenter who had replaced Bradley as head of the Union Leagues in the city, refused to accept Meade’s decision as the final word. He raised new charges against Mayor Anderson and other city officials and launched a petition campaign requesting that Meade remove them from office. The charges followed the model of the petition Bradley had circulated at the constitutional convention three months earlier. Several black men accused the mayor of unjustly enforcing city ordinances; the mayor and chief of police were accused of firing policemen because of their political opinions; and Chief Detective Wray was accused of charging \$300 for making an investigation. The petition was circulated by Union League members in the black community. Eden, Grant, and Tunis Campbell Jr and Sr spent three

⁶³⁸ *SDNH*, Mar. 27, 28, 29 and Apr. 29, 1868; *Milledgeville Federal Union*, May 12, 1868. The *Federal Union* article continued: “General Meade also stated that he had been plagued until his patience was exhausted by the Radical leaders of this city . . . and that he had written to Hopkins, telling him that when he saw the order for the election published, he would know all about it, and not till then.” A few days later, Meade offered the Hopkins family a consolation prize when he removed tax collector James McGowan from office and appointed Charles Hopkins Jr. as his replacement. See *SDR*, May 28, 1868; *SDNH*, May 23 and June 1, 1868.

days making copies. In early June, they took the petition, signed by 3,600 people, to General Meade in Atlanta.⁶³⁹

Anderson quickly refuted the charges against him and city officials. Meade noticed the names of several prominent Democrats on the petition and sent military officers to Savannah to investigate. Hundreds of citizens, black as well as white, signed affidavits asserting that they had not signed the petition and opposed it. Instead of Anderson being called to order, the men who had copied the list of names were accused of forgery. No lessons had been learned from the Bradley petition fiasco. The failure of the petition was another damaging blow to the Republican Party and the Union Leagues in the city.⁶⁴⁰

Republican Party leaders in Washington were anxious for Reconstruction to be over quickly, both to bolster Grant's election campaign and to allow the country to return to business as usual. On June 25, Congress passed the Omnibus Act to end Reconstruction in the six southern states which had adopted new constitutions. Georgia and five other states would be readmitted to the Union once their legislatures ratified the new constitutions and the Fourteenth Amendment. Republicans let their Georgia counterparts know that defense of property rights trumped electoral considerations. At the behest of conservative Republicans and the business community, the Omnibus Act mandated that Georgia must remove the sections of its new

⁶³⁹ *SDNH*, June 12 and 13, 1868; *SDR*, June 22, 1868. In fear for his life, Bradley apparently left Savannah after being expelled from his rooming house and took up residence with black supporters in South Carolina. On May 7 he wrote to General Canby protesting the arrest and imprisonment of several freedmen in Beaufort, South Carolina. See Bradley to Gen. E. R. S. Canby, May 7, 1868, B-6 1868, Letters Received, Dept. of the South, 2d Mil. Dist., RG 393, pt. 1, NA.

⁶⁴⁰ *SDR*, June 22, 1868; *SDNH*, June 12, 13, and 23, 1868.

constitution cancelling debts incurred during the war. This removed one of the key selling points Georgia Republicans used to win the support of poor whites, yeomen, and small businessmen.

Georgia's newly elected legislature convened at the end of June. Bullock had done nothing in the months after the elections to counter the ominous growth of the Klan, the increased attacks on blacks and Republicans, or the Democrats' defense of Ashburn's killers. With war clouds looming across the state, Bullock's sole focus was on the legislature and his slim legislative majority. Fredrick Engels described this mentality as "parliamentary cretinism . . . an incurable disease, an ailment whose unfortunate victims are permeated by the lofty conviction that the whole world, its history and future are directed and determined by a majority of votes of just that very representative institution that has the honour of having them in the capacity of its members."⁶⁴¹

Bullock could count heads as well as the Democrats. He knew that he did not have the votes to adopt his program. He looked for a way to disqualify enough Democrats to guarantee a Republican majority. A clause in the Omnibus Bill said that in order to assume office in the six reconstructed states, candidates had to swear that they had never taken an oath of support to the US Constitution before joining the Confederacy. The *Georgia Weekly Telegraph* estimated that application of the oath test would eliminate twenty-five Democrats in the General Assembly and twelve to fifteen in the Senate. Bullock begged Meade to apply this clause to members of the newly elected legislature.⁶⁴²

⁶⁴¹ Frederick Engels, *Germany: Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969),

⁶⁴² *GWT*, July 17, 1868.

Bullock's legislative maneuver achieved the opposite of what he intended. There was never any likelihood that Meade would fight the Republicans' battles for them and rule former Confederates ineligible to take their seats. Meade left the question of eligibility up to the members of the legislature. Opposition to the expulsions united conservative Republicans with the resurgent Democrats. Nor was it supported by many of Bullock's allies, including Hopkins and most black delegates. In a major setback for Bullock and Radical Republicans, the legislature declined to unseat any members.

As they had done in the constitutional convention every time white delegates' eligibility was raised, Democrats and conservative Republicans countered Bullock's proposed purge by questioning black delegates' right to hold office, beginning with Bradley. On July 7, a committee was set up to investigate Bradley's eligibility due to his having served time in Sing Sing prison. Bradley said he was "astonished that any member should question the eligibility of members on account of color." He "asserted in a bold manner that his race was intitled to all the privileges and immunities of the white race, even *to the carrying of fire arms.*" He alluded to the willingness of the freedmen to fight, arms in hand, to defend Reconstruction and black rights. "Unless his race were a part and parcel of the State militia," Bradley predicted, "in less than ten years there would be another rebellion, which would exceed in magnitude and would be more successful than the last." It was the only echo in the legislature of the willingness of the freedmen to fight to defend their rights.⁶⁴³

Bradley's suggestion that rather than relying on concessions and General Meade the Republicans should arm blacks to defend Reconstruction was apparently too provocative for other party members. They pressured Bradley to change his tune. The next day, in what can only

⁶⁴³ *SDNH*, July 11, 1868; *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, July 11, 1868. Emphasis in original.

be interpreted as irony, Bradley saluted the “happy change effected by the result of the rebellion, and the perfect harmony which now prevailed between the two distinct races.” He compared “the present happy domestic relations between black and white to the ‘lion and lamb lying down together’.”⁶⁴⁴

While the legislature was busy debating eligibility, the trial of Ashburn’s killers was taking place in the Fort McPherson barracks a few miles away. There was extensive, often verbatim, coverage of trial proceedings in the Democratic press. They used the occasion to exonerate Ashburn’s killers and indict Ashburn, Meade, and Grant in their place. The attorneys for the prosecution and the defense, Brown and Stephens, worked together to drag out the trial as long as possible. Once Georgia was admitted to the Union, military tribunals would cease functioning and the prisoners would be turned over to civilian courts, a conclusion favored by Georgia Republicans as well as Democrats. Meade, incensed by the “false and malicious statements” made about his attempt to convict the Columbus assassins, appealed to Grant and Congress to enact legislation to allow him to continue the trial by military commission even after Georgia was admitted to the Union. But Congress had no interest in ongoing military tribunals in the South and rejected his appeal.⁶⁴⁵

While Bullock was suffering a humiliating defeat in the legislature, the Klan was celebrating a big victory at the Democratic Party’s convention in New York City. Forrest had done his job well. Former Confederate generals, many associated with the Klan, played prominent roles in the delegations of the southern states. General Ambrose R. Wright of Augusta

⁶⁴⁴ *GWT*, July 17, 1868.

⁶⁴⁵ *Report on the Ashburn Murder*, 37. Meade’s chief prosecutor, Joe Brown, was part of the delaying effort. See Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South*, 107-08.

was a convention vice-president, Forrest led the Tennessee delegation, Gordon led the Georgia delegation, General James Kemper led Virginia delegates, and General Wade Hampton led those from South Carolina.

Four days before the convention began, Blair wrote a letter to a fellow Missouri Democrat, vowing that a Democratic president would declare the Reconstruction Acts “null and void, compel the army to undo its usurpations of the South, disperse the carpet bag State Governments, [and] allow the white people to reorganize their own governments.” The letter was widely circulated.⁶⁴⁶

After several ballots, former New York Governor Horatio Seymour was selected as the party’s presidential candidate. For vice-president, General Hampton nominated Blair “amidst the greatest excitement and applause. . . . The soldiers are jubilant, and speeches were made mostly by Confederate officers.” Blair was nominated by unanimous vote. It was a historic moment. Democrats across the country united in opposition to Reconstruction and in support of white supremacy.⁶⁴⁷

Elated over the prospect of a Democratic Party victory in November and the end of black suffrage, Toombs addressed an “immense assemblage” of Georgia Democrats on July 16 in Atlanta. Speaking alongside Toombs was ex-Governor and former Confederate General Howell Cobb. Cobb had presided over the Confederate States Provisional Congress in 1861. He and his family had first-hand experience of the power of the Union Leagues, suffering labor unrest and impromptu strikes at his southwest Georgia plantations. The *Georgia Weekly Telegraph* reporter

⁶⁴⁶ *Nebraska Herald*, July 16, 1868.

⁶⁴⁷ *SDNH*, July 10, 1868.

noted that “it was their first appearance, on the popular stage, since the war. It made one feel like old Georgia is about to be herself again.”⁶⁴⁸

On July 21, 1868, Georgia’s House and Senate ratified the Fourteenth Amendment. Rufus Bullock was inaugurated as governor the next day. All conditions had been met for Georgia’s congressmen to be reseated in Washington. If the promise of Reconstruction had indeed been achieved, it should have been a joyous occasion for blacks and Republicans. But there were no massive parades of cheering freedmen like the ones a year earlier at the founding convention of the Georgia Republican Party.

General Meade immediately suspended the military tribunal prosecuting the killers of Charles Ashburn. His only serious attempt to bring federal forces to bear against rebel violence came to an ignominious conclusion. The assassins were turned over to state authorities, who promptly set them free. They released a public statement condemning their imprisonment and were treated as heroes by the Democratic press. A book containing the trial proceedings with the title *Radical Rule: Military Outrage in Georgia* was rapidly published and widely circulated across the South.⁶⁴⁹

Meade announced the withdrawal of the US military from any “control over civil matters” in the state. The small number of federal troops remaining in the state were to be concentrated in Dahlonega, Savannah, and Atlanta, with “large reductions” in numbers proposed for the future.⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁸ *SDNH*, July 10, 1868; O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 189, 232.

⁶⁴⁹ *Military Outrage in Georgia. Arrest of Columbus Prisoners: with Facts connected with their imprisonment and Release* (Louisville: 1868).

⁶⁵⁰ *SDNH*, Aug. 3, 1868.

In 1865, Hopkins had warned of the disastrous consequences for blacks if the Union troops were withdrawn. “Get the troops away and the State into Congress,” he told Sidney Andrews, “and I give you my solemn word that I believe three fourths of the counties in the State would vote for such a penal code as would practically reduce half the negroes to slavery in less than a year. . . . Take the troops away, and off the great lines of travel there would be a reign of terror in a month.” Hopkins’s prediction would now be tested in real life.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁵¹ Andrews, *The South Since the War*, 371, 373.

15 JULY–DECEMBER 1868: TRIUMPH OF THE COUNTERREVOLUTION

On July 23, Georgia Democrats kicked off their campaign of defiance to the Bullock government and support for Seymour and Blair with a convention and rally in Atlanta. Cobb, Toombs, and Benjamin Hill addressed a huge audience of twelve thousand or more from a stage decorated as a bush arbor. The old rebel leadership was once again leading the troops against their northern foes.⁶⁵²

Toombs's speech recalled the "gallant but unsuccessful conflict in the noblest and holiest cause for which patriot blood was ever shed." He denounced Reconstruction measures as "usurpations, unconstitutional, revolutionary and void." "The Radical platform announces to you that a white government shall exist for the people of the North," he boomed, "but a nigger government is good enough for the people of the South." Hill lashed out at the support of white yeomen for the Republicans. "Those who voted for the Constitution on account of that relief are worse than the poor nigger who voted for the Convention because they were to get forty acres and a mule." "This plan leaves no room for difference of opinion or action among patriots," concluded Toombs. "Liberty says come – the country is in danger—let every freeman hasten to the rescue." In case anyone was in doubt about what Toombs meant, Colonel James Ramsey spelled out the message in the convention. "The true men of the South are ready to rally once more under the Rebel flag and try the issue of the cartridge box," he bellowed. His speech was met with "wild upheaving applause that shook the hall."⁶⁵³

⁶⁵² *Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel*, July 29, 1868.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*; George Winston Martin, "*I Will Give Them One More Shot*": Ramsey's 1st Regiment Georgia Volunteers (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2011), 232.

The summer of counterrevolution began in Savannah. On July 20, Savannah Democrats held their own “monster” march and rally to show support for Seymour and Blair and to nominate delegates to the party’s Atlanta convention. Over 5,000 people filled the Court House Square. The *Savannah News* proclaimed it “the largest political gathering we have ever seen in Savannah.” Leading the “great torchlight procession” were the auxiliary organizations of the party: the Young Men’s Conservative Club, the Oglethorpe Fire Company, Central Railroad employees, with colored conservatives bringing up the rear. Transparencies carried by the marchers denounced Bradley, Charles Hopkins, Robert Hopkins, and other Republican leaders. “Radicals, you have seen much, but you will see more in November” one read. “This is a white Man’s Government. We want white men as rulers.” “Let the Conservative Artillery Roar.” A speech by Thomas Norwood captured the theme of the meeting. “Our duty now is action! Action! Action!” he proclaimed. “If we fail in November, the last ray of liberty and constitutional government will be crushed out.”⁶⁵⁴

A few hours later, deputy sheriff Isaac Russell, the youngest member of the city’s leading rebel family, answered this call to action, and Robert Hopkins breathed no more. This was no accidental killing. Days after the murder of Ashburn, Klan leader Gordon had spelled out H-o-p-k-i-n-s as the next traitor to be punished. But Charles Hopkins had close links with Meade, Sumner, and other prominent Republican and Army leaders. Killing him could provoke the army to act. Politically, it would be hard to defend.

It was a different story with Charles Hopkins’s youngest son Robert. Only twenty-years-old, Robert had been elected tax receiver on the Republican ticket in the April elections. Like other newly elected officials, he was forced to wait until the state was admitted to the Union to

⁶⁵⁴ *SDNH*, July 21, 1868.

take his post. He had difficulty dealing with the stress of being the youngest son and political associate of the most prominent and reviled white Republican in coastal Georgia. His “solution” for the stress was alcohol, and when he drank he could become violent. In May 1867, while trying to remove intruders from his office, he accidentally shot and killed a young black woman, Anna Gardner. In December 1867, Robert and his older brother Charles Jr. assaulted Republican editor Hayes over a slanderous article against their father. In April 1868, in a “state of beastly intoxication,” he got into a fight with an engineer on a boat and was “severely beaten.”⁶⁵⁵

The day after the large Democratic rally, Robert Hopkins and two other men got roaring drunk in Frank Yeager’s bar. Hopkins and one of the men brawled outside the bar. Isaac Russell lived in his father’s house a few yards away. He knew Hopkins well, having arrested him for Gardner’s death a year earlier. Inspired by the rally the night before and eager to take advantage of Hopkins’s drunkenness, Russell entered the bar and sat down, cold sober, and asked for a glass of water. Hopkins, “in a very excited state,” asked Yaeger for a pistol to protect himself. Yaeger offered him an unloaded pistol. When Yaeger left the room and went to his private apartment, he heard a blow, followed by two shots. Returning to the bar, he saw Russell fire a third shot. All three shots pierced Hopkins’s heart. Russell, having accomplished his mission with no more damage than a bloody scalp wound, walked calmly out of the bar, told blacks outside the bar that he had shot Hopkins in self-defense, and was quickly escorted away by a policeman.⁶⁵⁶

When the word spread that Isaac Russell had killed Robert Hopkins, Savannah blacks understood immediately the significance of the event. The rolling of a drum was heard, and soon

⁶⁵⁵ *SDNH*, Apr. 3, 1868.

⁶⁵⁶ *SDR*, July 22 and 23, 1868; *SDNH*, July 22 and 23, 1868.

a crowd of two to three hundred blacks gathered. Believing that Russell was hiding in his father's house, the crowd converged on it. People in the crowd, "brandishing their axes and clubs," uttered threats against Isaac Russell. "We have fought in the war and know how to fight." "We won't submit to have our men shot." As news spread of the black protest outside P. M. Russell Sr's house, armed Democrats rushed to the scene. By the time policemen arrived, the freedmen were gone. The mobilization of the Democratic paramilitaries continued. "Heavy guards were thrown out about the neighborhood and were kept up all during the night."⁶⁵⁷

The Democratic press proclaimed that Russell had acted in self-defense in killing the "Radical Tax Collector" Robert Hopkins. Their concern was not the death of Hopkins, but rather the "Negro Mobs" which protested it. Headlines decrying the "mob" segued into an attack against the leaders of the Union Leagues. "The assemblage of the negroes last night . . . shows that they are organized. . . . This condition of things . . . must not be permitted to exist. No class of people have any right . . . to associate themselves in secret organizations." The *Daily Republican* blamed "Josiah Grant and his pestiferous negro club." "The leaders or inciters of these mobs. . . will be punished severely," the paper warned.⁶⁵⁸

Savannah's black population refused to be terrorized by the cops and the armed civilians. A crowd of three thousand, including twenty whites, assembled days later for Robert Hopkins's

⁶⁵⁷ *SDR*, July 22 and 23, 1868; *SDNH*, July 22 and 23, 1868.

⁶⁵⁸ *SDR*, July 22 and 23, 1868; *SDNH*, July 22 and 23, 1868. Jacqueline Jones argues there was no political motivation behind Robert Hopkins's death. It was merely a fight between two "trigger-happy sons of privilege." As for what happened, she accepts the line of the rebel press: the fight was started by Hopkins and Russell acted in self-defense. She blames the freedmen who responded by besieging Russell Sr's house for frightening whites throughout the city. These white fears accounted for the subsequent actions taken by the Russells and their allies against the black fire companies and other blacks involved in the "disturbance." See Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 316-18.

funeral. Nine hundred followed the procession to the cemetery, “chanting one of their peculiar melodies.” Services were held at the grave by Reverend Dr. Porter. Charles Hopkins was in Atlanta when his son was killed. Knowing they would not get justice from a civil court, Charles Hopkins and his surviving son Charles Jr. returned to Atlanta to petition Meade to have Russell tried by military commission. Meade refused to intervene.⁶⁵⁹

Two weeks after Hopkins’s death, Russell was brought before magistrates of the Superior Court to investigate the murder charge. The magistrates were all friends and associates of the Russell family. With no possibility of a fair hearing, the Hopkins family did not engage an attorney. The prosecution was left in the hands of a young lawyer, George Wilson, for whom it was his first trial. The courtroom was packed, with whites filling the ground floor and blacks in the gallery.⁶⁶⁰

The only eyewitness to the events of that night was Isaac Russell, and he did not take the stand. Bar owner Yaeger testified to what he had seen and heard. Four blacks related what Isaac Russell told them on leaving the scene of the crime: that he had been attacked by Hopkins with a gun, wounding him in the head. In his summation for the defense, former Confederate Senator Julian Hartridge argued that Russell fired his gun in self-defense. In his counter, Wilson asked why Russell remained in the presence of a “person whom he knew to be violent when drunk. . . . He [Russell] quietly takes his seat, for what purpose?” At a minimum, he argued, Russell should be charged with manslaughter and the case turned over for a jury. Wilson’s argument took a lot of courage under the circumstances, but it made no difference. The magistrates decided that

⁶⁵⁹ *SDNH*, July 24, 27, and 31, 1868; *Atlanta Constitution*, July 24, 1868.

⁶⁶⁰ *SDNH*, Aug. 5 and 6, 1868; *SDR*, Aug. 5 and 6, 1868.

Hopkins's death was justifiable homicide and released Russell. White spectators applauded while blacks looked on "sullenly."⁶⁶¹

Once the trial of Isaac Russell was out of the way, P. M. Russell Sr. and the city's ruling class launched a witch-hunt against the leadership of the Union League and other black organizations. It was guilt by association. Union League leaders were presumed guilty whether they were present or not at the protest. Josiah Grant and other prominent leaders of the League were arrested and charged with being leaders of the "negro mob that attempted to lynch Mr. Russell." Those who could not come up with \$800 in security were thrown into jail awaiting trial. Arrests of League leaders and supporters who were allegedly part of the "negro mob" continued in September and October. Black men and women identified as participants in "Radical powwows" were targeted for harsher punishment in Mayor's Court.⁶⁶²

A few days after Hopkins's funeral, Savannah's black fire companies, strong supporters of Hopkins and the Republican party, celebrated the independence of Liberia. In a calculated response to Savannah's white fire company's gala two months earlier, they paraded along with black axe companies from Macon, Beaufort, and Charleston. An "immense crowd of negro men, women and children followed the companies." The black mobilizations infuriated P. M. Russell Sr. He sent a letter to the officers and members of the Savannah Fire Department and a petition to the city council alleging that members of black Axe Companies 1 and 2 were part of the mob

⁶⁶¹ *SDNH*, Aug. 5 and 6, 1868; *SDR*, Aug. 5 and 6, 1868. Russell's acquittal was not the end of the story. "Four prominent Republican negroes" asked a lawyer "what steps should be taken to have Mr. Isaac Russell indicted by a Grand Jury" for murdering Hopkins. See *SDNH*, Aug. 8, 1868.

