“The Worst Behaved City in the Union”

This Honors paper by Joseph Doyle has been read and approved for Honors in History.

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Abstract

In the first three days of May, 1866, an impassioned white mob besieged the African-American community of Memphis, leaving nothing but death and destruction in its path. Existing scholarship on the topic either fails to place the Massacre in the context of national politics or contends the event lacked importance in comparison to the New Orleans Riots, which occurred on July 30, 1866. This thesis expands the prevailing understanding of the Memphis Massacre from two distinct perspectives. First, it places the tragedy within the context of Congressional Reconstruction. Politicians, both Democrats and Republicans, developed a wide variety

~Introduction~
The Memphis Massacre: Violence in the Months after the Civil War

In the first three days of May, 1866, an impassioned white mob besieged the African-American community of Memphis, Tennessee leaving nothing but death and destruction in its path. In less than seventy-two hours, the mob murdered, raped, pillaged, razed and terrorized. When the violence stopped, 46 blacks lay dead, 5 women raped, and dozens of schools and churches left in ruins. The Memphis Massacre was the result of built up tensions after the Civil War.

The Civil War forever changed the racial makeup of Memphis. The Mississippi Delta was known for the fertile land producing an immense amount of cotton crops; as much as 400,000 bales a year passed through the Memphis in the years before the Civil War. Despite the fertile land, cotton required a critical amount of labor to produce, thus plantation owners maintained large numbers of slaves. In 1860 the five counties surrounding Memphis, including Shelby County, had a slave population of nearly 45,000 people.[1] After the city fell to Union forces on June 6, 1862, three regiments of the United States Colored Troops remained posted at Fort Pickering. The large number of blacks enslaved at nearby plantations coupled with the garrison of black troops at the fort caused Memphis to become an asylum for fugitive slaves. While some freed blacks lived in the city and the Union military post just outsid

between 15,000 and 20,000 black men, women, and children lived in these camps, quadrupling the African-American population from five years earlier.[2]

Out of the camps of South Memphis, black Memphians constructed a community. By 1865, with the help of the Freedmen's Bureau, a federal agency designed to assist African Americans, the Mississippi Delta refugees built twenty-two schools and sent over 1,100 children to school. Although only one-third of the black population found employment in Memphis, in December 1865 the Freedmen's Bureau launched the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company Bank. By earl

After the withdrawal, the soldiers returned to Fort Pickering for the night, while the police organized a mob. Witness Ellen Dilts recalled, "The policemen went up and down and gave the alarm . . . and it was not long . . . before hundreds of people came together."[9] The mob descended upon South Memphis, to the shanty town erected by the Memphis' African-Americans, and wreaked havoc on defenseless black citizens.

Existing historical scholarship on the Memphis Massacre (or the Memphis Riot, as it is best known) focuses solely on the city and local matters. One could divide these current studies into three distinct categories. Originating in the early twentieth century the first group of scholars studied under or adhered to the interpretation put forth by Columbia University historian William Archibald Dunning. His students propounded their mentor's theory of Reconstruction. They claimed African-Americans lacked the ability to self-govern, making segregation and second-class citizenship necessary. These historians studied Reconstruction in each former-Confederate state. Dunning and his students' racist narrative dominated textbooks on the Reconstruction era until the 1960s.

Followers of the Dunning School who studied the massacre described the event as a violation of racial norms by African-Americans and placed blame on the black soldiers and former slaves rather than on the other major players in the tragedy, Irish immigrants and disenfranchised former-Confederates. Historian Gerald M. Capers, writing in 1939, for example, described the city's post-Civil War social revolution. "Socially the war was catastrophic," Capers wrote, "for it accentuated all of the vicious characteristics of Memphis. By converting the Negro into a free man it brought him into the city in vast numbers, to be a perennial burden as well as a disrupting force in the community."[11] Capers thus explained the origins of the Massacre: "Racial relations reached a boiling point in 1866. . . . Encouraged by Radical agitators, upon occasion the Negroes attempted to attain social equality. . . . The spark which started the actual conflagration was the discharge in the spring of four thousand black troops."[12] Similarly, another Dunning-era writer, Claude Bowers characterized the cause of Memphis riot: "In Memphis a group of