⁶⁶² *SDNH*, Aug. 11, 12, 13, 15, 25 and Sep. 23, 1868; *SDR*, Oct. 15, 1868.

who demonstrated at his house. He demanded the “disbandment” of these companies, which “almost nightly drilled in order to . . . act against the whites.”⁶⁶³

In late August, coastal-area Republicans Simon Powell and James Porter travelled to Boston “seeking aid for the freedmen of Georgia, who are without employment or homes because they have voted the Republican ticket. Thousands are now getting a scanty living by picking berries.” In the legislature, Campbell said he knew three hundred men in Savannah “who had been ostracized on account of their political opinions—refused employment.” These were “not a rabble” but “church-going people.” The *Savannah Republican* admitted that “quite a number” of “lazy negroes” of the “Bradley, Clift and Hopkins school” who “spent their time in Republican meetings . . . have very justly been dismissed, and reliable colored men . . . were employed to take their places.”⁶⁶⁴

The killing of Robert Hopkins and the arrest of Union League leaders marked a new stage in the development of the counterrevolution in Savannah. Hardline Democrats sent a clear message to area Republicans, Union Leagues, and other black organizations. We can kill your leaders at will and get away with it. Any protests you engage in we consider to be riots. We will jail not only participants in any actions but leaders of your organizations. There is no legal force which will help you. In addition to the police and the courts, we have armed civilians organized to use arms against you if necessary.

Inspired by the success of Atlanta’s bush arbor rally and the possibility of a Democratic victory in November, the rebels campaigned across Georgia. A massive propaganda effort in the Democratic press centered on an alleged black threat to kill whites and take over the state. Rebel

⁶⁶³ *SDNH*, July 28 and Aug. 12, 14, 15, 1868.

⁶⁶⁴ *SDNH*, Aug. 25 and 28, 1868; *SDR*, Aug. 26 and 27, 1868.

newspaper editors worked overtime to create an atmosphere of hysteria. Every fire was attributed to black arsonists. Every altercation was a “black riot.” Every meeting of blacks was part of a plot to launch a race war. In many counties, rebels vowed to prevent Republican rallies or Union League meetings by any means necessary.

For the Democrats, propaganda about a black insurrectionary threat was aimed at dividing working people along racial lines. At the same time, it justified their use of terror and violence against Republicans and Union Leaguers. Rather than denouncing this racist demagoguery and presenting a program to unite working people against their common exploiters, Georgia Republicans competed with the Democrats in trumpeting the dangers of a race war. In a big Republican rally in Atlanta, Brown warned Democrats that the election of Seymour and Blair would lead to a civil war. In such a war, the “negro had nothing to lose but life; but the white man had life and property.” He warned whites “as we feared the incendiary’s torch, not to originate such a war.” The *Augusta National Republican* assured its readers that if a race war broke out, “we should, of course, sustain our own [white] race.”⁶⁶⁵

Freedmen in southwest Georgia and elsewhere had been stunned by rebel election-day violence in April, but they had not been crushed. When campaigning began for the national elections, they once again asserted their right to vote, their insistence on equal treatment under the law, and their desire for land. With little hope of any assistance from the US Army or Freedmen’s Bureau and with no help being offered by Georgia Republicans, the freedmen were forced to rely on their own forces.

⁶⁶⁵ *GWT*, Aug. 21, 1868; *ANR*, Sep. 15, 1868.

Freedmen's Bureau agents reported that Stewart County freedpeople were "armed and drilled." A large number of Randolph County freedpeople formed a militia. Freedpeople in Quitman and Clay County were "rapidly organizing." Union Leagues and Loyal Leagues mobilized in large numbers in Cuthbert, Camilla, Americus, and Perry. Freedmen marched "in armed force" at Hawkinsville. In Columbia County, "freedpeople formed a company of armed men" to defend themselves against the Klan.⁶⁶⁶

In most counties in the cotton belt, whenever the freedmen attempted to meet and exercise their democratic rights, they were met by rebel opposition. It was an unequal battle. Rebels used the law, county officials, sheriffs, judges, courts, and control over every aspect of the economy to counter black initiatives. And increasingly, they used their superior weaponry to impose their will through force and violence. Crimes against freed people became "more general and open upon the ratification of the 14th constitutional amendment by the Georgia legislature," noted Crumley and Joiner. The act "placed . . . criminals beyond the reach of the military authority." As for the Freedmen's Bureau, it "was now a mere nothing."⁶⁶⁷

A typical example was what happened when 76 freedmen gathered at a cabin in Dooly County at the end of August "for drill, to 'form a Grant Club, and for the security of all their rights'." On learning of the meeting, hundreds of whites from across the county met at the courthouse. They sent "four prominent citizens" to ascertain the intentions of the freedmen.

⁶⁶⁶ Cimbala, *Under the Guardianship of the Nation*, 209-210; O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 257-260; *SDNH*, Aug. 18, 1868; Wetherington, *Plain Folks Fight*, 270.

⁶⁶⁷ Crumley and Joiner, "Memorial of the colored men," 93, 94.

Grant Club organizer Hugh Dean handed them a paper sent out by Republican campaign manager Hulbert asserting “the right of the people to peaceable assemble.”⁶⁶⁸

The four men returned to the courthouse and reported that it was a peaceful meeting. Leading county rebels rejected the report and insisted that the sheriff arrest Dean for illegally detaining several negro men. A “peace warrant” was issued, and the sheriff and a large posse were sent to arrest him. When Dean and other Grant Club members resisted, the sheriff told them he had “sufficient force” to make the arrest “without regard to consequences.” That is, his armed posse would shoot to kill. Dean was taken to jail, “charged with the crime of false imprisonment.”⁶⁶⁹

A Grant Club participant wrote a letter to the *National Republican*—one of the few letters written by a black man to be published by the main Republican paper in the state—explaining what happened next. “The Judge of the County Court and Sheriff of the county swore they would not recognize the negro as having the right to vote and hold office, and they should not have Grant Clubs in that county; that if they could not defeat Grant any other way, *they would kill the last damned negro in that county.*” A Club member was “knocked down for claiming that the colored people had the right to meet and peaceably discuss their rights, and all the rest were frightened away.” Emboldened by this success, a hundred and fifty whites, “well armed” and “on horseback,” “went up to where another Club had been organized” and “ran women and men into the woods from several plantations.” Declaring that a black man named Jerry Brown was “one of

⁶⁶⁸ *ANR*, Aug. 28, 1868; Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 71-72.

⁶⁶⁹ *ANR*, Aug. 28, 1868.

the scoundrels who had a gun at the Club meeting,” they kidnapped him, tied him to a tree, and shot him multiple times.” When his body was found, “the hogs was hold of it.”⁶⁷⁰

The letter writer himself was forced to hide in the woods for a week, beset by forty of fifty armed men for being “simply a Republican, wanting to see the liberties of my race secured. These armed men are Democrats, sworn to kill me and all men getting up these clubs; some of them are officers of the law, Judges of the Courts, and Sheriffs.” “They patrol the roads, as of old, to catch slaves out after times—they beat us with sticks—if we have a social gathering during week days, it’s found out soon the house is surrounded by armed white men from a distance, and by order it’s broken up – our women are taken from us, and abused in such a way I shall not here relate. At church, armed white men sit to watch us.” They “are taking our shot guns away from us. They all have army guns, most shot several times. . . . The jail is full of Grant Club men, who are persuaded every day to join the Seymour and Blair party, but they refuse; so they are kept in jail—otherwise they would be set free.”⁶⁷¹

Freedmen’s Bureau agent Daniel Losey investigated the incident and called for Army troops to intervene. Dooley County Judge Shep Rogers ridiculed the idea: “Bullock has not any to give you. General Meade can’t send them without violating his orders.” As for the threat of an armed response from the besieged blacks, “Rodgers laughingly replied, ‘We don’t fear your negro brigade’.” The response of the *National Republican* to the “interesting letter” of the “Dooly colored man” was to advise the party’s “white friends, be discreet, but brave. . . . It is not

⁶⁷⁰ *ANR*, Aug. 28, 1868. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*

every one that has the privilege of dying for his principles and his country. Let all put their trust in the just God.”⁶⁷²

Attempts of white Republicans to campaign were met with violence. Conservative Savannah Republican D. Hall Rice reported that at Valdosta he was met by “50 democrats . . . armed to the teeth” who “made constant threats of violence.” His brother, an assistant assessor, was driven out of town. At Quitman, Rice was surrounded by a mob of young men, some armed, and forced to get back on the train with bullets flying behind him. Republicans who had been elected to county office in the April elections were ousted from their posts at the point of a rifle. Democratic Party newspapers filled their columns with reports of electors in south Georgia withdrawing their names from the Republican ticket, of judges and others declining their nominations and supporting the Democrats. Hopkins’s brother Thomas, a prominent Thomasville Republican, held out as long as he could before capitulating. In southwest Georgia, notes O’Donovan, “no Republican occupied the seat he had won.”⁶⁷³

In areas like the 5th District where the Klan was just getting started, den leaders began with carefully planned initiatives against their Republican opponents. The Klan considered poor whites as much an enemy as Union League blacks. “Probably ninety per cent of the whites were debtors,” Oglethorpe County Klan leader John Reed acknowledged. “After the April elections, many weak-kneed whites were secretly beginning to curry favor with the Scalawags. . . . To prevent this menaced defection of the whites who were tempted to get relief by yielding suffrage

⁶⁷² ANR, Aug. 28, 1868; Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 71-72.

⁶⁷³ Hall to Bullock, Aug. 16, 1868; D. Hall Rice to Hon. R. B. Bullock, Aug. 16, 1868, Governor Bullock file, Georgia Department of Archives and History (GDAH), Morrow; *SDNH*, Aug. 31 and Sep. 12, 1868; O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 256-57.

to the negro was *the hardest of all the tasks of the Ku Klux*. I make this emphatic declaration here because the important fact has up to this time been overlooked even by native historians.”⁶⁷⁴

In one of the Oglethorpe Klan’s first actions in the summer of 1868, it “so effectually squelched an attempt of [county Ordinary F. J.] Robinson to assemble a meeting of whites to declare for relief that there was never afterwards the slightest danger that many would avowedly ally themselves with the Republicans.” When Charles Stearns attempted to occupy his post as ordinary of Columbia County, rebels informed him that “[w]e own the Court-house, and it shall not be occupied by niggers or the friends of niggers.” He was threatened with death, pushed down stairs, and his driver beaten severely. Stearns resigned from office in fear for his life.⁶⁷⁵

The hardline rebels in the ruling class used their posses in southwest Georgia and the Klan in the fifth district, in north Georgia, and elsewhere to wage war on their *class* enemies: white yeomen and poor whites as well as the freedmen in the Union Leagues. They played the *race card* to prevent their class enemies from uniting against them.

The new Republican governments in North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and Alabama were overwhelmed by this upsurge in rebel violence. Whereas the hardline Democrats were able to rely on sheriffs, county officials, and armed nightriders to impose their version of law and order, Republicans relied on Congress and the Union Army. Bullock and other southern governors wrote Meade that they were “powerless and unable to enforce the laws, without the aid and co-operation of the Military” and requested the assistance of the US Army.⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷⁴ Reed, “What I Know of the Ku Klux Klan,” January 1908. Emphasis added. Many “native historians” continue to ignore this “important fact” over one hundred years after Reed’s article was written.

⁶⁷⁵ Reed, “What I Know of the Ku Klux Klan,” March 1908; Stearns, *The Black Man of the South*, 223.

⁶⁷⁶ *Report of Major General Meade*, 12-13; Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 69.

The last thing the Republican Party wanted in 1868 was to see the US army back in action in the South. Grant's whole campaign was based on the idea that peace was at hand. Backed by Grant and Army Chief of Staff General John Rawlins, Meade rejected all such requests. "However lamentable may be the state of affairs as reported," he wrote Army Colonel John Sprague in Florida, "you have no power to remedy it. If the Government is unable to enforce law and order in the State, he should so report to the President, when orders will be given for the military power to intervene." As Meade knew well, Johnson would never give any such orders. Blodgett, the chairman of the Republican State Executive Committee, appealed for help from Congress. "The democrats have inaugurated a new revolution in the state," he pleaded. "They intend to overthrow the state government. . . . We have reliable information that the democrats are arming in every part of the state. . . . Can Congress do anything for us?" Congress did nothing.⁶⁷⁷

With rebel violence raging across the South and neither Congress nor the US Army offering assistance, governors in several southern states took steps to organize loyal militias to defend their governments. State militias organized by Brownlow in Tennessee and by the new Republican governor in Arkansas confronted the Klan. This was one threat the ruling class rebels had to take seriously. Their organized forces were still tiny. They were far outnumbered by blacks and relief-minded white yeomen. With state support, proper leadership, and arms, a loyalist militia uniting yeomen and poor whites with black Union League members could push back the rebels.

⁶⁷⁷ *Report of Major General Meade*, 44; *SDNH*, Sep. 14, 1868. See also Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 74.

The Republican leadership in Georgia not only never considered that possibility, they actively opposed it. Blodgett's plea for aid from Congress noted as one of the party's major accomplishments that "everything is being done that can be to prevent the colored men from arming." The last thing the party leadership wanted was to see blacks armed, worse yet, poor blacks armed alongside poor whites.⁶⁷⁸

When the Republican leadership failed to act, Aaron Bradley raised, once again, the call for a militia. On August 3, he "introduced a resolution that the committee on militia be instructed to bring in a bill organizing able-bodied loyal citizens to serve as militia, irrespective of race or color." Thousands of members of the black Union Leagues were ready, having drilled and undergone rudimentary military training. On August 13, J. F. Wilson wrote a letter to Bullock pledging the services of one hundred Savannah blacks, all Union veterans, to support the government as an organized militia company.⁶⁷⁹

Bradley's proposal provoked a rare discussion in the legislature about the need for a militia to counter the ongoing rebel violence wracking the countryside. Carpetbag Senator Joseph Adkins from Klan-infested Warren County noted he had "warned the negroes . . . to arm themselves for the purpose of self-protection against lawless bands." He "apprehended civil war, upon the eve of which the signs of the times would indicate the country now to be." He alluded to the murder of Ashburn, and "apprehended a similar disposal of himself." On August 19,

⁶⁷⁸ *SDNH*, Sep. 14, 1868.

⁶⁷⁹ *SDNH*, Aug. 4 and 6, 1868; J. F. Wilson to Rufus Bullock, Rufus B. Bullock, Incoming Correspondence, File II, Reference Services, RG 4-2-46, GDAH. In his letter to Bullock, Wilson added that he had informed "Colonel Hopkins" of their intention "some time since" and was anxiously awaiting the day when Hopkins would become mayor of Savannah.

Bryant introduced a motion in the General Assembly for the organization of 1,000 loyal militia in each congressional district to suppress the Klan.⁶⁸⁰

Democrats and conservative Republicans moved quickly to change the subject to the question of race. Committee members investigating Bradley's right to be in the legislature submitted their report, which declared Bradley ineligible for office due to his having served time in Sing Sing. Democrats threatened the two other black senators not to come to Bradley's defense. "One false step taken by them might place them in an irretrievable vortex of ruin and shame," warned Democratic Senator Nunnally. "The prosperity and success of their race" depended on their vote.⁶⁸¹

Tunis Campbell ignored the warning. He filibustered for three days against Bradley's expulsion. Campbell's oration was constantly interrupted by "hooting" and "hissing" and disgraceful "scenes of confusion." Senators walked out. "Have we (negroes) equal rights here?" asked Campbell. He predicted that if Bradley were ruled ineligible, "he would be met by the sympathies of 92,000 voters of a downtrodden race Who knows but your action in this matter will excite a revolution among the people? It will establish a precedent." Campbell's call for "revolution" was an idle threat. Democrats' and conservative Republicans' consciences were unmoved. Bradley was expelled from the Senate.⁶⁸²

⁶⁸⁰ *GWT*, Aug. 14 and 21, 1868; *SDNH*, Aug. 21, 1868.

⁶⁸¹ *GWT*, Aug. 14, 1868; Nathans, *Losing the Peace*, 122.

⁶⁸² *GWT*, Aug. 21, 1868; *Daily Constitutionalist*, Aug. 16, 1868. Bradley's expulsion was accompanied by a lot of political maneuvering. Given the balance of forces in the legislature, there was no doubt that a vote on the committee report would result in his ouster. The party leadership encouraged him to resign. A resignation would allow Bullock to call for new elections, with the hope that Hopkins or some other Republican would be elected in Bradley's place. Bradley went along with this plan and submitted a letter of resignation to Bullock. Bullock

For Bradley, the failure of the Republican leadership to defend him and other blacks in the legislature was the last straw. Particularly galling was the hypocrisy of Bullock and the white Radicals, saying one thing and then doing another. This betrayal was even worse than the open racism of the Democrats. On the day after he was ousted, Bradley announced his candidacy for a seat in Congress, running against Dr. Clift, the white Republican incumbent. About 500 blacks left a party rally in Atlanta to hear him speak. He “denounced and abused the white Radical [Republican] leaders of Georgia in the bitterest language imaginable; declared they were the very worst friends of the colored race, and were leagued with Democrats to prevent negroes from holding office.” Bradley “advised the negroes to join neither party, but to band together as a balance of power and vote with those only who would do the most for them.”⁶⁸³

Bradley’s distancing from Georgia’s Republican Party leadership was a step toward defining an independent position, but only a first step. He could have used it to speak out not just on behalf of blacks but for Charles Ashburn and Robert Hopkins and the tens of thousands of poor and yeomen whites now under assault by the Klan. Instead, he advised his audience in Savannah “never to trust” carpetbaggers and scalawags again. He could have countered the Democrat and Republican propaganda about a threatened race war. Instead, he rhetorically asked the Democrats: “Do you want another war? Do you want a revolution? . . . In the cities you can protect yourselves, but in the country places, what will the planter do while his house is

immediately posted a notice calling for a new election for senator in the first district. Ignoring Bradley’s resignation and Bullock’s call for a new election, the Senate majority voted that Bradley was ineligible to take office and seated Colonel Rufus E. Lester, his Democratic opponent in the April elections. See *SDNH*, Aug. 10, 12, and 18, 1868.

⁶⁸³ *Democratic Advocate* (Westminster, Maryland), Sep. 3, 1868 (citing an article in the *New York Herald*); *GWT*, Aug. 21, 1868; *SDR*, Sep. 8, 1868; *SDNH*, Sep. 8, 1868.

burning?” He could have renewed his call for a biracial militia, demanded the Army fight against the counterrevolution, and defend all supporters of Reconstruction. Instead, he “thought that the negro race would be saved by the election of Grant in November.”⁶⁸⁴

The Republican leadership, which proved incapable of defending blacks facing ouster in the legislature or braving death in the countryside, devoted considerable resources to counter Bradley’s bid for office. Ignoring the violence pervading the state, the *New Era* denounced him as a “pestiferous and foolhardy disturber of the public peace.” The Clift brothers campaigned against Bradley in the eastern part of the first district, while D. Hall Rice campaigned in the west. Bradley garnered some support among black activists. A “committee of negro radicals” met Clift in Thomasville and told him they supported Bradley and “had no further call for his [Clift’s] services.” But his appeal to blacks to vote for himself and other black candidates in future elections and to rely on a Grant win in November was no answer to the ongoing rebel violence. Bradley was forced to cancel his “great political camp meeting” in the Ogeechee area when only a handful of freedmen showed up. Few Bradley supporters attended the First District convention in Blackshear. Clift received the nomination on the first ballot. In early September, Bullock posted a proclamation acknowledging Bradley’s ouster from the Senate and his replacement by the Democrat Lester.⁶⁸⁵

While the Republican leadership was busy countering Bradley, the Democratic–conservative Republican bloc wasted no time moving against the other black members in the

⁶⁸⁴ *Democratic Advocate* (Westminster, Maryland), Sep. 3, 1868 (citing an article in the *New York Herald*); *GWT*, Aug. 21, 1868; *SDR*, Sep. 8, 1868; *SDNH*, Sep. 8, 1868.

⁶⁸⁵ *SDNH*, Aug. 14, 15, 18, 28, 29, and 31, 1868; *SDR*, Sep. 4, 1868; *ANR*, Sep. 6, 1868; *SMN*, Oct. 12, 1868.

legislature. With the Union Leagues on the run in the countryside, the army immobilized, and confidence growing for a Democratic victory in national elections, the bloc intended to deal a decisive blow to any hopes of the freedmen for radical change through the ballot box, while increasing Republican divisions along race lines.

The General Assembly adopted a Democratic motion that all blacks be declared ineligible. Democratic Senator Milton A. Candler cited the position of Georgia's leading Republican, ex-Governor Brown, now the chief justice of the Georgia Supreme Court, who insisted that blacks had no constitutional right to hold office. When Speaker of the House R. L. McWorter, a conservative Republican, ruled that blacks could not participate in the vote, expulsion became inevitable. On September 3, all blacks in the House were expelled by a vote of 83 to 23. Of sixty white Republicans, only ten scalawags and nine carpetbaggers voted against expulsion. The majority of Republicans abstained from the vote. Eleven days later, the two remaining black senators, Campbell and Wallace, were expelled.⁶⁸⁶

Bullock and the Republican legislators who had voted against the expulsions could have withdrawn from office and dissolved the state government. Such an action would have brought the collapse of the Republican Party in Georgia to the attention of the nation. But Bullock didn't want to do anything to hurt Grant's "peace" campaign. When the blacks were expelled, Bullock submitted a "respectful objection" to the expulsions. Ignoring the war taking place in the countryside, he appealed to the rebels in the legislature "as lovers of our common country and well wishers of the peace and good order of the State." He prepared his legal argument for an appeal to Congress by quoting at length from the US and Georgia constitutions to prove that blacks had a right to hold office. The *National Republican* called it a "magnificent document"

⁶⁸⁶ Nathans, *Losing the Peace*, 121-24, 130.

full of “convincing arguments.” Having made his pro forma objection, Bullock submitted to the General Assembly the names of the white Democrats who were to replace the expelled blacks.⁶⁸⁷

Black legislators were given one hour each to speak before their expulsions. Turner refused to plead with whites as some of his black colleagues had done because it reminded him “of slaves begging under the lash.” Instead, he threatened to “hurl thunderbolts at the men who dare cross the threshold of my manhood.” Like Bradley, Turner was outraged by the betrayal of the white Republican legislators. His speech amounted to a postmortem on the strategy he had faithfully pursued since the end of the war:

[N]o man in Georgia has been more conservative than I. . . . ‘Anything to please the white folks’ has been my motto; and so closely have I adhered to that course, that many among my own party have classed me as a Democrat. . . . I recollect that when we wanted candidates for the Constitutional Convention, we went from door to door in the ‘Negro belt,’ and begged white men to run. Some promised to do so; and yet, on the very day of election, many of them first made known their determination not to comply with their promises. . . . No man has ever been more deceived in that race than I have been for the last three weeks. I was not aware that there was in the character of that race so much cowardice, or so much pusillanimity. . . . [I]t is extraordinary, I say, that, with all these advantages on your side, you can make war upon the poor defenseless black man.⁶⁸⁸

While completely focused on the expulsions rather than the violence raining down on blacks and poor whites in the countryside, Turner’s speech marked a small step forward. Middle-class blacks would no longer merely follow the lead of the white Radicals, but would speak for themselves. Turner called for a blacks-only convention to meet in Macon in October.

⁶⁸⁷ ANR, Sep. 11, 1868; Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 64-65.

⁶⁸⁸ Drago, *Black Politicians and Reconstruction in Georgia*, 52; H. M. Turner, “Speech on the Eligibility of Colored Members To Seats in the Georgia Legislature,” in Ethel Maude Christler, “Participation of Negroes in the Government of Georgia 1867-1870,” 1932 PhD thesis, Atlanta University, Appendix B, 93-94; *SDNH*, Sep. 21, 1868.

The ouster of all blacks from the Georgia legislature was big news in the North. The Democratic Party's virulently racist campaign against Reconstruction and the Fourteenth Amendment, the prominence of Wade Hampton, Forrest, and other former Confederate generals in the southern Democracy, and growing violence against Republicans and blacks throughout the South had reenergized northern Republicans. Memories of the recent war still loomed large among farmers and working men. The gains of the war were in danger. What was sorely needed, what the southern governors had called for, were military measures to crush the counterrevolution.

The Republican leadership, conservatives and Radicals alike, worked overtime to channel the growing anti-Confederate sentiment into a vote for Grant in the November elections. This approach was on full display at a "monster" meeting in the conservative Republican stronghold of New York on September 14. The *New York Times* called it "the largest and most enthusiastic" Republican election rally of the year with up to 10,000 in attendance. Speakers ranged from conservative Republican Henry J. Raymond, owner of the *New York Times*, a man who despised Bradley, to two Republican leaders stationed in the South--US District Court Judge Richard Busteed from Alabama and Florida Governor Harrison Reed—to Aaron Bradley.⁶⁸⁹

Bradley had been invited to speak by Charles Spencer, the Radical Republican who had supported his admission to the New York bar in 1867. Bradley's presence would give a radical cachet to the meeting. It would also remove him from Georgia to the great relief of Governor Bullock. For Bradley the meeting would give him the recognition he felt he deserved. It also meant he wouldn't have to face the constant threats to his life in Georgia.

⁶⁸⁹ *NYT*, Sep. 15, 1868.

Raymond gave the keystone speech. “Peace has been restored to our beloved land,” he declared. “The sounds of war no more assail our ears.” “New Governments have been organized” in the South. “All that we now need is time and patience. . . . If the process can go on simply as it is now going, a very few years will give us peace.” Raymond combined this peace scenario incongruously with comparisons of the Democratic Party’s campaign with the counterrevolutions after the British and French revolutions and with Louis Napoleon’s coup d’etat.⁶⁹⁰

The two southern speakers contradicted Raymond. Busted “denied that peace had come.” “There was as much of the gall of rebellion” among “the aristocratic and educated portion” as there was “when their rebel swords first leaped from their rebel scabbards. . . . The South today bore the same hostility to the Constitution of the United States and the Union as during the war.” But, he argued, there was no more need for military action. “The first conflict ended in the surrender of the rebel armies to ‘unconditional Surrender’ Grant, and the last conflict would be decided in November next by a victory in favor of the same great General. . . . Once they had used the sword to conquer; now they would use the no less effective weapon of the ballot.”⁶⁹¹

Bradley, introduced as “the man that has made all the trouble” and “cheered with the greatest enthusiasm,” could have spoken about the rise of the Klan, the attacks on blacks and Republicans in the countryside, the absence of democratic rights. He could have called for the army to defend Reconstruction in Georgia and for the formation and arming of a state militia. But he shared the same illusions as the other speakers in the election of Grant as the solution for

⁶⁹⁰ *NYT*, Sep. 15, 1868.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*

counterrevolution. Echoing Bullock, Bradley used the occasion to denounce the ouster of blacks from the Georgia legislature and to defend blacks' right to hold office under the terms of the Fourteenth Amendment.⁶⁹²

Flush with their success in expelling blacks from the legislature, rebels were inspired to take their offensive against blacks and Republicans to a new level. Less than a week after the expulsions, carpetbagger Republican candidates William Pierce and John Murphy and expelled black legislator Philip Joiner called for a campaign rally in the tiny town of Camilla in southwest Georgia. Mitchell County rebels mobilized to prevent the meeting. The Young Men's Democratic Club in nearby Albany had received a shipment of five cases of repeating rifles a week before. The threat of violence was palpable. Reverend Robert Crumley, like Joiner a recently expelled legislator, warned his Albany congregation "not to go to Camilla 'with less than 150 men . . . well armed with plenty of ammunition'."⁶⁹³

Ignoring the warning signs, the organizers decided to hold the rally. The 150 blacks who marched to the rally were not prepared for conflict, though some "brought weapons, mostly shotguns loaded with birdshot, which they carried out of habit." Mitchell County Sheriff Mumford Poore met the marchers outside Camilla and demanded they disarm before entering the town. The march organizers insisted that their intention was to hold a peaceful political meeting. Poore deputized a "posse of every man in town . . . to arm themselves" to prevent the meeting. They stocked freshly loaded guns in nearby stores and arranged themselves "in position to cross fire over the public square." When the first marchers arrived in Camilla, they were mowed down.

⁶⁹² *NYT*, Sep. 15, 1868.

⁶⁹³ Lee Formwalt, "The Camilla Massacre of 1868: Racial Violence as Political Propaganda," *GHQ* 71, no. 3 (Fall 1987), 405, 415. The Formwalt article is the best account of the Camilla Massacre.

Armed rebels on horseback pursued those who survived the initial volleys. By the end of the day, notes O'Donovan, one-third of the marchers were dead. Rebel "gangs swept through Newton and Blakeley, seeking out not just the survivors of Camilla but Republican leaders more generally, captains of companies that drilled."⁶⁹⁴

Freedmen's Bureau Assistant Commissioner O. H. Howard immediately notified Meade of what had happened and requested troops be sent to restore order and protect the freedmen. Poore and other "leading citizens" of Camilla sent their story of a "black riot," of armed blacks "led on by wicked white men," to the Democrats in the legislature and to the national press. Hundreds of blacks mobilized in Albany and prepared to march on Camilla to assist their besieged comrades. Howard acted quickly to deter blacks from responding. He promised them that the guilty would be punished and the freedmen protected. In a letter to the Bureau headquarters in Atlanta, he "wondered how long he would 'have the heart to deceive these freedmen by false promises'."⁶⁹⁵

The slaughter in Mitchell County quickly made headlines across the country. Formwalt notes that "'Camilla' became a campaign code word which, for Republicans, meant violent southern efforts to undo Reconstruction; for Democrats, it was synonymous with meddlesome carpetbaggers attempting to undermine the established social order." Though Camilla was useful as campaign propaganda for Republicans, the last thing they wanted was for news of the massacre to lead to demands for US Army intervention or, still worse, for arming southern blacks and poor whites in militias. Bullock quickly downplayed the significance of the events.

⁶⁹⁴ Formwalt, "The Camilla Massacre," 407, 410, 411; O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 261, 262.

⁶⁹⁵ Formwalt, "Camilla Massacre," 415, 416, and 417.

He characterized it as an isolated incident, confined to one county. Bullock's message to the legislature two days after the massacre was a model of obfuscation:

- Dozens of unarmed blacks mowed down became “fifty people [race unspecified] killed or wounded.”
- A killing spree organized by the leading citizens of the town became an attack by “irresponsible persons of one political party” who opposed “the right of the people to peacefully assemble.” It was “however, gratifying to know,” Bullock continued, “that this sentiment is confined to a few lawless persons, who are not countenanced or supported by the responsible citizens.”
- Sheriff Poore's leadership of the mob became praise for the “honest efforts of the officers of the law.”⁶⁹⁶

As for doing anything about the violence, Bullock said his hands were tied. Congress, he said, had “very properly prohibited” a state militia in Georgia. Instead, he “earnestly recommended” that the legislature ask the President to place US military forces in Mitchell County. When the legislature, as expected, turned down Bullock's proposal to request US troops, a relieved R. C. Drum informed Meade that “the presence of troops is not necessary.”⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁶ Formwalt, “Camilla Massacre,” 422; *ANR*, Sep. 23, 1868.

⁶⁹⁷ *ANR*, Sep. 23, 1868; R. C. Drum to Major General George C. Meade, Sep. 23, 1868, in *Report of Major General Meade's Military Operations and Administration of Civil Affairs in the Third Military District and Dept. of the South* (Atlanta: 1868), 49. Bullock justified his opposition to a state militia by referring to a rider attached to an Army Appropriations Act passed by Congress in March 1867 prohibiting militias in the southern states. The bill was enacted to prevent militias being used by unreconstructed state governments against freedmen and Republicans. In early 1868, the newly reconstructed governments demanded the bill be repealed. The Senate introduced a bill to repeal the militia ban in July. Meade agreed with Bullock that this act prevented Georgia from organizing a state militia. See Otis A. Singletary, “The Negro Militia Movement During Radical Reconstruction,” *LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses*, 1954, 5-7; “General Orders No. 27,” Oct. 8, 1868, *Report of Meade's Military Operations*, 51.

Bullock's statement at least had the merit of placing blame for the Camilla massacre on supporters of the Democratic Party. Meade found even this went too far. Rejecting Howard's report as biased, Meade's "Report on Camilla Difficulty" placed the blame for the deaths in Camilla on the *organizers of the rally*. "The conduct of Messrs. Pierce and Murphy," he said, was "in the highest degree reprehensible." When they refused to obey Sheriff Poore and disarm the blacks, he argued, it made "collision, riot and bloodshed . . . inevitable." As for Sheriff Poore, Meade acknowledged he may have been more involved in the shooting than he let on—a charge he found "almost too terrible to believe"—and urged a civil court to investigate the sheriff's actions. In his report, Meade assured Bullock that had the "collision" in Camilla "been followed by retaliation on the part of the colored population, I would at once have sent sufficient troops to have restored order." Meade's hands were tied, it appeared, when it came to mustering troops against counterrevolutionary mobs, but unbound when it came to putting down blacks trying to defend themselves.⁶⁹⁸

On October 6, delegates from nearly 100 counties participated in the blacks-only convention in Macon. The Camilla massacre focused the attention of conference attendees outside the narrow confines of the legislative chamber in Atlanta to the extreme violence against ordinary blacks in the countryside. On the first day of the conference, at the urging of delegates, Reverend Crumley from Albany spoke about Camilla. The reporter for the *Macon Telegraph* described his speech as "exceedingly inflammatory." Crumley "said the whites of the South were determined to re-enslave the blacks, but failing in that, they were determined to get their labor for nothing or take their lives." The issue of arming blacks in self-defense was raised. Delegates

⁶⁹⁸ George G. Meade to R. B. Bullock, Oct. 3, 1868 in *Report of Meade's Military Operations*, 80, 81.

asked Congress: “Shall we look to your august body in the future for protection from injustice as we have in the past, or must we protect ourselves?”⁶⁹⁹

Turner, for his part, focused on “the right of the colored man to hold offices.” He denounced the Republicans who voted for the expulsion of the blacks as “meaner than Democrats and never to be supported for anything.” He regarded the Legislature as “illegal, revolutionary in its character, and declare[d] he will break it up.” Turner’s electoral focus won the day. The convention did not raise the demand for a militia and rejected the call for armed self-defense. In a closing resolution, delegates promised to fight those who denied blacks equal rights “with words, with the press, on the stump, on our knees, in the Courts, in the Congress, or wherever we can, *except in mortal combat.*”⁷⁰⁰

The convention was a step toward the formation of a black caucus in Georgia’s Republican Party. At the end of the convention, delegates formed a black-only Civil and Political Rights Association and sent Simms, Turner, and Costin to lobby Washington to reverse the ouster of blacks from the legislature.⁷⁰¹

“Camilla and its aftermath drove black radicalism in southwest Georgia to ground,” writes Susan O’Donovan. Bureau agent William C. Morrill described the situation in Americus:

The condition of the colored people in Schley Co. is most deplorable. There seems to be no protection for them at all. They are continually shot, beaten nearly to death, and it seems from the testimony, the most respectable citizens are engaged in it, if there can be any respectability about such people. . . . There is a perfect reign of terror, and they swear, so I am told, no freedman shall vote the

⁶⁹⁹ *SMN*, Oct. 8 and 9, 1868. Bryant, who had presided over meetings of the Georgia Equal Rights Association in 1866 and 1867, was allowed to address the body, but there were no white men present during sessions. Bradley, still in New York, did not attend.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

⁷⁰¹ *SDR*, Oct. 13, 1868. See also Drago, *Black Politicians and Reconstruction*, 53.

Radical ticket. . . . Even Major Wilson said last night “God damn it I wish I had a company of cavalry and a roving commission I’d like to shoot about a hundred [rebels].”⁷⁰²

“The present aspect of affairs warrants no reasonable hope that there is either happiness or prosperity at hand for the freedpeople,” wrote Bureau agent O. H. Howard. He advised the freedmen in Albany to avoid political meetings, and if they held any “always without arms.” Blacks in rebel and/or Klan-dominated counties did whatever it took to stay alive. Union Leagues, Loyal Leagues, and Grant Clubs were dissolved. Blacks in a number of counties joined organizations of colored Democrats to get out of the line of fire. Carpetbaggers in south Georgia—schoolteachers, planters, elected officials—sought refuge in Atlanta and began to move out of state. More than a few blacks turned their anger against the Republican Party. Shortly before he abandoned his plantation and left the state, J. W. Loving, a carpetbagger friend of Charles Stearns, wrote him that

the black people the men on your place would kill you for little or nothing they say you have preached to them so much about Elivation and Education [but] the yankeys have not done right by them. They come down here and set them free and give them nothing to go upon you made them belive your way was right and they voted your way and now the North wont give them any protection.⁷⁰³

While rebels rampaged in Georgia, Bullock spent much of October in Indiana, Ohio, and New York State, campaigning for Grant and the return of the ousted blacks to the legislature. He offered rewards for murderers and ordered sheriffs to protect life and property. But “his

⁷⁰² O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 262; Formwalt, “Camilla Massacre,” 419; J R Lewis, Asst Comm FB to Bullock, Nov. 2, 1868, citing a letter from W C Morril, agent at Americus, Rufus B. Bullock, Incoming Correspondence, File II, Reference Services, RG 4-2-46, GDAH.

⁷⁰³ O. H. Howard to Sibley, Sep. 19, 1868, cited in Cimbala, *Under the Guardianship of the Nation*, 218; Stearns, *Black Man of the South*, 235.

proclamations had little effect,” notes Russell Duncan, “because Democrats ignored them and Republicans were afraid to enforce them.” Unable and unwilling to confront the Democrats’ “muskets, shotguns and pistols,” the party leadership ceased campaigning in many counties and resigned itself to losing the election. The *Augusta National Republican* consoled itself with the hope that “the reign of the revolutionary Democracy in Georgia will be brief.” “There is too much intelligence and patriotism in our country for unsuccessful revolutionists [Toombs, Cobb, and Hill] . . . long to rule and domineer as they have been doing. . . . Reason and judgment will after a while assert their right to control the conduct of rational men.”⁷⁰⁴

In Savannah, Democrats used the remaining weeks before the elections to strengthen the police force and civilian paramilitaries. On October 8, the Democrat-dominated legislature gave the City Court of Savannah “jurisdiction over all offences committed within the county of Chatham that are of a less grade than felony.” County blacks had no vote in municipal elections, but city cops now controlled law enforcement in their communities. Pay was increased for Savannah policemen. On September 30, a special meeting of Savannah Volunteer Guards was called “on business of importance.” “Veteran soldiers” were requested to attend. The *Savannah Morning News* announced the formation of a community patrol in the southern suburbs “for mutual protection to themselves and their property. . . . The patrol will scour the suburbs every night, and they are vested with police powers.” On its first night out, the patrol arrested two blacks “under very suspicious circumstances.”⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰⁴ *ANR*, Sep. 19, 20 21, 26, and 30, 1868; Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 73; *SMN*, Oct. 23 and 30, 1868.

⁷⁰⁵ *SMN*, Sep. 30 and Oct. 2, 12, and 15, 1868.

Despite the pressure, blacks and Republicans in Savannah continued to function. They held regular campaign meetings in the city as well as in nearby Liberty County. Blacks announced their candidacies for justice of the peace and county constable in upcoming municipal elections. They resisted the increase in policing and arrests. The rebel press complained that “hardly an arrest of a negro is made, now-a-days, but an attempt is made to rescue him by negro mobs. . . . It is time their insolence should be checked . . . in such a manner that the remembrance of it will strike terror to the heart of each member of the race.”⁷⁰⁶

Days before the election, Republicans held a final campaign rally at the courthouse. The threat of Democratic violence was palpable. The meeting flyer was addressed to “all those opposed to INTOLERANCE, OSTRACISM, INTIMIDATION and COERCION.” Five hundred blacks attended, far less than the boisterous and enthusiastic meetings of a year earlier. A “large proportion” of the freedmen present were “from the country.” As in previous Republican public rallies in the city, substantial numbers of whites listened to the proceedings “on the outskirts of the main body.”⁷⁰⁷

The Savannah party was now fully under the control of the Bullock leadership. The chairman and main speakers at the rally were three carpetbaggers: Isaac Seeley and the Clift brothers. Hopkins and Simms, who had led the Savannah rallies in April, also spoke. Hopkins’s status in the party remained high. Over the summer, he played a prominent role in the Republican Convention in Atlanta, was elected to the Georgia Republican Executive Committee, became an at-large alternative elector for Grant, and was a confidant of Bullock. Bradley, still

⁷⁰⁶ *SDR*, Sep. 15, 1868; *SMN*, Sep. 29 and 31, Oct. 9, 10, 13, and 21, 1868.

⁷⁰⁷ *SMN*, Oct. 26 and 28, 1868; *SDR*, Oct. 28, 1868. Emphasis in original.

persona non grata after challenging Dr. Clift for the senatorial nomination, was on the podium but did not speak.⁷⁰⁸

Rally speakers made no attempt to prepare black voters for the likelihood of violence on election day. Simms and Hopkins aimed their speeches at the Democratic leadership. Simms commended local authorities for their respect for civil rights. Chatham County Republicans, he said, “had not been disturbed in their right of free speech, and in the exercise of their privileges; but up in the State they murdered and beat radicals.” He said nothing about the killing of Robert Hopkins, the multiple arrests of leaders of black organizations, and the growth of white paramilitary units. Both Hopkins and Simms made idle threats that if violence was used to prevent blacks from voting, there would be a race war. “Let the first crack of a pistol be heard,” Hopkins proclaimed, “and we would have all the horrors of an internicine war.” Simms promised that Savannah blacks “will remain peaceable, law-abiding citizens if we may, but devilish, fighting, burning citizens if we must.” He “warned the Democrats that if they pursued their present line of conduct there would be a fearful retribution when General Grant was elected.” Hopkins exuded optimism about the elections. He predicted the Republicans “would carry Chatham county by three thousand majority, and that the whites, finding it useless to struggle against the popular tide, would turn around and vote for Grant.”⁷⁰⁹

Buoyed by growing opposition to the rebel resurgence in the South, Republicans won big in fall elections in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and New England. *New York Times* reporter “Quondam” wrote from Augusta that “the result of the October elections has been a heavy blow

⁷⁰⁸ *SDNH*, Aug. 20 and 21, 1868; *SMN*, Oct. 26, 1868; Bullock file, C H Hopkins to R. B. Bullock, Aug 24, 1868, Rufus B. Bullock, Incoming Correspondence, File II, Reference Services, RG 4-2-46, GDAH.