[11] Gerald M. Capers Jr., *The Biography of a River Town; Memphis: Its Heroic Age* (New Orleans: Tulane University Press, 1939), 163.
[12] Capers, *The Biography of a River Town*, 177.

arrest several of the more boisterous, intoxicated Negroes at [a local saloon]."[17] Ryan characterized the black soldiers as foolish and impulsive, but hardly violent. Conversely, he described the white mob as ruthless and antagonistic, for it attacked soldiers and civilians indiscriminately. Ryan, moreover, harshly criticized the city government as racist, inept, and lazy.

While the shift from Capers to Holmes and Ryan was significant, the subsequent shift was more nuanced. In the 1990s and 2000s, historians focused on specific social groups within the conflict. Marius Carriere investigated the actions of the Memphis press before, during, and after the massacre. He concluded, "The articles in the Conservative press before and during the May riots of 1866 were clearly biased at best, and inflammatory at worse."[18] Brian Page researched Irish-Americans in Memphis during Reconstruction and saw the Massacre as an "affirmation of whiteness," but it was not the only event that shaped their daily struggle in the construction of whiteness.[19] Kevin Hardwick examined the behavior of black troops and

behavior."[20] Altina Waller reinvestigated the significance of race in the matter, arguing that it was a form of "collective protest" and not a racial massacre.[21]

All of these articles all focus exclusively on Memphis local politics and social structures. None explain the impact of the event on national politics. Some scholars acknowledge the connection between the local and the national, but few develop this idea**.** Holmes comments, "Because [the massacre] occurred during the mid-term congressional election year, the Memphis riot played into the hands of Radical Republicans seeking to discredit the president's reconstruction policy toward the South," and in another article he explains, "of greater [impact] than [the loss of life or destruction of property] were the riot's effects on political, social, and economic developments in Memphis, in Tennessee, and throughout the nation."[22]

In addition to scholarship centered solely on the Memphis Massacre, a number of Reconstruction studies mention the event, typically as a precursor to the New Orleans Riots, which occurred on July 30, 1866. The latter event transpired during the Louisiana Republican Party convention when a group of twenty-six Republican leaders and between one-hundred and two-hundred African-Americans marched through the city. New Orleans police and white onlookers lined the streets towards the convention building and watched the spectacle. Shots were fired and in the ensuing chaos thirty-four African Americans lost their lives. Many historians view the Memphis Massacre as a secondary event compared to the New Orleans Riots. Eric Foner comments, "Even more than the

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[20] Kevin Hardwick, "'Your Old Father Abe Lincoln is Dead and Damned': Black Soldiers and the Memphis Race Riot of 1866," *Journal of Social History* 27, no. 1 (Fall 1993): 122.

[21] Altina L. Waller, "Community, Class and Race in the Memphis Riot of 1866," *Journal of Social History* 18, no. 2. (Winter, 1984): 242.

[22] Holmes, "The Underlying Causes of the Memphis Race Riot of 1866," 195; Holmes, "The Effects of the Memphis Race Riot of 1866," 58.

Memphis riot, the events in New Orleans discredited Presidential Reconstruction."[23]

Likewise, Andrew Johnson biographer Albert Castel remarks, "The Tennessee affair was

critical issues prevalent during and after the First American Revolution: the relationship between the states and the federal government. In choosing a Reconstruction plan, politicians walked a fine line between properly reconstructing the American South using constitutional powers and overextending the size and scope of the sacrosanct Constitution.