⁷⁰⁹ *SMN*, Oct. 28, 1868.

and great discouragement to the Democrats of the State. . . . All hope of Seymour's election is gone." "They look for the silver lining of the cloud, and find it in Grant's conservatism," he noted. Georgia Democrats were confident that Grant would focus on "restoring the Union, reestablishing peace, renewing the bonds of fraternity between the sections."⁷¹⁰

With vanishing hopes that black suffrage would be turned back to the states by a Democratic president, Georgia Democrats found a "legal" way to eliminate black and poor white voters. They latched onto a provision in the new state constitution requiring the payment of an educational poll tax of one dollar in order to qualify to vote. The *Savannah Morning News* claimed that "out of the ninety thousand colored voters in the State not more than five hundred have paid their poll tax." Democrats in counties across the state obtained copies of tax lists naming those who owed. Ten days before the election, Bullock issued a proclamation suspending the poll tax requirement, but Democrats ignored him, claiming he had no right to suspend the requirement.⁷¹¹

With tax lists in hand, Democrats planned carefully for the elections. Klan leader John Reed described how this worked in Oglethorpe County. He used "legal proceedings" to install himself and other Democrats, rather than Republicans, as election superintendents. He made sure that the sheriff and deputy sheriff, both Republicans, would not be present in the county's key Lexington precinct on election day. In their place he selected a deputy sheriff and "a posse of fifteen men each one of whom I had picked with care. Every man had two six-shooters in his belt."⁷¹²

⁷¹⁰ *ANR*, Oct. 29, 1868.

⁷¹¹ *SMN*, Oct. 22 and 23, 1868.

⁷¹² Reed, "What I know of the Ku Klux Klan," February 1908.

On the day of the election, the sheriff and his posse were placed inside the courthouse, with “the rest of the Klan on the alert outside.” The election superintendents rejected almost all blacks for non-payment of taxes. White defaulters were told to pay their debt to the tax collector and then allowed to vote. Hundreds of blacks gathered outside the courthouse, demanding their Republican leaders do something. But, Reed notes, the “Scalawags” had been “completely outwitted and surprised” and “had little stomach for bold play.” Surrounded by armed Klansmen, threatened with jail if they tried to force their way to the ballot box, the Republican leaders gave up. Hundreds of blacks had no choice but to return home without the chance to deposit their ballots.⁷¹³

Rebel leaders in Savannah followed the same script as Reed. They obtained tax lists for the county. Bullock helped by naming P. M. Russell Jr. to preside at the city polls. Russell appointed six other rebels, including his father, as registrars, leaving two token slots for Republicans. The Democratic registrars decided that voting would be in one central location, the Chatham County courthouse. Russell knew that the black voters would arrive in a mass at the opening of the polls. He knew that when they were not allowed to vote because of failure to pay taxes, they would become extremely agitated and angry. The police and rebel paramilitaries would be in place when that happened.⁷¹⁴

The Russells had one obstacle to contend with. Democratic Sheriff James Dooner was not one of the rebel conspirators. The day before the elections, he published a list of thirty “special deputies” to aid him in “preserving order at the polls.” The list included several prominent Republicans, including Hopkins, James Johnson, Henry Bieber, and T. P. Robb. The rebels

⁷¹³ Reed, “What I know of the Ku Klux Klan,” February 1908.

⁷¹⁴ *SMN*, Oct 19 and 28 and Nov. 5, 1868; *Condition of Affairs in Georgia*, 44-45.

managed to include some of their own on the list, notably a last-minute addition identified as “Killourhy.”⁷¹⁵

Election day proceeded according to plan. Blacks arrived early at the polls. After twenty ballots were cast, the Democratic registrars began to challenge black voters over non-payment of the poll tax. Ninety percent of blacks were rejected. Voting slowed to a trickle. With over a thousand freedmen waiting for their chance to vote, anger grew in front of the courthouse as more were turned away. Paramilitaries from the civil patrols, the rifle club, the Young Men’s Democratic Club, and the white fire department moved into place.⁷¹⁶

The second stage of the operation began a little after 8 a.m., when fifty white men from the Central Railroad, a stronghold of the rebel movement, “marched up in a body” to vote. Special Deputy J. B. Killourhy and white citizens pushed aside the blacks waiting patiently in line to vote. When blacks resisted, Sheriff Dooner called upon the city police “to aid him in clearing the way.” Lt. Howard, his deputies, and white paramilitaries pushed the blacks aside. Some blacks fought back with fists and clubs. After the entrance was cleared, Dooner was called away to check the rear of the courthouse.⁷¹⁷

With Dooner out of the way, stage three began. A shot rang out, then two more shots. That was the signal for the police and paramilitaries surrounding the blacks. Immediately, “the air resounded with the reports of a hundred pistols.” “For from five to ten minutes the firing was continuous and unbroken, like the rattling of a cart loaded with iron bars over a stone paved street, and then it ceased altogether.” Blacks were totally unprepared for the onslaught. US Army

⁷¹⁵ *SMN*, Nov. 3, 1868.

⁷¹⁶ *Condition of Affairs in Georgia*, 45, 49-50.

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38; *SDR*, Nov. 4, 1868; *SMN*, Nov. 4, 1868.

Captain J. Murray Hoag noted afterwards that “not one in fifty [blacks] were armed, while the democracy had one or more revolvers each. Not more than one in ten [blacks] carried sticks or canes.” “At the first of the shooting the negroes stood” but they soon “broke and ran . . . pursued by officers and citizens. Bullets filled the air.” Blacks “hurried from the field, and scattered in every direction, seeking shelter from the shots, wherever any protecting covering could be found.”⁷¹⁸

Two policemen were fatally wounded. Whether they were struck by bullets fired by blacks or were accidentally shot by their own side was never established. At least three freedmen died and fifteen to twenty blacks were wounded, though the real figure was likely higher. Blacks often quietly buried their dead and treated their wounded behind closed doors since any evidence that they or members of their family had participated in confrontations could result in loss of jobs and further repression from the authorities.

The army arrived on the scene after the shooting was over. Seeing that the area around the courthouse was peaceful, they returned to barracks. Crowds of rebels gathered around the courthouse, making it a “reckless exposure of life . . . for a colored Republican to attempt to reach the polls.” The terrorized blacks retreated to the New Street church. Simms urged the blacks to “return to their homes and not attempt to vote.” He thought it best not “to risk any more bloodshed.” The only men who remained in line to vote were white. Registrars ceased challenges

⁷¹⁸ *SDR*, Nov. 4, 1868; *SMN*, Nov. 4, 1868; *Condition of Affairs in Georgia*, 55. The Savannah newspapers claimed that the first shot was fired by a black man, though they disagreed about details. It is unlikely that the Russells left the firing of the first shot up to chance. Rebels had been using black provocateurs since 1867, including the attempt to kidnap or kill Bradley in September 1867, the disruption of Bradley’s meeting on September 30, 1867, and probably the disruption of the February 4, 1868 meeting organized by Hopkins at the New Street church.

for nonpayment of poll tax. When not enough whites showed up at the polls, Democrats began pulling blacks out of the saloons and paying them to vote the Democratic ticket. One black man told Amherst Stone “he had voted 16 times and got \$5 for it.” The *Savannah Morning News*, which had called on whites to “turn the tide of evil at this hour” and take action, saluted the police and paramilitaries. “Many of our white citizens behaved with uncommon bravery, and fought like men who knew their rights, and dared maintain them.”⁷¹⁹

A very different election took place at the Chapman house polling site close to the Ogeechee rice fields. Bradley and the Ogeechee blacks took the rebel threats seriously. Unlike Republicans in Savannah, they came fully prepared to defend themselves and their right to vote. When eight hundred to one thousand blacks—men, women, and children—and a few whites gathered at the polling site, Solomon Farley and members of the Ogeechee Union League were in charge. From three to four hundred blacks brought their “guns, pistols, clubs, and old flint lock muskets.” When a white registrar, A. McKenzie Pittman, arrived from Savannah, he was given a list of Union League men to be appointed as sheriffs. Pickets were placed at the gate “to keep order and prevent fighting.” When a black man was challenged for non-payment of the poll tax, Bradley spoke to the crowd, making it clear that no one would be prevented from voting for non-payment of taxes. After that, all registered whites and blacks were able to vote without any

⁷¹⁹ *Condition of Affairs in Georgia*, 8, 47, 51; *SMN*, Nov. 3 and 4, 1868; *New York Tribune*, Nov. 12, 1868.

The best account of the November 1868 elections in Savannah is Jonathan M. Bryant’s article “‘We Defy You!’ Politics and Violence in Reconstruction Savannah” in *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah*, edited by Leslie M. Harris and Daina Ramey Berry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 161-84.

conflict. It the freest and fairest election in the state, one secured and made possible by armed freedmen.⁷²⁰

When voting ended at the Chapman house, blacks left in organized groups to make sure they were able to return to their homes without incident. Ever since the failed kidnapping attempt against him over a year earlier, Bradley travelled with a bodyguard. He was accompanied to his rooming house in Savannah by a armed contingent of about twenty Union Leaguers led by Solomon Farley and Paul Campbell. A prominent black businessman, King Solomon Thomas, rode alongside Bradley in his carriage.⁷²¹

When the rebels heard that Bradley was on his way back to Savannah, they decided to teach him and the Union League a lesson. They spread a rumor that Bradley and 500 armed negroes were marching along the Ogeechee road to attack the city. “General Anderson ordered a special force of mounted citizens, organized as a patrol guard, to go out and meet them.” Five or six young Democrats who had been “racing and screaming” on horseback through the streets volunteered. About two miles outside the city, the small but heavily armed posse encountered the outgunned but disciplined defense force protecting Bradley. A short but fierce fight ensued. When it ended, one patrol member, Samuel Law, 24, lay dead in the road. Several blacks died or were wounded. King Thomas was shot in the nose.⁷²²

The patrol returned to Savannah and claimed they had been ambushed. More likely, they attacked as soon as the blacks came into view, seeing it as a golden opportunity to get rid of Bradley once and for all. A detachment of fifty men was sent to avenge Law’s death. By then,

⁷²⁰ *SMN*, Jan. 22, 1869; *SDR*, Nov. 5, 1868.

⁷²¹ *SMN*, Nov. 6, 1868, and Jan. 22, 1869.

⁷²² *New York Tribune*, Nov. 12, 1868; *SDR*, Nov. 4, 1868; *SMN*, Nov. 4 and 7, 1868.

Bradley, Farley, and the other members of his bodyguard had disappeared. That night, “armed patrols marched through the streets of the city at frequent intervals.” “A heavy force of armed civilians” was sent out to defend the city from blacks rumored to be preparing to invade the city along the Ogeechee and Louisville road.⁷²³

The meticulously planned assault by Russell and his allies on black voters, combined with extensive ballot-box stuffing afterwards, gave Seymour and Blair a smashing electoral victory in Savannah. At the end of the day, 4,544 ballots were counted for the Democrats, only 394 for Grant and Colfax. Considering that there were only 2,500 registered Democrats in Savannah, it was a remarkable tally. The fraudulent count in Savannah was more than enough to offset the violence-free vote in the overwhelmingly black county districts, which cast 1,922 votes for Grant and Colfax, 97 for Seymour and Blair. At least 2,000 black voters were prevented from voting by rebel violence. “Old Chatham is redeemed,” gloated the *Morning News*. “[T]he carpetbaggers and scalawags have been signally defeated, and Radicalism received a check in this section of the country. We can afford to rejoice.”⁷²⁴

Across the state, Democrats used similar tactics to those employed in Oglethorpe and Chatham. Massive numbers of blacks along with poor whites in north Georgia were denied the vote for not paying the poll tax. Polls in black districts were never opened in Stewart and Camden counties; ballot boxes stuffed in Monroe, Dougherty, Muscogee, Liberty and other counties. Blacks were murdered in Lincoln, Richmond, and Jasper counties. The sheriff in the Republican stronghold of Augusta was assassinated. In Jefferson County, “Republicans were driven from the polls, waylaid at night, assaulted, and badly beaten; many turned out of house

⁷²³ *SMN*, Nov. 5, 1868; *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 5, 1868.

⁷²⁴ *SMN*, Nov. 5, 1868.

and home; many votes rejected for non payment of poll-tax; colored people fleeing for their lives; and republicans, both white and black, feel unsafe at their homes at night.”⁷²⁵

Democrats won 41 of 54 counties where blacks outnumbered whites. Eric Foner notes that “eleven Georgia counties with black majorities recorded no votes at all for the Republican ticket.” Some 54,000 freedmen, over half the registered black voters, were intimidated into not voting or coerced into voting for the Democrats. Democrat intimidation and race-baiting were directed at whites as well as blacks. They won decisive majorities in north Georgia and the piney woods counties. When the election results were counted, Seymour crushed Grant in Georgia with 64 percent of the vote (102,822 votes to 57,134).⁷²⁶

It had been an extraordinary turnaround in only one year. In 1867, freedmen’s Union Leagues and Loyal Leagues collectively confronted planters in the fields, rescued unjustly accused blacks from the courts and the cops, excitedly engaged in non-stop political discussion, and trained militarily for the confrontation with the former slaveowners they knew was coming. Supported by the Republican Party and the US Army, yeomen and poor whites in north Georgia and freedmen across the state marched confidently to the polls. The freedmen proudly raised their banner: ‘Forty acres of land! A mule! Freedom! Votes! The equal of the white men!’

Rather than bringing peace to the South, Radical Reconstruction had produced an explosion of class conflict. Forced to choose between the southern planters and businessmen on the one hand, and working people North as well as South on the other, the capitalist businessmen

⁷²⁵ *Condition of Affairs in Georgia*, 63; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 343. *Evidence before the Committee on Reconstruction Relative to the Condition of Affairs* contains first-hand accounts of rebel violence in the November 1868 elections by Freedmen’s Bureau agents and white and black citizens from dozens of Georgia counties.

⁷²⁶ Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 75-76.

who led the Republican Party in the North took the side of their southern counterparts. The army attacked the Union Leagues, the heart of Republican strength in the South, opening the door to the counterrevolution. Former Confederate Army generals rose to the leadership of the Democratic Party. The southern ruling class formed the Klan and other paramilitary organizations to finish the job the army had begun. Grant and Meade failed to crush the Klan when they had a chance.

One year later, the Union Leagues were shattered. Militant blacks were beaten, murdered, on the run. In the fields, planters enforced their control with armed guards, beatings, and firings. Political meetings were broken up; blacks' guns were seized; the sounds of military drilling were no longer heard. With the army confined to barracks and Republicans on the run, tens of thousands of freedmen and the white men who dared join them were driven from the polls by the armed rebels now leading the Democratic Party. As Klansmen in Oglethorpe County triumphantly put it, "the bottom rail is in its old place."⁷²⁷

Ulysses Grant won the 1868 elections. Northern workers' and farmers' opposition to the Democrats' ambition to reverse the gains of the war, combined with the overwhelming black vote for the Republican Party in most southern states, proved decisive. Republicans cemented their victory with Congress's adoption of a new constitutional amendment, the Fifteenth, which prohibited denial of suffrage because of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

Thousands of black men in northern and border states now had the right to vote.

Grant's victory and the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment were hailed by Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and other abolitionists and Radicals as the definitive triumph

⁷²⁷ Reed, "What I Know of the Ku Klux Klan," February 1908.

of their cause. Blacks had won the equality they had fought for so long. The South was reconstructed at last. The reality was otherwise. The Fifteenth Amendment did not guarantee blacks' right to hold office, nor did it outlaw the myriad other ways, such as poll taxes, which were already being used against black suffrage. The Klan and other rebel organizations had not only prevented tens of thousands of blacks and Republicans from voting in Georgia and Louisiana, they were on the offensive in Tennessee, Alabama, and South Carolina as well. Rebels had no fear of Grant and the Union Army. They looked to their victories in Georgia and Louisiana as models to be emulated. Rather than marking the triumph of Reconstruction, the 1868 elections announced the beginning of the end.

16 1869 AND 1870: POST-RECONSTRUCTION GEORGIA TAKES SHAPE

Georgia's Democratic ruling class had reasserted control over politics in the state. In many areas, violence against blacks and Republicans continued unabated. On the evening of their election victory in November, John Reed met with "the leading men of the order" in Oglethorpe County. He warned them that "our carrying the election was only a great surprise, a staggering blow to the champions of negro suffrage, not a decisive victory. . . . Our real work had hardly begun." In Greene County, "houses were burned, dozens of freedmen beaten, and several blacks murdered." Black leader Abram Colby was severely beaten when he refused to join the Democratic Party or resign his seat in the legislature. In Warren County north of Augusta, state Senator Joseph Adkins was assassinated in May (fulfilling the prophecy he had made earlier in the year) and Republican Sheriff John Norris was ambushed and forced to seek refuge outside the county.⁷²⁸

In southwest Georgia, notes O'Donovan, "what a pummeling ex-masters administered in the wake of the 1868 election. . . . Wages plummeted and violence skyrocketed. . . . [F]oremen, overseers, and vengeful ex-masters openly toted their shotguns and pistols back into the fields. They beat, whipped, shot, and stomped . . . any ex-slave bold enough to talk back." They "boarded up or burned down the schools" and "swept radical spokesmen out of the streets and into jail." They reinstated chain gangs and smothered the business interests of the carpetbaggers "under an avalanche of civil litigation."⁷²⁹

⁷²⁸ Reed, "What I know of the Ku Klux Klan," February 1908; Jonathan Bryant, "We Have No Chance of Justice before the Courts," in *Georgia in Black and White: Explorations in Race Relations of a Southern State, 1865-1950*, ed. John C. Inscoe (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 27; Trelease, *White Terror*, 234.

⁷²⁹ O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 268-70.

But the national situation had changed. Ulysses Grant was now president. Republicans were in charge of all three branches of the government. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the constitution were the law of the land. Bullock was governor. Although the economy had revived somewhat, poverty was widespread. Planters and businessmen needed northern capital, but capital would not be forthcoming unless there was labor peace. In areas where blacks were sufficiently pacified, planters and businessmen were eager to bring an end to counterrevolutionary terror. One of those areas was Chatham County.

In late December 1868, fed up with being cheated of their miserable wages, freedmen roughed up a couple of guards and stole thousands of pounds of rice from two plantations in the Ogeechee. J. Motte Middleton, the owner of the plantations, swore out warrants against sixteen freedmen for theft and attempted murder. Still seething about the victorious Republican vote in the Ogeechee and the “mob of black savages” who had killed Samuel Law, P. M. Russell Jr. added Solomon Farley’s name to Middleton’s list.⁷³⁰

Sheriff Dooner peacefully served warrants on five of the men involved in the thefts. But when he arrested Farley, he got a different response. The freedmen knew that Farley’s arrest had nothing to do with the rice theft and everything to do with the Union League and the November elections. When he arrived at the train station with Farley in tow, the sheriff found 75 men on the road, a few with arms, along with 30 to 50 women armed with sticks. Greatly outnumbered, the sheriff released Farley. Later that day, two small groups of freedmen roughed up a white watchman and an overseer, and stole some more rice and some property from Middleton and his

⁷³⁰ *SMN*, Nov. 5, 1868, Dec. 24 and 25, 1868, and Jan. 15, 1869.

overseers. Their passions spent, rice workers went back to work the next day as if nothing had happened.⁷³¹

Savannah's rebel press proclaimed that the long-predicted negro uprising had begun. *Savannah Morning News* headlines claimed that a white man had been murdered, women and children had been taken hostage, houses were being plundered, whites were fleeing for their lives. The Ogeechee, said the reporter, "which has long been infested by the worst class of our negro population, under the teaching and drill of the villainous Bradley and other white and black emissaries, seems now to be in a complete state of insurrection." The myth of the "Ogeechee Insurrection" was born.⁷³²

In Savannah, General Henry R. Jackson issued a call to arms to save the city. "We are waring against bandits, armed desperados," he insisted. Hundreds of men volunteered to form a new posse. Russell issued 1,300 warrants for the arrest of virtually every black man living in the Ogeechee. The army, which had refused to confront overwhelming white violence in the elections, was quick to investigate this alleged black threat. Colonel Arthur Williams travelled to the Ogeechee with two aides and found no fortifications and no organized resistance, only a lot of frightened blacks.⁷³³

⁷³¹ *SDR*, Dec. 30 and 31, 1868; *SMN*, Dec. 30 and 31, 1868 and Jan. 18, 19, 20, and 28, 1869.

⁷³² *SMN*, Dec. 31, 1868. The conservative Republican press echoed these claims. The *New York Times* reprinted a *Savannah Republican* article alleging there were 800 to 1,000 armed and organized negroes, with a government of their own, strong enough that "no white man or officer of the state should molest them with impunity. . . . They have officers of every grade, and means of intercommunication that are almost equal to the facilities of a regular signal corps." See *NYT*, Jan. 6, 1869, and Bryant, "We Defy You," 58, 59, and 63, on the coverage of the "insurrection" in the northern press.

⁷³³ *SMN*, Jan 1, 5, 6, 8, 15, 22, and 27, 1869.

On January 15, 1869, a hearing began for twenty-five freedmen charged with insurrection. It proved disastrous for the whole insurrectionist story. Planters and overseers from several Ogeechee plantations testified that there was no drilling, no military organization, and no insurrection on the Ogeechee. The sheriff, his deputies, and Middleton insisted it was the warrant against Farley, who was not involved in the rice thefts, which caused all the trouble. All charges of insurrection were dropped. In May, a Savannah grand jury convicted six men on charges of robbery and assault for having robbed the sheriff and his deputies at the Ogeechee station.⁷³⁴

The Russell family, General Jackson, and the other Savannah rebels pushed their violent attacks on blacks one step too far. Meade, the US Army, and Sheriff Dooner drew the line against another Camilla. The planters drew the line against the loss of their work force, whether through posse violence or prison terms. The freedmen also drew the line. They showed in the November elections in the Ogeechee and in their successful rescue of Farley that—with or without the Union League—there were limits beyond which they could not be pushed.

The freeing of Farley was the last act of what remained of the Union League in the Ogeechee. What preceded and followed that rescue—rice theft and random attacks on property—were not any indication of collective strength but rather of individual demoralization and despair. With Bradley facing a murder charge should he return to Chatham County, Farley on the run, and no Union Leagues organizing in the streets or the plantations, Mayor Anderson and the Savannah ruling class were confident that they could control the freedmen without

⁷³⁴ *SMN*, Jan. 15–30, May 12–14, and May 25, 1869.

recourse to the extreme violence the Russells and their allies had used in the summer and fall of 1868.⁷³⁵

Despite the Republican victories in the national elections and in most southern states, Republicans in the South faced a desperate situation. They had failed in their prime objective. No significant section of the southern ruling class had been won to the Republican Party. Republicans had refused to come to the aid of the Union Leagues, their strongest base of support among blacks and poor whites. What remained of this movement was under constant threat from the Klan and other counterrevolutionary forces. The Freedmen's Bureau was dissolved. The tiny army contingents were largely confined to barracks. Grant and Congress had made it clear that southern governments were on their own.

Across the South, Republican governors and legislatures, generally dominated by well-to-do scalawags, courted their political foes. They removed any remaining voting restrictions on whites. In Alabama and Tennessee, they combined with Democrats to establish "New Departure" governments. Sharp divisions developed within the Republican parties as carpetbaggers and

⁷³⁵ The "Ogeechee Insurrection" has been the subject of more articles by historians than any other single event in Chatham County during Reconstruction. Jones devotes several pages to the events in *Saving Savannah*. She credits every fanciful story printed about the "insurrection" in the *Savannah Morning News* and *Savannah Republican* as if it were the truth. Historians Karen Bell, Neil Shirley, and Saralee Stafford have written accounts similar to Jones's. Jonathan Bryant sets the record straight. Basing his findings on the testimony by planters and their overseers, Union Army officers, Sheriff Dooner, and the blacks themselves, he correctly concludes that "[t]here was no insurrection." See Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 322-26; Bell, "Ogeechee Troubles," 375-97; Neal Shirley and Saralee Stafford, "Ogeechee til Death: Expropriation and Communization in Low-Country Georgia," in *Dixie Be Damned: 300 Years of Insurrection in the American South* (Oakland: AK Press, 2015), 53-88; Bryant, "We Defy You," 161-84.

blacks competed with scalawags for patronage posts. Foner notes that “[b]ehind this debilitating factionalism lay the reality of a party whose leaders lacked a secure place in the South’s business and professional world, and depended upon political position for their very livelihood.”⁷³⁶

The status of Republicans in Georgia was especially dire. They had suffered a crushing defeat in the elections; the legislature was dominated by Toombs-led Democrats; and the party had completely failed to defend voting rights and civil rights for blacks. But Georgia Democrats had gone too far in their assault on democratic rights. The ouster of all blacks from the legislature and the rampant violence of the elections were widely publicized in the North. Congress, basking in the glow of the Fifteenth Amendment, was forced to act. On December 19, 1868, the House Select Committee on Reconstruction began hearings on the “Condition of Affairs in Georgia.” Testimony and affidavits from Republicans and government officials in dozens of Georgia counties proved that tens of thousands of blacks and Republican voters were denied the right to vote at gunpoint, that freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and other democratic rights did not exist across much of the state.⁷³⁷

Georgia Republicans divided over proposals for how to resolve the situation. Bullock insisted on the need for another round of military rule and the return of the expelled blacks to the legislature. The state’s leading carpetbagger and Radical John Bryant had been left out of Bullock’s division of patronage posts. Bryant joined with Amos Akerman, other conservative

⁷³⁶ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 349.

⁷³⁷ *Evidence before the Committee on reconstruction relative to the condition of affairs in Georgia* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1869). Democratic county officers in the Select Committee hearings insisted that the only violence in Georgia came from the freedmen. Three of them cited the Ogeechee “insurrection” as proof.

Republicans, and the Democrats in opposing any return to military rule. Bryant argued that “since the election, an entire change has come over” the Democrats. The former rebels, he said, were now willing to accept suffrage and office-holding for blacks. With Georgia Republicans divided, Congress settled on a compromise. They refused to seat Georgia’s delegation, but they also refused to install a new military government. The ball was back in the hands of the Georgia legislature. Georgia’s legislature descended into ferocious factional infighting, with the Democrats letting their old foe Bryant take the lead in opposing the Bullock faction.

With the passing of the Fifteenth Amendment, blacks began to play a more prominent role in the Republican Party. Ties between middle class blacks north and south were strengthened. Simms and Turner became spokespersons for the national Republican campaign to pass the Fifteenth Amendment, tying it to their demand to return to the Georgia legislature. Turner chaired the National Convention of Colored Men in Washington. Simms spoke at the thirty-sixth anniversary meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society at the Cooper Institute in New York City.⁷³⁸

In Georgia, the ousted black legislators formed an increasingly important component of the Bullock wing of the party. Their Civil and Political Rights Association “held mass rallies throughout the state to petition Congress to reconstruct Georgia again.” Campbell was elected vice-president of the Republican convention in Atlanta. He and Porter were elected to the party’s central committee. Simms, Costin, and Turner joined four whites as the party’s delegation which met Grant in the White House. Bullock rewarded his supporters, black as well as white, by giving them plum patronage positions in the federal government. He proposed Simms for

⁷³⁸ *New-York Semi-Weekly Tribune*, Jan 15, 1869; *New York Tribune*, Jan. 23, May 5, and May 20, 1869; *New York Evening Post*, May 11, 1869.

postmaster in Savannah and Turner was appointed postmaster in Macon. Tunis Campbell's son, Edward Howard, and other blacks became post office clerks in Savannah.⁷³⁹

Conservative Republicans' desperate push for an alliance with Democrats, black leaders' fear of endangering their new acquired positions, and the Democrat Party's confidence in its ability to win elections without resorting to violence were all on display in the long-postponed elections for mayor and city aldermen in Savannah in October 1869. The 1868 elections had shown Democrats the usefulness of poll taxes as a perfectly legal way to sharply reduce the number of black and poor white voters. In March, the city council adopted an election registration tax to support white schools. The council divided Savannah into four city and three county districts. Democrats from the city districts met together to select a slate of candidates for city council and mayor. Voters would cast their ballots for slates rather than individuals. The new system, later known as the white-primary system, virtually ensured Democratic victories in these key races. The district system made it possible for middle-class blacks to win less important posts in Savannah's two majority black areas. In April, voting for constables and magistrates resulted in the election of three blacks in the Fourth District, including King Solomon Thomas as magistrate.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁹ *SMN*, Oct. 8 and 9, 1868 and June 2, 1869; Drago, *Black Politicians*, 54; *Daily New Era*, Mar. 6, 1869.

Other Republican factions made sure that Bullock's black postmaster nominees did not last long. Grant chose Walter Clift instead of Simms for the postmaster job in Savannah. Turner was quickly fired from his position in Macon after the conservative Republican editor of the Macon *American Union* accused him of passing counterfeit money and immorality. On Turner's firing, see E. Merton Coulter, "Henry M. Turner: Georgia Negro Preacher-Politician During the Reconstruction Era," *GHQ* 48, No. 4 (December 1964), 387-96.

⁷⁴⁰ Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 337-38.

Democrats chose a new face to be their candidate for mayor—John Screven, president of the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad—along with twelve newcomers to city council. By removing the much-reviled Mayor Anderson, they hoped to demobilize Republicans. There would be only one polling place: the courthouse, the site of the armed rebel attack on blacks in the November 1868 elections. Democrats formed a committee of 75 prominent men to challenge black voters for failing to pay the poll tax. The city appointed one hundred armed “special deputies” to police the polls.⁷⁴¹

For years, a major focus of Savannah Republicans had been the ouster of Mayor Anderson and the election of a Republican mayor. At the beginning of September, Hopkins organized a meeting in Chippewa Square of the Municipal Reform Party with himself as candidate for mayor. The program of the party was similar to the pro-labor, racial equality programs he and Bradley had run on in 1867 and 1868. Hopkins proposed tax cuts for workers and small shopkeepers, the end of favoritism in contracts, free hospitals for all races and both sexes, school funds divided equally for both races, and party membership and offices for black and white alike.⁷⁴²

In 1868, Hopkins had been able to unite all Republican factions behind a single slate. In view of the obstacles put up by the Democrats, unity of Republicans in these elections was more important than ever. But in 1869, no such unity was to be had. Both the Bryant wing and the Bullock wing of the Savannah party were running scared. Despite his reelection to the central

⁷⁴¹ Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 337-39; *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 12, 1869.

⁷⁴² *SMN*, Sep. 4, 1869.

committee of the state party and his strong support for Bullock, Hopkins was indelibly linked to Bradley and the Union Leagues, and neither faction wanted to be tarred with that brush.⁷⁴³

Conservative Republicans held their own meeting on the same day as Hopkins's campaign launch. Isaac Seeley and Dr. James Waring, together with a small number of men accurately described by the *Savannah News* as "carpet-baggers who have recently obtained lucrative appointments in the Government," tried to come up with a candidate who could appeal to moderate Democrats. They were not successful. Democrats were confident they would win elections without any need for compromise with renegade Republicans. Hopkins also failed to get the backing of Bullock supporters. Black Republican officeholders like King Thomas, court clerk Richard White, and post office clerk Edward Howard were not willing "to risk their hopes and good name on the [Hopkins] ticket." Hopkins stood alone, "without a supporting ticket for Aldermen."⁷⁴⁴

Hopkins's support among black workers remained strong. "In the weeks before the election," notes Jones, "black men rushed to register." On October 5, six hundred rallied in support. On election day, "[h]undreds [of blacks] were turned away; others didn't even attempt to vote." Men who attempted to vote without being registered were "promptly arrested" by the

⁷⁴³ In 1868 and 1869, Hopkins lobbied Sumner and Butler in support of Bullock. See C H Hopkins to Hon Charles Sumner, Dec. 13 and 15, 1868 and Feb. 15, 1869, Papers of Charles Sumner, Houghton Library, Harvard University; C. H. Hopkins to Hon. Benjamin F. Butler, February 14, 1869, Benjamin F. Butler Papers, Library of Congress.

⁷⁴⁴ *SMN*, Sep. 4 and Oct. 2, 6, 7, and 12, 1869. Jacqueline Jones praises Waring, a long-serving city alderman, as the one white ally of Savannah's blacks. See Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 341. For another view of Waring's politics, see Lisa Denmark, *Savannah's Midnight Hour: Boosterism, Growth, and Commerce in a Nineteenth-Century American City* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), Chapter 5.

police. Although nearly one thousand blacks braved the Democratic gauntlet and voted for Hopkins, it was not enough. Hopkins lost by a three-to-one margin. Democrats hailed their victory as “the death knell of Radicalism in the city of Savannah” and celebrated with a grand torchlight procession.⁷⁴⁵

For Hopkins, the municipal elections marked a turning point. The party he had played a central role in building since 1867 had collapsed. His campaign had been sabotaged by Waring and conservative carpetbaggers and boycotted by black officeholders. His efforts on behalf of the party had cost him his job and his youngest son Robert. To make matters worse, his remaining son, Charles Jr., succumbed to rebel pressure and voted “the straight Conservative ticket,” a betrayal for which he was promised “a place in the government.” His political hopes shattered and his family broken apart, Charles Hopkins left Savannah and returned to McIntosh County.⁷⁴⁶

Campaigning for the Fifteenth Amendment across the country strengthened the ties between Georgia’s black Republicans and their counterparts in the North. Georgia black leaders responded immediately to a call by Isaac Myers of Baltimore to attend a black labor convention in Washington, DC in December.

⁷⁴⁵ Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 339; *SMN*, Oct. 7, 12, 13, and 14, 1869; Bryant, “We Defy You,” 168.

⁷⁴⁶ *SMN*, Oct. 13, 1869. The pressures weighing on Charles Hopkins Jr. were immense. Elected in April 1868 as Chatham County Tax Collector, he had been unable to come up with the required bond and lost the office to his Democrat opponent. In June 1869, his wife Matilda died in childbirth, along with her unborn child. In August 1869, Madison Bell, the Comptroller General of Georgia and a prominent conservative Republican, sued Charles Jr. for \$13,000 because of a supposed discrepancy in state revenue which they linked to his previous term as tax collector. Financial blackmail was a favorite tactic used by Democrats against their Republican opponents. Now it was conservative Republicans who using it against the Hopkins family. The failure of Savannah Republicans to support his father’s mayoral bid was the last straw. See *SDR*, Nov. 24, 1868; *GWT*, Aug. 6, 1869.

Myers was responding to the efforts of the National Labor Union to organize black workers. In August, the National Labor Union had appealed to Myers and other black leaders to join the NLU. Union leaders supported labor reform candidates running against both Democrats and Republicans in New York, Massachusetts, and elsewhere. Myers was deeply worried by these developments. While supporting the organization of black workers, he believed that the future for blacks lay in capitalism and the Republican Party. He saw the “labor versus capital” approach of the NLU and its call to workers, black as well as white, to break from the Republican Party as major threats.

At the end of October, Henry Turner and Jeff Long, a well-to-do Macon barber, organized a Georgia state meeting in Macon to elect delegates to the black labor convention. Two hundred and thirty-six delegates attended, representing fifty-six counties. Though advertised as a labor convention, the delegates were not dockworkers or plantation hands. Most attendees were preachers, merchants, small businessmen, elected officials, and government appointees. The ousted Republican legislators played prominent roles.⁷⁴⁷

Delegates addressed the ongoing violence against blacks throughout the state. The convention’s “Committee on Outrages upon Labor” produced a report on the “frightful state of disorder” exerted against blacks in most Georgia counties: murders, violent attacks, employers’ failure to honor contracts, low wages, lack of justice in the courts, schoolhouses burned, meetings broken up. Delegates called for the “reorganization of our courts” and oversight by the US military to resolve these problems. But delegates were also property-owning men with a stake in the system. They insisted that there was “no antagonism between labor and capital . . . when justice was done.” “An attempt was made by some delegates to fix a price for the labor of

⁷⁴⁷ *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Nov. 6, 1869.

plantation hands, but it was opposed by Mr. Long, Mr. Turner and other influential leaders, who were almost unanimously sustained by the Convention.”⁷⁴⁸

Georgia Democrats viewed the convention proceedings as a welcome change from previous black meetings. “[T]he order was excellent, the members kept their seats, the presiding officer seemed to know parliamentary law very well,” noted the pro-rebel *Atlanta Constitution*. The *Macon Telegraph*, a moderate Democratic paper, praised the convention for its “good sense, moderation and good temper. It has been the first large gathering of the colored population in Macon, in which some attempt has not been manifested to stir up bad feeling between the races.”⁷⁴⁹

The two hundred and fourteen black delegates at the national black labor convention in Washington, D.C. in December included few workers or labor organizers. The Georgia contingent consisted of Simms, Long, William White, assistant assessor of Internal Revenue from Augusta, and A. Smith, a merchant from Columbus. Myers repeated his support for unions of both black and white workers. “Only through such unity, he said, could the freedom and progress of the toiling millions be guaranteed.” But until the white unions accepted blacks as equal members, blacks should organize separately. Delegates discussed the plight of blacks in

⁷⁴⁸ *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Nov. 6, 1869. For a full account of the Macon Convention, see Phillip S. Foner and Ronald L. Lewis (editors), *The Black Worker During the Era of the National Labor Union, Volume 2* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), and at https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvn5tvwc.5?seq=4#metadata_info_tab_contents.

⁷⁴⁹ *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Nov. 27, 1869; *Macon Telegraph*, Oct. 29, 1869.

the South. They called on Congress “to intervene on their behalf,” including the division of public lands into forty-acre farms.⁷⁵⁰

Delegates supported the Republican Party and its program. Keynote speakers included the mayor of Washington, Senator Wilson of Massachusetts, W. D. Kelley of Pennsylvania, General O. O. Howard, and other prominent Republican politicians. Myers stressed that “we do not regard capital as the natural enemy of labor.” “For the well-being and productiveness of capital and labor, the best harmony and fellowship of action should at all times prevail, that ‘strikes’ may be avoided.” His proposed course of action for black workers emphasized education, encouraging industrial habits, the formation of “separate associations” to negotiate with employers, and especially the “establishment of co-operative workshops” with the assistance of “bankers and capitalists.” At the end of the five-day convention, delegates formed the Colored National Labor Union. The prospectus of the new “labor” organization proclaimed as its goal: “It should be the aim of every man to become a capitalist.”⁷⁵¹

Aaron Bradley attended the Washington convention as a delegate from New York, but not as a supporter of the Republican Party. Fleeing from frame-up murder charges in Chatham County, fed up with Georgia’s Republican Party, Bradley rediscovered in Massachusetts the labor reform alternative to Republican or Democratic politics he had become acquainted with in 1867. At the end of August 1869, he spoke at a State Labor Reform Convention in Boston. In September, he was elected vice-president of the state convention in Worcester. The convention opposed the Democratic Party “because of its disloyalty and avowed sympathy with slavery.” It

⁷⁵⁰ Foner and Lewis, *The Black Worker*, Vol. 2, 31, 33.

⁷⁵¹ *Proceedings of the Colored National Labor Convention* (Washington, D. C.: New Era, 1870), 10, 11, 38, 40; Foner and Lewis, *The Black Worker*, Vol. 2, 72, 73.

opposed the Republican Party “because it was the tool of the money power.” The only party for the working man was the labor reform party. The party attracted a heterogenous mix of unionists and middle-class radicals. Its program included support for unions and the eight-hour working day as well support for greenbacks and a tax on bonds as the way forward. The party chose Edwin M. Chamberlain, a 34-year-old hotel manager who stressed greenbacks and the bond tax, as labor reform/NLU candidate for governor of Massachusetts.⁷⁵²

Chamberlain’s candidacy was a national focus of the NLU. As one of the few black labor reformers, Bradley quickly became a leading figure in the campaign. He spoke at labor reform meetings alongside Chamberlain, NLU President Richard Trevellick, and New York state organizer Alexander Troup. In his speeches, Bradley attacked Massachusetts’s judicial and penal systems. He demanded that convicts be employed by the state rather than by private contractors, with financial support given to convicts’ families. At a two-day Working Women’s Convention in Boston, he supported women’s right to vote and hold office. He “described the condition of the black men in the South, and showed that in common with white men they were interested in the labor movement.” He “spoke of the diabolical influence which capital exercised over all the affairs of state, industrial and political,” and maintained that “if it went on for ten years longer it would lead to a bloody revolution.” Although the Republican candidate for governor won, Chamberlain got 13,500 votes and twelve Labor Reform candidates were elected in the lower house.⁷⁵³

⁷⁵² *BP*, Aug. 30, 1869; *Boston Journal*, Sep. 23, 1869; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Sep. 29, 1869; *Massachusetts Spy*, Oct. 1, 1869; *Weekly American Workman*, Oct. 9, 1869.

⁷⁵³ *Boston Journal*, Oct. 18 and 22, 1869; *Springfield Republican*, Oct. 19, 1869; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Oct. 22, 1869; *Boston Traveler*, Oct. 27, 1869, *Boston Semi-Weekly Advertiser*, Oct. 27, 1869; Montgomery, *Beyond*

Following the Massachusetts elections, Troup invited Bradley to come to New York City to spread the message of unions and labor reform among black workers. Bradley spoke at a meeting of 600 black men and women to select delegates to the Colored Labor Convention. He organized additional meetings in New York under the auspices of the Colored Men and Women's Labor Reform Union. A large number of black workers attended, women as well as men. In his speeches in New York, Bradley tied the struggle of blacks for their freedom with the fight of labor against capital over a broad swath of world history. He cited the Magna Carta as the beginning of the "history of freedom and independence of the workingmen." "He characterized the rebellion [Civil War] as a great struggle of capital against labor" and praised the "gallant part" blacks had played in "that bloody drama," pointing to their actions in Richmond and New Orleans. He "described the condition of the black men in the South, and showed that in common with white men they were interested in the labor movement." The problem now, Bradley argued, is that "capital is united—labor is divided." "When capital has completed its work, the laboring people of the United States will be slaves, without regard to color, sex or race." "The laboring men and women feel the weight of unjust treatment, and pray to be relieved, as it has already become intolerable." "A tempest of war would very soon again roll over this land. It would be a second edition of the French Revolution." In a few days, Bradley would have his chance to bring that message to Georgia.⁷⁵⁴

Equality, 369-70. Bradley also spoke in support of women's suffrage in the Massachusetts legislature. See *Springfield Daily Republican*, Apr. 15, 1869; *NYT*, Apr. 17, 1869.

⁷⁵⁴ *New York Herald*, Nov. 12, 1869; *New York World*, Nov. 13, 1869; *Pomeroy's Democrat*, Dec. 1, 1869.

Bradley's speeches received extensive coverage in the three New York newspapers, one Republican and two

In August 1869, a report by General Terry to Secretary of War W. T. Sherman declared that “[i]n many parts of the State there is practically no government. . . . Murders have been and are frequent; the abuse in various ways of the blacks is too common to excite notice. . . . [C]ivil authorities are in sympathy with or are overawed by those who commit crime.” Terry concluded that “the only way to restore good order in the State is to resume military control over it for the time being.”⁷⁵⁵

Terry’s report, the failure of the Georgia legislature to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment, the persistent lobbying in Washington by Bullock, Campbell, and other legislators, and the strong backing of Congressional Radicals Ben Butler and Charles Sumner eventually paid off. In December 1869, Congress passed another Georgia Bill. The bill gave Bullock what he had demanded unsuccessfully from Meade in June 1868. It called for reseating the expelled black legislators and a review of qualifications for membership in the legislature under the terms of the Omnibus Act of 1868. Georgia representatives would be accepted in Congress once the reorganized legislature approved the Fifteenth Amendment.⁷⁵⁶

When the Georgia Legislature reconvened on January 10, 1870, Bradley and the other ousted black legislators were reseated without protest. The Democrats who had replaced them were removed. General Terry established a Military Board of Inquiry to determine which

Democrat, cited here. Taken together, these accounts provide the best overall presentation of Bradley’s views in 1869. A transcription of the articles is contained in Appendix B.

⁷⁵⁵ Brevet Major General Alfred H. Terry to Brevet Major General E. D. Townsend, August 14, 1869, Annual report of the Secretary of War, 1869-70 v. 1 (Washington: U. S. Govt. Print. Off., 1869), 89, 91, 94, accessed June 24, 2021 at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b2979880&view=1up&seq=7>.

⁷⁵⁶ Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 93-94.

legislators elected in 1868 met the criteria for taking office. Nineteen additional Democratic representatives and five senators were disqualified, giving Republicans a majority in both houses of the legislature. The reconstituted legislature adopted the Fifteenth Amendment.⁷⁵⁷

But the Georgia Bill of December 1869 was no more successful in resolving the crisis of the state's Republican Party than the one Congress passed less than a year earlier. The party faced certain defeat if elections for the legislature were held as scheduled later in the year. Bullock raised new demands. He proposed that the legislature elect new senators to replace the ones elected in 1868. He demanded that Congress prolong the term of the reorganized legislature until 1872, arguing that members had been deprived of their two-year term of office due to the illegal ousting of the black legislators in 1868.

Bryant-led Republicans and Democrats vigorously opposed Terry's purging of legislators who could not take the oath required by the Omnibus Act. They fought against Bullock's demand to elect new senators and his attempt to prolong the legislature. They accused Bullock of corruption, arguing that he had mishandled state funds to purchase the state capitol building from Atlanta Republican entrepreneur H. I. Kimball. Bullock's oversight of the state railroad, the Western and Atlantic, also came under attack.⁷⁵⁸

Grant and Congressional Republicans were opposed to propping up Bullock's government for another two years. Nor did they have any intention of expanding the powers of the US military in Georgia. Fed up with the endless debates over the "Georgia problem," on

⁷⁵⁷ Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 96; Nathans, *Losing the Peace*, 174.

⁷⁵⁸ Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 101-02; *GWT*, Feb. 15, 1870. After a merger in November 1869, the *Georgia Weekly Telegraph's* official name changed to *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Georgia Journal & Messenger*.

March 6 the House passed the Bingham amendment, requiring that elections in Georgia take place at the normal time. Congress's "withdrawal of support," remarks Nathans, "sealed the doom of Bullock's administration in Georgia." With Democratic victory inevitable, Republicans ran for the exits, scrambling to find a place for themselves in a Democrat-dominated state.⁷⁵⁹

Bullock and his black allies in the legislature headed back to Washington in a last-ditch effort to reverse the Bingham amendment. Desperate now, the men who had adamantly opposed a state militia when it could have made a difference pledged demagogically to defend the state government arms-in-hand if the federal government would only give them another chance. Former moderate and Radical Republican supporters of Bullock turned instead to Bryant. Together with Democrats and conservative Republicans, they opened an investigation of Bullock on corruption charges. It was a lot easier to blame the problems of Reconstruction in Georgia on the leadership of the state party than it was to admit that their conservative Republican as well as Radical Republican projects for the South had both been based on erroneous premises.

In Georgia, many blacks were bitter and angry at the betrayal of all their hopes by their white Republican allies. Their disenchantment was reflected in a speech by Turner at a July celebration by Atlanta blacks of the battle of Bull Run. Turner declared that "[t]he friendship of the whites, both Republicans and Democrats, in a majority of cases, was only superficial and cropped out about the time these pretended friends wanted to get into power." In a speech to the legislature in August, Turner noted that after three years of Republicans in power there was "not a colored juror or a colored police in all the state. . . . If we get on the [rail]cars we have to . . . go into any old dirty box they choose to put you. . . . We are forced to pay taxes to keep up schools

⁷⁵⁹ Nathans, *Losing the Peace*, 179; *GWT*, Mar. 18 and Apr. 5, 1870; Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*,

and municipalities, and not a dollar is ever expended for the benefit of colored children. . . . Our statute books are as proscriptive now as they were in slave time.” The only thing blacks had won, said Turner, was “the right to vote and sit in the General Assembly” and even these gains, as he well knew, were under constant assault. Turner pondered whether now wasn’t the time to succumb to the inevitable and work out a compromise with the Democrats.⁷⁶⁰

Compromise was already underway across the state. It took a number of different forms. From the moment of his inauguration as governor in 1868, Rufus Bullock had worked tirelessly with Republican and Democratic legislators to spur capitalist development in the state. In 1869 and 1870, with or without the black legislators, Republicans and Democrats passed dozens of bills to incorporate new railroads and banks.

In Savannah, the ruling Democrats allowed some black celebrations and organizations to reemerge, as long as black moderates were in charge. In April 1870, Porter organized a peaceful rally of two thousand blacks to celebrate the passing of the Fifteenth Amendment. When Jim Habersham, a negro constable and one of the men tried for “riotous conduct” at Bradley’s meeting in September 1867, was arrested for attempting to sit in the streetcar reserved for whites, the mayor dismissed charges against him because he was “amenable to the law.” A few days later, the mayor congratulated a parade of the members of the colored axe company—the company Russell Sr. had tried to ban in the summer of 1868—for their “excellent appearance and good behavior.” The *Savannah Morning News* congratulated blacks on the “general quiet

⁷⁶⁰ *Atlanta Constitution*, July 21, 1870; H. M. Turner, *The Civil and Political Status of the State of Georgia and her Relations to the General Government* (Atlanta: New Era Printing Establishment, 1870), 10, 11, accessed July 13, 2021 at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044009670423&view=1up&seq=1>.

and good order” which prevailed. Ever since the “subsidence of Bradley,” said the paper, “the friendly relations between the races, which he had disturbed, were re-established.”⁷⁶¹

Tunis Campbell, Bullock’s leading black supporter, worked out a power-sharing arrangement with Democrats in his overwhelmingly black fiefdom of McIntosh County. Former Confederate Colonel E. S. Barclay, a Democrat, held the powerful position of Inspector General of Lumber and Timber. When Charles Hopkins applied to Darien’s city council for this post in April 1870, the council, tightly controlled by Campbell and his supporters, rejected his application. Despite his long history in the county and his prominent position in the Republican Party, Hopkins was too closely associated with Aaron Bradley.⁷⁶²

In addition to support for Bradley, there was one other line Democrats would not permit blacks to cross. When black leader Jeff Long proposed to reorganize a Union League in Macon “as a means of protection to the negro,” Democrats’ response was unyielding. An editorial in the *Georgia Weekly Telegram* warned the “few worthless, insolent, half-breeds” who are trying to “inflame the worst passions of the black people” that if they “succeed in precipitating a race conflict . . . it will be their first and last campaign.” The editorial was reprinted in the *Savannah Morning News* and in other Democratic papers across the state.⁷⁶³

Bradley was well aware that he was persona non grata to Bullock, Bryant and the Democrats. He knew that black legislators as a group were part of the Bullock faction. But he

⁷⁶¹ *GWT*, Apr. 19, May 13 and 17, and Aug. 2, 1870; *SMN*, May 10 and July 4, 1870; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 291, 355-56.

⁷⁶² *Atlanta Constitution*, Apr. 7, 1870; *Columbus Weekly Sun*, Apr. 9 and 12, 1870; *SMN*, Apr. 11, 1870; Sullivan, *Early Days*, 461.

⁷⁶³ *GWT*, July 5, 1870; *SMN*, July 4, 1870.

was also conscious of the depth of black dissatisfaction, inside and outside the legislature, with Bullock and most white Republicans. He hoped to use his support among Georgia blacks and his new-found status as a prominent labor reformer to draw black legislators away from Bullock and build an independent black faction within the Republican Party.

Entering the legislature with grand panache, Bradley made his move in early February in opposition to Bullock's proposal to elect new senators. He sent a telegraph to Vice-President Colfax and President Grant, insisting that "[i]f we elect Senators before revising the barbarous Code of Georgia, and enacting a mixed jury and militia bill, the Republicans are defeated." He called on General Terry to take command of Georgia. He calculated that the "colored members" plus whites who agreed with this proposal formed a larger bloc in the legislature than either the "Bullock Republicans" or the "Bryant Democrats."⁷⁶⁴

Bradley's hopes were quickly dashed. In 1870, there were no more Union Leagues putting pressure on Republicans. There was only Bradley himself, an erratic man at the best of times, a man without powerful allies. Bullock, on the other hand, continued to support voting rights and civil rights for blacks, however ineffectively. He also had friends in Congress and patronage positions to offer. After token signs of disagreement, the black legislators voted in support of Bullock's proposals.

⁷⁶⁴ *GWT*, Feb. 15 and 22, 1870. A northern reporter offered the following description of Bradley in the legislature: "With his silver mounted cane, and his yellow kid gloves, and his polished plug hat, and his shiny boots, and his tightly fitting pants, and his gorgeous eye-glasses, either swinging from a button-hole in his faultless coat . . . or else tightly clasped over the Grecian bend of his Grecian nose, Bradley was the target of all eyes, and the pride of the admiring blacks." See *Columbian Register* (New Haven), Jan. 29, 1870.

It was a big setback for Bradley. He investigated other career opportunities. He visited the South Carolina legislature in Columbia and proposed to become a “South Carolina politician.” He was authorized to practice law in South Carolina. He went to Washington and convinced Hon. A. G. Riddle to submit an application for Bradley’s membership in the bar of the U.S. Supreme Court. Neither of these possibilities seemed very promising. Bradley’s only hope, however slight, lay in Georgia.⁷⁶⁵

While in Washington, Bradley lobbied Georgia’s black legislators to cease their support for Bullock. Fearful that he might still be able to tap black discontent, Georgia’s Republican leadership decided to rid themselves of the Bradley menace once and for all. The *Daily New Era* launched a smear campaign against him, arguing that his opposition to the election of new senators made him “the new leader of the Democracy in the Senate.” When other black legislators received back pay for the year they were expelled, Republican leader Walker Brock refused to extend back pay to Bradley, saying he had voluntarily resigned his post.⁷⁶⁶

For Bradley, Brock’s implied threat to expel him from office was the last straw. On May 2, he went public. Speaking to a crowd of hundreds of blacks in front of Atlanta’s City Hall, Bradley began by reading his version of a labor reform program for Georgia. “[T]he future prosperity of the people of this Republic is under the control of the laboring classes . . . regardless of race, color or sex,” it began. It protested the outrageous treatment of blacks on the state-owned Western and Atlantic Railroad. The program called for an eight-hour day and the

⁷⁶⁵ *Charleston Daily News*, Mar. 2, 1870; *Anderson Intelligencer*, Mar. 10, 1870; *Philadelphia Age*, Apr. 6, 1870. Riddle withdrew the application when he learned that Bradley had spent time in Sing Sing.

⁷⁶⁶ *GWT*, Apr. 12 and May 5, 1870; *Daily New Era*, Apr. 26, 1870 and May 3, 1870.

redemption of government bonds in greenbacks and opposed the employment of convict labor by private individuals or corporations.⁷⁶⁷

Bradley's speech, however, was not aimed equally at "Bullock Republicans" and "Bryant Democrats." Instead, he launched an all-out attack on the state's Republican leadership. He denounced "weak-kneed Republicans" for expelling blacks from the legislature. He chastised Brown, "the brains of the Party," for opposing blacks' right to hold office. He called on the "90,000 colored voters" to "elect all colored men" and for the white Republicans "to elect theirs, in the counties where they predominated."⁷⁶⁸

Three days later, with Simms and other blacks echoing Bradley's concern about the mistreatment of convicts in the state, the legislature appointed a committee to "investigate the condition of the Georgia Penitentiary." The eight-person committee included three prominent black legislators: Simms, Turner, and Wallace. The committee spent much of June visiting the penitentiary and railroads where the convicts were employed and interviewing prison officials, jailors, guards, and convicts. The 200-page account of their investigation is an extraordinary document, one of the first to provide details about prison labor and convict leasing in the South after the Civil War. It describes the regular whipping of the mostly black prisoners by white

⁷⁶⁷ *Atlanta Constitution*, May 3 and 4, 1870. Returning from Washington aboard the Western and Atlantic railroad, Bradley was refused admission to a whites-only car. He protested his treatment, and Sumner called for an investigation. See *Daily Phoenix* (Columbia, S.C.), Apr. 19, 1870; *Atlanta Constitution*, Apr. 26, 1870; *Weekly Union*, May 10, 1870.

⁷⁶⁸ *Atlanta Constitution*, May 3, 1870. Bradley's labor reform program for Georgia is reprinted in Appendix C.

penitentiary and railroad guards, including names of prisoners who were beaten to death, and other atrocities.⁷⁶⁹

The penitentiary investigation provided Bradley a perfect opportunity to campaign in support of his labor reform program. Democrat as well as Republican businessmen and government bodies were deeply involved in the exploitation of convict labor. By attacking both parties equally, Bradley could begin to flesh out an independent political stance. Opposition to the mistreatment of prisoners was broadly felt by blacks across the state. The issue could provide a much-needed bridge to Simms and other black legislators.

Bradley missed the opportunity. He used the investigation of the penitentiary to ramp up his one-sided attack on the Republican leadership. At a large meeting in Augusta, he attacked Bullock's and Terry's support for "a new system of slavery" in Georgia: "the chain gang system, or the hiring out of convicts to railway contractors, who starve, whip, work and shoot them to death." He took his campaign to Washington D.C., distributing a handbill protesting "A New System of Chain-Gang Slavery in Georgia" and challenging Bullock to debate him on this issue. He denounced Bullock for retaining "rebel tyrants" as judges, for "swindling the people" in leasing the state capitol from Kimball, and for employing "Senators, Representatives, or their sons, cousins or brothers" in patronage positions on the State Road. Bradley threatened that "unless the colored people are better treated there will be a general smash-up. . . . If our own party will not give ear and come to our assistance," he threatened, the colored people of Georgia

⁷⁶⁹ *Proceedings of the Joint Committee Appointed to Investigate the Condition of the Georgia Penitentiary* (Atlanta, 1870), 1, 2, accessed May 1, 2021 at https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044010157931&view=1up&seq=1&q1=200_

“will go to the Democracy, *who are now anxious to do for us all we require*. When this time arrives then good-bye to Georgia ‘carpet-baggers’ and ‘scalawags’.”⁷⁷⁰

Bradley’s scorching attack not only on Bullock and Terry but on carpetbaggers and scalawags in general, combined with his threat to support the Democrats, ended any possibility that Simms, Turner, and Wallace would denounce the gross mistreatment of black prisoners by the railroads and penitentiary officials. The black legislators rallied behind Bullock. The committee report noted that the general condition of the Georgia prisoners was good, clothing comfortable, food wholesome. Some small changes in procedure were proposed, notably that women should no longer be stripped naked before being whipped by the guards. The committee unanimously absolved prison authorities, the railroads, and the governor of all charges.⁷⁷¹

The 1870 elections would determine Georgia’s two congressmen, half the members of the state senate, members of the state assembly, and a large number of county posts including sheriffs, clerks, and tax collectors. Georgia’s Republican leaders, who had spent most of their time lobbying Washington and defending their policies against Bryant and Bradley, hoped that edicts from Washington and new Georgia election laws would pull them through.

Confronted with the rapid growth of the Klan throughout the South, Congressional Republicans passed the Enforcement Act in June 1870. The act gave federal courts the power to establish penalties for interfering with the right to vote and authorized intervention by the army if necessary. However, no new troops were committed. The Enforcement Act was similar to the

⁷⁷⁰ *SMN*, May 11 and 26, 1870. Emphasis added.

⁷⁷¹ *Condition of the Georgia Penitentiary*, 195, 199. See also Edward O. Hightower, “Convicted and Railroaded: Rufus B. Bullock and Georgia Convict Leasing, 1868-1871,” 2011 MA Thesis, Clark Atlanta University.

General Orders Meade posted after Ashburn's assassination . . . and just as effective. But it gave Congress the cover it needed. They had acted. If southern Republicans couldn't stop the violence, it was their own fault.⁷⁷²

Georgia conservative Republican Amos Akerman was named US Attorney General. Akerman and the legislature pushed through a new set of election laws "designed to secure peace and order at the polls and to prevent the intimidation of voters." The election was postponed to the end of December 1870. Bullock was empowered to select three of the five members of the election boards for each county. Sheriffs were placed under the orders of the election managers, subject to \$100 fines. The voting period was extended to three days to give voters more time to get to the polling stations. Managers were not permitted to challenge voters. Voters could not be disqualified based on non-payment of the poll tax. US troops were brought in from Florida to help maintain order.⁷⁷³

Democrats and the Klan were not deterred by the Enforcement Act, Akerman's appointment, or Georgia's new election laws. Klan activity increased across the state. But the political climate in Georgia in the summer of 1870 was not like that of 1868. Democrats were confident in victory. With the Union Leagues out of the picture and Republicans deeply divided, there were no more hysterical newspaper campaigns about an impending black insurrection, no more assassinations of prominent white and black Republicans, no more Camillas. Former Savannah Mayor Anderson was now chairman of the State Democratic Executive Committee.

⁷⁷² *GWT*, June 14, 1870.

⁷⁷³ Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 130-31; Reed, "What I Know of the Ku Klux Klan," July 1908; *NYT*, Sep. 22, 1870.

Under his leadership, party and Klan branches across the state united around the strategy of enforcing the poll tax in order to reduce “the negro vote.”⁷⁷⁴

In early August Bradley announced that he was running for Congress in the First District. On October 4, Bradley supporters and Bullock supporters held competing meetings in Savannah to nominate their slates.

The pro-Bullock meeting was a sedate affair of about 75, comprised of many of the same men who had founded the Savannah party three years earlier. This was not a group oriented to winning elections. Republicans had not even presented a candidate against Democrats in the mayoral and council elections in October. The carpetbaggers present—Robb, Seeley, Clift, and others—now occupied the highest posts in customs and the post office in Savannah. Most meeting participants were light-skinned, property-owning blacks from 16 counties in the district, men with aspirations to federal posts or elected offices in predominantly black areas. The meeting nominated a white man for the 42nd Congress; a black man, Richard White, to serve the few remaining months of the 41st Congress; and an equal number of blacks and whites to other party positions. The principle aim of the meeting was not to take on the Democrats, but to defeat Bradley and the memory of the revolutionary Union League movement of 1867 and 1868. “Bradley is the great enemy of the Republican party in this district, and has been bought by the Democratic party,” trumpeted Foster Blodgett, chairman of the Republican State Central Committee and the party's campaign director.⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷⁴ Trelease, *White Terror*, 238-40; *SMN*, Dec. 19, 1870. See also Reed, “What I Know of the Ku Klux Klan,” July 1908.

⁷⁷⁵ *SMN*, Oct. 6 and 11, 1870. White, an Oberlin-educated man “light skinned enough to pass for white,” had come south as a member of the Massachusetts Fifty-fifth Regiment. See Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 176, 308.

Bradley's meeting, on the other hand, resembled the mass meetings of earlier years. He still had a strong base of support from the Ogeechee and from poor blacks in the city, attracting a large and enthusiastic crowd of 1,500. Charles Hopkins had travelled from McIntosh County to show his ongoing support. He introduced Bradley and was elected a vice president of the meeting.

Bradley contrasted his meeting to that of the Bullock Republicans. "[T]he time of these political dictators had expired," he declared hopefully. "[T]hey were now acting as a self-constituted body, while his convention was called and sustained by the masses." He launched an all-out assault on the carpetbaggers leading Georgia's Republican Party. Blodgett, Clift, and Joe Brown were only interested in prolonging their offices, Bradley insisted. The "barbarous, devilish, infernal hell-hounds Bullock and Terry" and their railroad contractor friends were profiting from "chain-gang slavery." Northern capitalists, among them "bondholders, bankers, insurance agents, carpet-baggers, collectors," were all looking to take advantage of cheap southern labor. While he still had hope in Howard and Simms, Tunis Campbell, he said, was "a white man's nigger," "employed by Bullock to do his dirty work."⁷⁷⁶

It was a not inaccurate picture of what Georgia's Republican Party had become. What was missing was any criticism of the Democrats: of the terrible working conditions on the plantations, of the Klan, of Democratic violence against blacks, of their opposition to black voting rights. Instead, determined not to give Republicans and the Union Army credit for ending slavery, Bradley praised Davis and Lee for starting the war. Nor were Republicans applauded for giving blacks voting rights. It was "through *my* indefatigable exertions that you got the right to vote," insisted Bradley, "and it was *I*, also, who got the slaves put on an equality with their old

⁷⁷⁶ *SDA*, Oct. 6, 1870; *SMN*, Oct. 6, 1870; *GWT*, Oct. 11, 1870.

masters.” He called on those present to “elect nothing but black men . . . and when you see the Democrats have a majority over you in a county, run no ticket, but harmonize and support the ticket nominated; you will then enjoy that good will and sure protection in all that is just and lawful.”⁷⁷⁷

On behalf of the Conservative Republicans of Georgia, Bradley presented a ticket “of Southern men of both races—men who are devoted to Republicanism and not to carpet-baggers from the North.” Along with himself as nominee for senator, Houston, Simms, King Solomon Thomas, and James Porter were nominated for key positions. Hopkins was proposed for Clerk of Superior Court. At the end of the meeting, Hopkins gave a “brief speech, in which he fully endorsed the sentiments of Aaron Alpeoria Bradley.”⁷⁷⁸

October 4 was the last time Bradley and Hopkins would share the stage at a political meeting. Their struggle for a total transformation of the South, for the unity of black and white working people, their faith in the Republican Party, had ended in bitter disappointment and deep despair. With no labor alternative to both parties in view, they turned to the forlorn hope that a bloc with the hated Democrats might offer some relief. Southern nationalism, the unity of southerners of all classes, the ideology of the lost cause, was now given credence by the two men who had fought against it the longest and hardest. Democrats, predictably, were delighted with Bradley’s speech. “Very few Democrats could have flung so many plain truths in the teeth of the Radical carpet-bagger,” chortled the *Savannah Republican*.⁷⁷⁹

⁷⁷⁷ *SDA*, Oct. 6, 1870. Emphasis added.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid.*; *SMN*, Oct. 6, 1870.

⁷⁷⁹ *SDR*, Oct. 6, 1870, from *GWT*, Oct. 11, 1870.

The competing Savannah Republican factions faced off again on December 12. The Bullock Republicans attracted a small crowd of 200 to the only public event of their campaign in the city. As their meeting was about to begin, the Bradley forces, who were holding a meeting in an adjacent square, “formed a line of march two feet deep, and with a field band of music, followed by about twenty-five hundred Bradleyites,” marched past the pro-Bullock gathering. The Bradley march included “a number of women who had walked all the way from the Ogeechee to see that the men from that section did not desert Mr. Bradley’s banner.” When they marched past, half of the participants at the pro-Bullock meeting joined the Bradley rally. The “major portion” of the one hundred who were left were “officeholders.” Speeches there were short, amounting to little more than “give me your votes, my colored friends. I have saved you and will do so again,” noted the *Morning News*. “The white portion of the crowd were evidently doing their level best to keep the machine working, but it seemed anything but a labor of love.”⁷⁸⁰

Bradley opened his ‘Conservative Republican’ meeting with a poem of his own composition titled “The Laborer’s Song.” The poem proclaimed his support for labor, for the eight-hour-day, against capital, against the banks and railroads. It was a wistful tribute to the program he and Hopkins had co-authored in the fall of 1867, of the labor reform campaigns he had joined in 1869, of the program he had presented in Atlanta only a few months earlier. Bradley rapidly segued from the poem into his standard attack on his Republican opponents. The black men he had proposed for office in October were now candidates on the Bullock slate. He told the crowd to “beware of the wolves in sheeps’ clothing, headed by Porter, Sims, White and others.” “He spoke till he was hoarse, handled his African, Indian and White opponents without

⁷⁸⁰ *SMN*, Dec. 13, 1870; *SDA*, Dec. 13, 1870.

gloves,” noted the *Savannah Morning News* reporters. “The entire negro element was with him.”⁷⁸¹

The ruling class in Chatham County had succeeded in dividing their Republican opponents. The *Advertiser* headlined its article on the December meetings “Black and Tan vs Out-And-Out Nigger.”⁷⁸²

Democrats used that division to coast to an easy victory in the elections in Chatham County. The official county polling station, controlled by the Democrats, was established at the courthouse. Bradley supporters voted there. Blacks who showed up were allowed to vote freely, with only a few arrested for repeat voting. There was apparently no enforcement of the poll tax, no armed policemen barring the door. Bullock Republicans set up their own ballot box at King Solomon’s office in east Savannah. In September, Campbell had pushed through a bill in the legislature which allowed Savannah voters to set up additional polling places in the city. Although the Democrats did not recognize Campbell’s bill and considered King Solomon’s polling station to be illegal, they made no attempt to shut it down. Democratic candidates averaged around 3,800 votes, all at the courthouse; candidates on the Bradley ticket 2,000, almost all at the courthouse; the Bullock Republican slate, 2,250, all in King Solomon’s District.⁷⁸³

⁷⁸¹ *SDA*, Dec. 13, 1870; *SMN*, Dec. 13, 1870. Bradley mockingly referred to the light-skinned Richard White as an “Indian.” “The Laborer’s Song” is reprinted in Appendix D.

⁷⁸² *SDA*, Dec. 13, 1870.

⁷⁸³ *SMN*, Dec. 22, 23, 24, and 28, 1870; *SDA*, Dec. 28, 1870; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 357-59. The vote for the Bradley slate corresponds to tallies in previous elections and to the numbers of participants in Bradley’s campaign rallies. The other two totals are highly suspect. In an election where ballot-box-stuffing was rife across the state, Savannah Democrats tallied 3,800 votes in a county where registered Democrats numbered well under 3,000.

In the rest of Georgia, Democrats used intimidation, poll tax disqualification, and ballot-box stuffing to maximum advantage. Elections in Oglethorpe County were typical. With the full support of the local Democratic Club, Klan leader Reed found that “everything that I wanted in the county was at my command.” Klan members were enrolled as poll watchers and sheriff’s deputies. Reed spoke to the sergeant of the seven or eight US soldiers stationed in Lexington, the county seat. The sergeant said their orders were to stay out of sight and to appear “only to assist the Sheriff when called on by civil authorities.” Reed noted ironically that “[t]his made me regard him as a reinforcement.”⁷⁸⁴

On election day, thousands of blacks were prevented from voting for failure to pay the poll tax. In Hancock County, moderate Democrat Linton Stephens had the Republican election managers arrested when they refused to enforce the poll tax restrictions. In Columbia County, DuBose’s Wilkes County, and elsewhere, white men blocked the voting booth for blacks and Republicans. Blacks were forced to vote Democratic. Some were paid a quarter for their effort. Democrats swept the elections, winning “71 of the 86 contests for house seats and 19 of 22 senate seats to take overwhelming control of the legislature.” Klan Grand Titan Dudley DuBose

As for the count at King Solomon’s polling station, for a slate which couldn’t even draw one hundred blacks to their sole campaign rally to rack up over 2,000 votes also raises questions. Bradley’s vote count elsewhere in the district did not represent his actual support. According to Coulter, “Bradley received one vote in Bryan County and one in Glynn. Apparently his name must not have got on the ballot in the other counties or was not counted.” See Coulter, “Aaron Alpeoria Bradley,” Part III, 282.

⁷⁸⁴ Reed, “What I Know of the Ku Klux Klan,” July and August 1908.

was elected to the US House of Representatives. Isaac Russell, the murderer of Robert Hopkins, was elected to the Georgia House.⁷⁸⁵

The Democratic victory in the elections was no surprise. The shocker was a letter by Benjamin Hill published a week before the elections in newspapers across the state. Hill, the Democrat who had led the fight against Congressional Reconstruction in 1867, who had joined Toombs and Cobb as a speaker at the Democrats' "bush arbor" rally in 1868, called on Georgians to accept unreservedly the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. He appealed to Democrats to "render ready protection and cheerful assistance to the colored man in his free, full and unrestricted enjoyment" of the suffrage. The North has established a "strong national government" and a "new system of industry," he explained. Southerners must "cease all quarrelling over the past and . . . unite our energies to bring back prosperity to our country." It was the same plea Republican leader Joseph Brown had been making for years!⁷⁸⁶

Days after the election, the impetus behind Hill's conversion became clear. Rufus Bullock announced that the state's biggest moneymaker, the Western and Atlantic railroad, was being leased to two companies for twenty years at the absurdly low cost of \$25,000 per month. Joseph Brown—who had written the bill authorizing the lease—headed one group, which included Atlanta entrepreneur and Bullock crony H. I. Kimball; John P. King, former Democratic Senator from Georgia, planter and railroad promoter; Henry B. Plant, Connecticut-born president of the Southern Express Company and a loyal supporter of the Confederacy

⁷⁸⁵ Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 132-33; Stearns, *Black Man of the South*, 285-304. Many more descriptions of Democratic suppression of the vote in the 1870 elections are contained in *Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, Volumes 6 and 7.

⁷⁸⁶ *SMN*, Dec. 13, 1870.

during the war; and former Confederate Vice-President Alexander H. Stephens. The second company included among its principals John T. Grant, Atlanta railroad entrepreneur and convict lessee; Thomas A. Scott, Pennsylvania Railroad president and assistant secretary of war under Lincoln; Simon B. Cameron, former secretary of war under Lincoln, Republican Senator from Pennsylvania, a notoriously corrupt railroad entrepreneur and close friend of Grant; John S. Delano, son of the secretary of the interior; and Benjamin H. Hill.⁷⁸⁷

The takeover of the Western and Atlantic heralded the “New South” being born. Confederate railroad magnates joined with their Yankee counterparts, Republican politicians north and south united with leading rebel politicians to take over the largest industrial enterprise in the state. Together they would reap the rewards of the capitalist juggernaut which the war itself had propelled into being.

Georgia was indeed reconstructed. Not in the way blacks and poor whites had fought for, in an economic and political transformation of society in their interests. Not in the way the Radicals had hoped, with their utopian dream of a wage labor system which could resolve all conflicts between employers and employees, ensure black rights and the political triumph of the Republican Party. But rather reconstruction in the interests of the ruling classes north and south, once more reunited. The southern ruling class had reasserted its hold on political power and the agricultural economy—sustained through the expansion of the sharecropping and tenant farming system, the ever-present threat of violence over its labor force, and electoral fraud—with a nice slice of industrial profits to boot. In return, the northern ruling class had overseen the end of the regional conflict and won a broad area for investment largely freed of the burden of trade unions and labor opposition. If the price to be paid for that was former Klansmen and unrepentant rebels

⁷⁸⁷ Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 115-16.

in high office, a solid Democratic Party state, and a sham adherence to the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments by their new partners, it was a small price to pay for progress.

17 CONCLUSION

After the 1870 elections, Charles Hopkins returned to Darien. In 1871, he sued Tunis Campbell in court and won back possession of his Belleville estate. Hopkins continued to be active in the Republican Party in McIntosh County. In 1876, he was elected as a delegate to a district convention of the party in Hinesville. He supported Republican Rutherford B. Hayes for president. In 1877, he was elected ordinary of McIntosh County, a position he occupied for several years.⁷⁸⁸

Bradley continued his quest to unite southerners of both races and all classes against carpetbag Republicans. In 1871 he led a successful campaign to remove carpetbagger T. P. Robb from his post as director of the Savannah Custom House. In October 1871, he presided over a large meeting in Savannah which nominated Grant for President, Joe Brown for Governor, and Democratic Mayor John Screven for Congress. He called Brown “the only man in the Republican party that can unite the white and colored vote, and give satisfaction to the Democrats.” In the 1872 elections, Bradley circulated a handbill in Savannah calling on “all true Irishmen and German laboring Democrats” to join blacks in supporting Grant. He vowed “he would vote any day for a good, honest, straight-out Democrat in preference to a wishy-washy Republican. His first choice for Congress was H. M. Turner.” Using the methods they had pioneered in 1868 and 1870, the Democrats swept the 1872 elections in Georgia and Chatham County, effectively ending any hope for a Republican victory in Savannah. By 1873, only 400 black men were registered to vote in Chatham County.⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁸⁸ Tad Evans, ed., *Darien Georgia Newspaper Clippings, Vol. 1, 1818-1878* (Darien: Tad Evans, 2001), 231; *Savannah Tribune*, Aug. 12, 1876; *SMN*, Dec. 12, 1886; *Darien Timber Gazette*, Dec. 1886.

⁷⁸⁹ *SMN*, Oct. 28, 1871, Aug. 31, 1872, Sep. 3, 1872; Jones, *Saving Savannah*, 383-84, 387.

The final decade of Bradley's life resembled in some ways the ten years he had spent living as an outcast in Boston after his disbarment in 1856. For several years, he tried unsuccessfully to make a living as a lawyer in South Carolina and Georgia. He was disbarred in Georgia and thrown in jail on several occasions in South Carolina for his efforts. In 1874, he ran unsuccessfully for Congress in a coastal district of South Carolina. In December 1874, some 2,000 people attended a meeting he organized in Savannah to encourage black migration to Florida. In May 1879, he held a much smaller meeting in Savannah to promote the exodus of blacks to Kansas. In 1881, he moved to St. Louis and was eventually admitted to the bar in Missouri.⁷⁹⁰

On October 19, 1882, Bradley dropped dead on a sidewalk in St. Louis. "A lot of papers of no value and twenty-five cents" were found on his body. Unwilling to see Bradley interred in a pauper's grave, "the colored people raised funds and gave him a decent burial." His obituary, published on the last page of the *Savannah Morning News*, noted that he was prominent during Reconstruction. As a Senator, said the *News*, he "committed many freaks that stamped him as a crank. . . . He was a dangerous character in the demoralized times just after the war, and did much to provoke strife and to array the races."⁷⁹¹

Hopkins died four years later at his home near Darien on November 29, 1886. His obituary in the *Savannah Morning News* appeared in a column of miscellaneous news from Georgia and Florida on page eight. The article noted some of the offices he had held in his long political career: mayor of Darien, colonel in the Georgia Militia, member of the legislature and of three constitutional conventions, federal revenue assessor in Savannah, candidate and delegate

⁷⁹⁰ Coulter, "Aaron Alpeoria Bradley," Part III, 291; *SMN*, Dec. 15, 1874.

⁷⁹¹ *SMN*, Oct. 25, 1882.

in the Whig, Constitutional Union, and Republican parties. It noted that in the 1867 convention, “he was the author of several important measures, notably ‘No imprisonment for debt,’ and a resolution petitioning Congress to remove the disabilities of all Southerners who participated in the late war.” “It seems that Col. Hopkins always voted the Republican ticket for President,” the article concluded, “while for the Congressional and local positions he supported the best man, regardless of political creed.”⁷⁹²

Bradley, maligned even in death. Hopkins, what he stood for all his life disappearing under the list of offices he had held. Both of them far away from where they had made their biggest mark, far from the Chatham County freedmen they had led in combat.

Bradley and Hopkins died at a time when the competing wings of Georgia’s ruling class which had clashed for a brief period between 1867 and 1870 had reunited. Georgia politics in the 1880s was dominated by the “Bourbon Triumvirate” of Alfred Colquitt, John Gordon, and Joseph Brown: two founders of the Georgia Ku Klux Klan arm-in-arm with a former central leader of Georgia’s Republican Party. When Bradley died, Brown had just succeeded Gordon as US Senator; Colquitt was governor. When Hopkins died, Brown and Colquitt were Georgia’s US Senators; Gordon was governor. Brown, now a very wealthy man, was one of the largest employers of convict labor in the state. Georgia’s only Republican governor, Rufus Bullock, became president of the Atlanta Cotton Factory in 1882. The factory, one of the showpieces of the “New South,” profited from the super-exploitation of white workers. When former Confederate Vice-President Alexander Stephens died in 1883, pallbearers at his funeral included Colquitt, Gordon, Brown, Bullock, and Robert Toombs.

⁷⁹² *SMN*, Dec. 12, 1886.

All the movements of working people which developed at the end of the Civil War were immature. Workers in the North and West were confronted by a massive expansion of capitalist industry and commerce. Unions were in their initial stages. All faced strong opposition from the employers as well as from Republicans and Democrats. A small vanguard was beginning to break from these pro-capitalist parties to form a labor party. But the economic expansion meant that many workers had the alternative of becoming their own bosses or moving out west and escaping the proletarian existence entirely.

The South had only a tiny number of industrial workers and still fewer unions. Most poor whites worked on farms or owned small farms themselves. In their attempt to get relief from crushing debt, they ceded to the political leadership of wealthier farmers, lawyers, and politicians who voiced similar concerns.

The freedmen were illiterate, mostly living in the countryside, and new to wage labor. They were “landless agricultural workers who aspired to become small owners and producers.” As Marxist historian George Novack explained, “[t]hey became the vanguard of the revolutionary forces, not because they had been prepared by experience and education to assume that role, not because they had intended to, but because their social situation and the tasks of the times thrust them to the forefront of the mass movement.”⁷⁹³

The centuries-long existence of slavery in the South fostered racist attitudes among white workers and farmers on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line, attitudes encouraged by employers who profited from those divisions and promulgated in the Democratic and most of the Republican press. Few blacks lived in north Georgia, where the strongest contingent of poor

⁷⁹³ George Novack, *America's Revolutionary Heritage: Marxist Essays* (New York: Pathfinder, 2013), 352, 354.

white Republicans was located. Working people in north Georgia had little idea of the life and death struggles freedmen were waging in the southern part of the state. In the North, where there were few blacks, working people had even less information about the struggles of southern freedmen or poor whites. These divisions were not the product of racism. They were the product of the uneven development of capitalism and market forces in the United States in its first hundred years, of geography and social distance.

Neither the workers in the North, the southern yeomen, or the freedmen had broken from bourgeois parties. White workers were split between Democrats and Republicans. The freedmen harbored big illusions in the Republican Party. Even their most advanced elements were prone to follow petty bourgeois ideologies and leaders.

Working people north and south were strong enough to provoke their class enemies, but too weak to defeat their class enemies separately, and too divided to unite against them. The consequences were tragic. With the defeat of Reconstruction, says labor historian Farrell Dobbs, “not only Afro-Americans but the entire working class had suffered the worst setback in its history.”⁷⁹⁴

The extreme regional and social differences workers faced during Reconstruction no longer exist. Wage workers now comprise the big majority of the population in every state. Most live not on isolated farms but in cities and towns. Large numbers of Blacks and other minorities reside in every part of the country, working side-by-side with white workers in every major

⁷⁹⁴ Farrell Dobbs, *Revolutionary Continuity: The Early Years 1848-1917* (New York: Monad Press, 1980), 52. In addition to his work as a historian, Dobbs was a leader of the Teamsters Union in the 1930s and of the Socialist Workers Party.

industry. Women, black as well as white, have the right to vote, hold office at the highest levels, and are fully part of the working class. Trade unions are no longer a novelty. They have the experiences of a century and a half of fierce battles against the employers behind them. Working people across the country have means of communication and possibilities of common action today which were unthinkable in the 1860s and 1870s.

Thanks to the massive struggles of new generations of southern black working people in the Civil Rights Movement—supported by millions of Blacks and whites across the country—the reform program of the Radicals has been redeemed. Jim Crow is no more. The Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act have made the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments once again the law of the land. The United States now has tens of thousands of black congressmen and congresswomen, governors, police officers, judges, CEOs, multimillionaires, generals, movie stars, top athletes, even a two-term black president. There is far less racism today in this country than at any time in its entire history.

Nearly 60 years have passed since the Civil Rights Movement. The redemption of the Radical program has not resolved the problems of black or white working people, nor those of new generations of workers of many ethnicities and skin colors. Working people continue to confront poverty, joblessness, racism, and war, an economy prone to periodic crises, along with staggering and growing inequality between rich and poor.

What then is the legacy of the struggles of the freedmen, of Aaron Bradley and Charles Hopkins? Are there any lessons we can learn from Reconstruction?

The problems working people face today would not have been unfamiliar to the revolutionary leaders of Reconstruction. Over 150 years ago, Thaddeus Stevens insisted that “[i]t is impossible that any practical equality of rights can exist where a few thousand men

monopolize the whole landed property How can republican institutions . . . exist in a mingled community of nabobs and serfs: of the owners of twenty thousand acre manors with lordly palaces, and the occupants of narrow huts. . . ?” “The landed aristocracy have always been the curse of the State,” insisted Charles Hopkins. “Till that is broken down there can be no real freedom here for either the negro or the poor white.”⁷⁹⁵

Then as now, the key problem facing working people was the one that Bradley explained succinctly in 1869: “capital is united—labor is divided.” How Hopkins and Bradley approached this problem offers important guidelines for today:

- Hopkins and Bradley looked to ordinary working people as the men and women who would transform society. Hopkins recognized the revolutionary potential of white workers and farmers in the Civil War. Bradley looked to the plantation freedmen, the dockworkers, and the urban and rural poor.
- Both men understood that the way to overcome differences between black and white workers was in struggle, fighting together for better wages and working conditions, fighting against all forms of injustice. Together they drafted a program to unite the freedmen with working class and yeomen whites.
- The most important battles they waged were not in the courts, the conventions, or the legislatures. Rather, it was Hopkins’s joining the fight of the poor whites against the Confederate army. It was the freedmen’s and Bradley’s fights on the plantations to hold onto the land. It was the fights of the Union Leagues

⁷⁹⁵ Thaddeus Stevens, “Address Delivered to the Citizens of Lancaster, Sept. 6, 1865,” *NYT*, September 10, 1865; Andrews, *The South Since the War*, 371-72.

against the planters in the fields, against police brutality, against injustice in the courts and the prisons.

- Bradley realized that neither the Democratic nor the Republican parties represented the interests of working people. They were both “tools of the money power.” Working people, black and white, needed a party of their own, a Labor Party.⁷⁹⁶

From the very beginning, Bradley and the freedmen faced the opposition of the “friends of labor.” Liberals, called Radicals in those days, opposed land confiscation, unions, and strikes. They insisted that the vote, “free labor,” and their own enlightened leadership would give blacks everything they needed.

In *Black Reconstruction*, W. E. B. Du Bois sharply criticized the liberals of both the Reconstruction era and of his own time. The country, he insisted, is in “the hands of an organized monarchy of finance.” The liberals “never could bring themselves to countenance the redistribution of property.” They were “largely based on property, believed in capital and formed in effect a powerful petty bourgeoisie. [They] believed in democratic government but only under a general dictatorship of property.” “What liberalism did not understand was that such a revolution [Reconstruction] was economic and involved force.” To the liberals of his time who saw race behind the failure of Reconstruction, Du Bois responded firmly that “the overthrow of Reconstruction was in essence a revolution inspired by property, and not a race war.”⁷⁹⁷

Today, working people confront poverty and racism, inequality and injustice stemming from the same “capitalistic dictatorship” they faced in the 1860s and 1870s. It is working people

⁷⁹⁶ *Pomeroy's Democrat*, Dec. 1, 1869.

⁷⁹⁷ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 580, 591, 595, 622.

themselves, the men and women who have “their shirt sleeves rolled up” as Bradley put it, who will resolve these problems. Their common fight, no longer submerged, will redeem the unsuccessful efforts of Charles Hopkins, Aaron Bradley, and the Union Leagues for a social revolution in the first six years of Reconstruction in Georgia.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid., 630; *SDNH*, Oct. 1, 1867.

APPENDICES

**Appendix A: Sidney Andrews's Interview with "A Gentleman Of Middle Age" in
November 1865⁷⁹⁹**

I have fallen in with a gentleman of middle age who was in the Rebel army about three years. He is a lawyer by profession, and is among the leading members of the bar in his section. He has been in the Legislature, and before the war was one of the most popular speakers in his district. He is a man of such ability that he was often invited to speak with Howell Cobb, Ben Hill, Lucius J. Gartrell, and other leading politicians. He claims to have been always a Union man, and says his service in the army was compulsory. He is now, at least, acting the part of a quiet, well disposed citizen; and his advice is found of value by the officer in command in his city. I speak thus particularly, because I do not deem it advisable to give either his name or his residence. On a certain Sunday morning we two fell into some talk on the condition of the State and the prospects of the future. I found him, after a time, quite ready to speak, and he found me equally ready to listen. And this, almost word for word, is what he said: —

"I think you are mistaken, sir. Giving suffrage to the negro would not accomplish the ends you desire to reach, I'm afraid. Perhaps I'm prejudiced against him, but I doubt if suffrage would secure his freedom to him, for I know too well how he can be wound round the finger of a plausible white man. You've been about the State considerable, I reckon, but let me tell you just how I see things; and remember, I'm a native Georgian, and expect to live and die in my State.

"The Negro's first want is, not the ballot, but a chance to live,—yes, sir, a chance to live. You say the government has given him freedom, and that many good men in the North believe he

⁷⁹⁹ This excerpt is taken from Chapter XLI, "Matters in Southeastern Georgia," dated Savannah, December 2, 1865, in Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War*, 369-73.

must have the ballot to secure that freedom. I tell you he's not got his freedom yet, and isn't likely to get it right away. Why, he can't even live without the consent of the white man! He has no land; he can make no crops except the white man gives him a chance. He hasn't any timber; he can't get a stick of wood without leave from a white man. We crowd him into the fewest possible employments, and then he can scarcely get work anywhere but in the rice-fields and cotton plantations of a white man who has owned him and given up slavery only at the point of the bayonet. Even in this city he can't get a pail of water from a well without asking a white man for the privilege. He can hardly breathe, and he certainly can't live in a house, unless a white man gives his consent. What sort of freedom is that?

He has freedom in name, but not in fact. In many respects he is worse off than he was before you made him free, for then the property interest of his owner protected him, and now his master's hand as well as the hand of everybody else is against him. True, he has the military here for his protection; but there are a thousand things done here every day under the colonel's very nose that he don't know anything about, and that he can't know about, —things he couldn't remedy if he did know about 'em. Then, besides, there are the hundreds of wrongs of which he knows, but he can't reach and can't make right. 'T isn't such whippings as he told you about that most wrong the negro; it's the small, endless, mean little injustice of every day that's going to kill him off. He's only partially protected now; take the troops away, and his chance wouldn't be as good as a piece of light-wood in a house on fire.

“Yes, I know there's talk of selling them into slavery again, but I don't see how you got hold of it. I know a good many of these men they've sent to the Legislature; and I know there'll be private talk this session, even if there isn't open effort, to make the penal code take him back into the condition of slavery. It'll be called ‘involuntary servitude for the punishment of crime,’

but it won't differ much from slavery. Why, I know men right here in this very town who believe in making the breaking of a contract a crime for which the nigger may be sold. They can do it. They can establish any system of crimes and punishments they please. I don't say they will do that, but I know many men who would vote for doing it. You Northern man can't see much of the real feeling here. Get the troops away and the State into Congress, and I give you my solemn word that I believe three fourths of the counties in the State would vote for such a penal code as would practically reduce half the negroes to slavery in less than a year.

"No, I haven't much faith in the idea that capital and labor will reconcile themselves. Things are exceptional here. Our capital is all in the hands of a few, and invested in great plantations. Our labor is all in the hands of a race supremely ignorant, and against whom we all have a strong prejudice. In my opinion, you can't reconcile these two interests unless you put the labor in subjection to the capital, that is unless you give the white man control of the negro. Of course that can't again be allowed, and therefore there's an almost impassable gulf between the negro and freedom unless the government aids him.

"I'll tell you what I think you should have done. The policy of confiscation should be rigidly carried out at once. Mercy to the individual is death to the State; and in pardoning all the leading men, the President is killing the free State he might have built here. The landed aristocracy have always been the curse of the State, —and I say that as a man born and reared in Georgia and bound to her by every possible tie. Till that is broken down there can be no real freedom here for either the negro or the poor white. The result of the war gave you a chance you never will get again to overthrow that monopoly. The negroes and the poor whites are bitter enemies in many respects, but they agree in wanting land. You should have carried out your confiscation policy, —divided up the great plantations into fifty-acre lots, and sold them to the

highest and best bidders. That would have thrown some of the land into other large plantations, but it would have been fair, and would have given the poor whites and the negroes a chance. Give a man a piece of land, let him have a cabin of his own upon his own lot, and then you make him free. Civil rights are good for nothing, the ballot is good for nothing, till you make some men of every class landholders. You must give the negroes and the poor whites a chance to live, — that's the first thing you should do. The negro has a great notion to get a piece of land, and you should help him along by that notion. What does he want of a vote? He wouldn't know how to use it, and 't wouldn't bring him anything to eat or wear if he had a dozen. Give him land, and then you touch his case exactly. He can get none now. There isn't one planter in a thousand who would sell him any; but if you'd carried out your confiscation policy he could have bought it like anybody else.

"I said in a speech on last Fourth of July that we had always boasted of our country as the land of the free and the home of the oppressed, while in fact it had been the land of the oppressed and the home of the slave. I said, too, that I hoped the war had made it possible for men to be free without regard to color, so that we might boast more truly than England that our flag floats over no slave. I spoke very cautiously, but what little I said was enough to kill me politically in this county. I have sometimes thought I would go North and urge your people to take the first fruits of the victory, but I should not dare to come back here after speaking up there. I've wanted to write a letter to some leading newspaper; but If I should say what I honestly believe, I should be killed if it ever got out that I wrote it. There isn't any freedom of speech here, or anywhere in the State, unless you speak just as the Secessionists please to let you. I should be shot before tomorrow morning if I were to publicly say what I've said to you. Take the troops away, and off the great lines of travel there would be a reign of terror in a

month. Your test oath is a bad thing. It sets an ugly precedent, and it will keep our best men out of Congress. I wish you could have reached your ends in some other way. But you've got it, and you'll have to enforce it. It will punish many who are not guilty, but it will accomplish final results which I want brought about as much as you do."

I have not met many men in this State who are more competent to speak upon the condition of the people than this captain. His remarks do not apply to this section alone. It seems to me that they are a powerful argument out of the mouth of a Southern advocate of the opposite policy, that the ballot in the hand of every man, white and black, is the only method of securing the rights of the humbler classes of all colors in the South. It will give them the power and eloquence of numbers. It will give them what party leaders will covet, and what the bitterest slave oligarchist in the whole list will not be above stooping to secure. To be sure, some should be owners of land; but the citizen, with the ballot in his hand, is a king in his own right, to whom all things are possible. Ownership of land in fee-simple does not necessarily include command of the ballot; but put into the negro's horny palm the simple right to vote, and he is at once installed into ownership of houses and lands and comforts and luxuries, from which only his own idleness or improvidence can dispossess him.

Appendix B: Aaron Bradley speaks at meetings of the Colored Men and Women's Labor Reform Union in New York City in November 1869

New York Herald, November 17, 1869

LABOR REFORM UNION

Meeting at the Bethel Church—Political Reform Advocated by a Colored Senator—Hard

Knocks for the Hubites—The Right of Suffrage for Colored Women

Last evening a meeting was held in Bethel church, Sullivan street, under the auspices of the Colored Men and Women's Labor Reform Union. A host of attractive orators was announced to speak, but the only one who put in an appearance was the well known colored Senator A. A. Bradley, of Georgia. There was a large attendance of both sexes.

Rev. Mr. JONES opened the proceedings with prayer, in the course of which he sued for human liberty, in order that the social and moral condition of man might be improved.

Mr. TROUP was the first speaker. He called attention to the proceedings of the Labor Congress at Philadelphia, and alluded to the great sincerity of that body in allowing colored people to participate in the good results of its deliberations. He was aware of the prejudice existing against colored people and that prejudice must be lived down. The time was come when labor must rise above capital. There had been a difference of opinion in this country about the introduction of colored men into the white men's union—there had been a difference of opinion among the colored men themselves—but there could be no difference of opinion between white men and colored workingmen that they should go hand and hand in the great struggle for their liberty. He was there to encourage the organizations of colored workingmen in this city. If there were any white workingmen who objected to that he would say they were blind to their own interests. They could not see that it was their interest to organize with the colored men and work

harmoniously together. In regard to the coming convention at Washington, he was informed by the President of the National Labor Congress of the United States that he would be present at that convention in order to give his aid and countenance to the movement. The speaker said he would his utmost to forward the interests of the colored workingmen's organization. (Applause)⁸⁰⁰

Senator BRADLEY then came forward and was warmly received. He said the subjects under consideration were religious labor and political reform. The religious point of the subject had been so ably treated previously that he deemed it superfluous and entirely unnecessary to refer to it. With regard to the other portion of the discourse, he would say that in the first periods of the world's history necessity compelled that generals should govern, because men, grouped together in herds, commenced fighting each other and their leaders, chiefs and generals, were obliged to manage them. Among others William the Conqueror, of England, in his time owned everything. People were sold and their masters took care of them. It was then that capital triumphed over labor. It was pretty much the same now in Russia. But at a later period, when people became more enlightened in England, they commenced to own themselves and own land, but they would remember that that was not brought about until the Magna Charta was extorted from King John. Then commenced the history of freedom and independence of the workingmen. The Magna Charta was the foundation of American independence. The speaker then proceeded to dilate at considerable length upon the wars of the country, showing the prominent part colored

⁸⁰⁰ Alexander Troup was New York state organizer of the National Labor Union. The "Labor Congress at Philadelphia" is a reference to the third congress of the National Labor Union in August 1869. Several representatives of black labor organizations attended and spoke at that meeting, notably Isaac Myers of Baltimore. The "coming convention at Washington" is a reference to the Colored National Labor Convention organized by Myers.

people had taken in them. It was a colored man who gave the first blow in the great revolution. A colored man named Christopher Atuck and two white men were shot down in Boston, the alarm bells were rung and the mighty struggle was commenced. He alluded to the compliments paid the colored troops and finally referred to the action of the negro forces in the late war. The speaker was quite profuse in eulogies of his brethren, and the announcement of their heroic deeds elicited frequent and loud tokens of approbation. He characterized the rebellion as a great struggle of capital against labor. The speaker reviewed the history of the country since the war, introducing many incidents to show that the acts of reconstruction had not been put into force in the fair and impartial manner intended. At times Senator Bradley was quite humorous; particularly so when narrating his experiences in the Georgia Legislature. Nor did he spare the Massachusetts Legislature in the course of his lengthy address. No less than four hundred and sixty-three special acts had been passed during the last session, a large number being for railroads, while the poor mechanic, the poor St. Crispin, could not get a single act passed. He was particularly severe regarding the street improvements of Boston, and drew comparisons between the municipal legislation of that city and New York, both of which came in for a good round of abuse. And while the Senator wandered away considerably from the subject for which the meeting had assembled, he did not fail to draw attention to the important fact that he himself could not live on air—a fact, by the way, all present seemed ready to admit. During the collection the quick ears of the Senator were suddenly startled by the chink of coin, when with much dignity he intimated that paper currency was the order of the evening. The announcement might scarcely have been thoroughly appreciated had it not been that the wily legislator addressed himself to the softer sex and strenuously insisted they had a right to vote; whereupon the stamps felt like rain. The Senator earnestly advocated this point, and read voluminous documents and statutes to

substantiate his argument. As the hour was somewhat advanced when Senator Bradley closed his oration, the consideration of the labor question was adjourned and the meeting was brought to a close.⁸⁰¹

New York World, November 17, 1869

LABOR MOVEMENTS

Meeting of Colored Working-men—Characteristic Address by “Senator” Bradley—A French Revolution Threatened.

Last night a large number of colored working-men assembled in the Bethel Church, Sullivan street, to aid in a movement having the interests of their class in view. The main attraction in addition to the cause was the presence of the distinguished legislator, Senator Bradley, of Georgia, who gave the meeting his view of the working-man’s question, which was, to stand by him.

After an earnest appeal to his “brethren” not to let him “starve by the wayside” on his mission of “colored philanthropy,” the hat was sent round, and Senator Bradley kindly informed his friends that his dignity as a gentleman of color and his high political position would not allow him to accept less than a ten-cent stamp. Those with cents might seek the door. . . .

⁸⁰¹ Saint Crispin was the patron saint of cobblers, curriers, tanners, and leather workers. Shoemaking was a big industry in Massachusetts in the 1860s and 1870s, employing tens of thousands of workers. Shoemakers played a key role in the labor movement in the state. In 1860 a strike of shoemakers in Lynn, Massachusetts drew the attention of President Lincoln. Organized as a national union in 1869, the Knights of St. Crispin was the largest proto-industrial union in the country, with 30,000 members in Massachusetts alone. With their jobs threatened by rapid mechanization, the union fought for the eight-hour day, higher wages, and a city-wide pay scale. The Crispins encouraged the organization of women workers in the Daughters of St. Crispin and supported women’s suffrage. They also opposed the hiring of apprentices and the importation of Chinese labor. Labor Reform candidates backed by the union won the Lynn elections in 1869. In the fall of that year, Bradley campaigned in support of Labor Reform candidates in Massachusetts. As a former skilled shoemaker himself, he identified strongly with this movement. See John Philip Hall, “The Knights of St. Crispin in Massachusetts, 1869-1878,” *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (June, 1958), 161-75.

Then came the great legislator. He stood erect, in all the pride of conscious power, and told his colored fellow-citizens that they are and ever have been basely treated with regard to their powers of voting. Every man and woman there had a vote, and he would call upon them most solemnly to exercise every right which they possessed. The statute said "person;" a woman was a person and not a pig, therefore she should have a vote. He called upon the ladies present to vote. In the name of their fathers, husbands, sweethearts, he called on them to vote. Leaving the ladies, the orator next took up the Declaration of Independence, and attempted to prove from it that every "colored gentleman" born after it was signed was a free citizen. The mother might be a slave, so might the father, but the son was a free man. Having settled that point to his own satisfaction, he next took up the late war. They could look back with pride to the gallant part they took in that bloody drama. The colored troops were the first to enter Richmond. At New Orleans they were placed before the cotton bales with which they had fortified the city, so as to save them from the deadly discharge of the enemy. Two thousand eight hundred were shot down, while only four whites lost their lives, and these by looking through the holes. After reviewing the war, and keeping his audience in laughter at numerous spicy incidents which he introduced, he graciously informed the meeting that he was pressingly asked to become judge down South, but he would not. However, he had no objection to take government money. He was once on a Senatoral committee and he accepted a thousand dollars for it. He declared that he saw a cloud no bigger than his hand, but it would soon spread and deluge the earth with blood. The people of America were bloodthirsty and pugilistically inclined. A tempest of war would very soon again roll over this land. It would be a second edition of the French Revolution. As his friends seemed inclined to drop away, he begged them to remain, "the spicy part was yet to come." He implored one matronly lady in particular not to leave "if she could help it." She begged to be excused, as

“nature must be attended to.” The gentleman is talking still, and we advise all to go and hear him.

Pomeroy’s Democrat, December 1, 1869⁸⁰²

Some days since A. A. Bradley, a prominent colored man from Georgia, delivered an address before a large meeting of colored workingmen in this city. A portion of his address we publish, that the public may know the sentiment so rapidly spreading among laboring men of all classes.

Said Mr. Bradley:

Among the reforms which are needed in each State and nation, is to repeal one-half of all the criminal laws, and make the remainder reformatory and not vindictive.

All that a convict can earn, over what it is worth to feed and guard him, should be paid to him or his dear wife and children on or before the expiration of his term of imprisonment, that the work of judicial slaves shall not be brought into market by contractors against poor laboring bosses and journeymen, who hire their capital at twenty per cent, and pay a house rent of fifty per cent, and buy meat at seventy-five per cent on its true value.

No nation can live long which destroys the manly and womanly character of her laboring millions North or South.

When capital has completed its work, the laboring people of the United States will be slaves, without regard to color, sex or race.

Capital is united—labor is divided. The laboring millions produce more bread and meat than is needed to feed the people of the United States, but capital will not let them have it.

⁸⁰² This is an excerpt from an article in *Pomeroy’s Democrat* titled “Southern Sentiment Against Bondholders.”

During the war we made enough to feed 2,802,000 soldiers and sailors, and destroyed half as much more, and yet all had enough. And now those men are at work producing food, and yet capital will not permit us to eat it.

The laboring men and women feel the weight of unjust treatment, and pray to be relieved, as it has already become intolerable, and may produce a general revolution, which must be regretted by all just men and women, but who will welcome it as they last argument. The air belongs to God—the sea belongs to God—the light of the sun, moon, and stars is given to all men and women alike to enjoy—the earth in like manner belongs to God, and he has commanded man to till the earth and live by the sweat of his brow—but capital robs us of it.

They who work the least eat the best and the most. Is this right and just under Christ's law? The brains and hands of laboring men have invented all the machinery of the world; and in some cases it will do the work of four hundred men, and yet capital has taken it and demands the same number of hours of each man in work.

Shall the bonds be taxed?

We say they should, because 2,500,000 white and 180,000 colored troops and 122,000 sailors and marines are being taxed to pay seven per cent gold interest on these bonds, and the bonds are not better than these brave men who faced the cannon's mouth to save the nation's life.

The United States bonds bearing seven per cent interest should be paid off with bonds bearing three per cent, or, still better, greenbacks.

First, because seven per cent gold interest will produce a revolution, as did the tea in 1776.

Because the labor of the country must pay this interest, seven per cent, and it only receives three per cent. Because, when the Government tax the rich man's property he compels his tenants, laboring men, to pay every dollar.

Appendix C: Aaron Alpeoria's Platform⁸⁰³

The following are the resolutions Aaron Alpeoria Bradley, Republican Senator from the First District, made the basis of his speech yesterday:

Resolved, That the future prosperity of the people of this Republic is under the control of the laboring classes North, South, East and West, regardless of race, color or sex.

Therefore, we believe Congress should aid labor to develop the resources of the public domain, and relieve the producers from taxation to pay gold interest on untaxed bonds; that Government bonds should be redeemed in greenbacks, except such as are otherwise distinctly provided for by specific laws.

Resolved, That the people will never consent to the repeal of the eight hour law, but would rather have it made a legal day's work in each State and territory of the United States; that men and women might have more time to read and reflect.

Resolved, That the State employ all convicts, and all they make above that which contractors now pay the State for their labor be put in bank or paid to their wives and children; and not continue in market the work of judicial slaves against the poor workingmen, women and children.

Resolved, That if the present Legislature refuse and neglect to repeal bad laws and enact good ones for the whole people of Georgia, they should be removed from power and a provisional government put in its place by Congress.

Resolved, That labor should not be degraded by judicial slaves in chain gangs working for private individuals or corporations.

⁸⁰³ *Atlanta Constitution*, May 4, 1870.

Resolved, That the Constitution of Georgia has never been amended as required by Congress and Article 12, in these words, to-wit: "A two-third vote of two successive Legislatures, and by a submission of the amendment to the qualified voters for final ratification."

Resolved, That the manner of conducting the Western and Atlantic Railroad, is a great outrage on the colored citizens of Georgia, and also gives common dissatisfaction to all the white people of the State, without regard to party or sex.

Resolved, By the expressed will of the people of the free States, and the Congress of the United States, an election for all the members of the General Assembly and the odd numbers of the Senate and Congressmen take place in November next, 1870.

Resolved, That these resolutions are our prayers to the people of Georgia and the Congress of the United States."

Appendix D: The Laborer's Song—By A. A. Bradley⁸⁰⁴

Come, united, let us be,
 In setting all the Laborers free.
 Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah, hurrah,
 Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah.
 Up with rights and down with wrongs;
 Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah.
 We'll work eight hours for a day;
 And have for that our daily pay.
 Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah, hurrah,
 Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah.
 Like beasts of burden we will not work;
 Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah.
 In our ranks we have the mind,
 To make machinery what we find.
 Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah, hurrah,
 Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah.
 Shall we fight, for this right?
 Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah.

⁸⁰⁴ “The Laborer’s Song” was included in an article titled “Bradley’s Brigade — The Pow-Wow in Whitfield Square” in the *Savannah Morning News* on December 13, 1870. The *SMN* reporter prefaced the song with the following comment: “The exercises were then continued by a specimen of the vocal abilities of the great Wahoo, who favored the audience with the following poetic gem, which he assures us is wholly his own composition.”

Its made our wealth at least ten fold,
And shall the capital have the whole?
Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no;
Oh no, oh no, oh no.
Shall banks and railroads enslave us all?
Oh no, oh no, oh no;
With our country we'll rise or fall,
Defending labor, one and all;
Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah, hurrah,
Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah

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Charleston Daily News

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