Despite decisive election margins in the fall of 1866—just six months after the Memphis massacre—within two years the Radicals were already losing national power. Yet in such a short lifespan the Radicals pushed a flurry of legislation through Congress with the assistance of moderate and conservative Republicans. In the framework of Reconstruction, the study of the Memphis massacre c

~Chapter One~
Reconstruction, the "Grasp of War" Doctrine, and the Memphis Massacre

Plans for repairing, rebuilding and reconnecting the North and the South emerged before the conclusion of the Civil War. While sold

provided unstable grounding for reconstructing the South, until Richard Henry Dana Jr.

presented his “Grasp of rr6051.96388(s)-”.99843(g)6.7156886--9.83821(r)p.28275(H)2.96262(o)6.5629

example, Representative John Broomall proposed a bill based on the Guarantee Clause that enfranchised African-Americans in every state; it died on the floor of the House. This policy seemingly authorized federal regulation over the political institutions of the

amnesty in the first proclamation, pre-war voting qualifications returned in-full, effectively denying suffrage to emancipated African-Americans, many of whom fought with the United States Colored Troops or supported Union soldiers in domestic duties in military camps. The second proclamation appointed William W. Holden provisional governor of North Carolina and charged him with creating a new state constitution. Soon after, Johnson appointed more provisional governors to lead former-Confederate states. Put succinctly, Johnson believed the southern States never seceded from the Union and should retain all pre-war rights. Since no state governments existed in the South, the obligation to restore government fell to the President, acting as commander-in-chief of the United States Armed Forces.[12]

Initially, Johnson's plan appealed to Republicans, many of whom publicly allied with the President, including Senator William Pitt Fessenden, Representative Elihu Washburne, and *Harper's Weekly* editor George William Curtis. The more radical Republicans wanted black suffrage included in the President's plan, yet still considered the President a collaborator. Northern Democrats also recognized Johnson as an ally who embraced party ideals: limited federal involvement, local government empowerment, dedication to white supremacy, and a short reconstruction timeline. Johnson clearly favored immediate, rather than complete and just, readmission of the former rebel states with an emphasis on dissolving the southern slave aristocracy.[13]

By the later half of 1865, however, the honeymoon between Johnson and his Republican supporters waned. On March 27, 1866, when Johnson vetoed the Freedman's Bureau and Civil Rights bills, most Republicans lost all hope in the President. Johnson

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[12] Benedict, *Preserving the Constitution,* 8; Foner, *Reconstruction,* 183, 216.
[13]McKitrick,

believed the bills to be unconstitutional because Congress denied seats to representatives from insurrectionary states. Most Congressmen believed the legislative branch, not the President, determined statehood and congressional representation. For many Republicans, presidential Reconstruction became less about unifying the country and more about completely controlling the process, preventing Congress from exercising its constitutionally-preserved rights.[14] Historian Eric L. McKitrick explains Johnson's deficiencies quite precisely:

> The President's narrow insistence, balanced only on the pardoning power, that he be conceded full-authority over a matter of the most vital interest to Congress and people, and against the deepest convictions of a majority of both, did not augur well for the success of his administration. Indeed, to give notice as a matter of principle—when the peacetime precedents for it existed nowhere—that Congress and the nation be excluded from participating in such vital decisions, could not have failed to strike thousands of the President's well-wishers as the gravest folly.[15]

Republicans, particularly the more liberal or "radical" element, questioned Johnson's complete rejection of guaranteed rights for African-Americans. Moreover, with only a limited number of southerners disenfranchised, racist southern elites implemented black codes in communities across the South, targeting freedmen. These local laws limited civil liberties and ostensibly reinstituted the harsh social hierarchies of slavery.[16]

When the President implemented a limited version of Reconstruction and acted as an enemy, rather than an ally, towards African-Americans, Radical Republicans quickly gathered support for a congressional Reconstruction. Johnson's refusal to include Congress in the Reconstruction discussion equally irked moderate and conservative

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[14] McKitrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction*, 108.
[15] McKitrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction*, 109.
[16] Theodore Brantner Wilson, *The Black Codes of the South* (City: University of Alabama Press, 1965); Donald G Nieman, *To Set the Law in Motion: The Freedmen's Bureau and the Legal Rights of Blacks, 1865-1868* (Millwood, NY: KTO, 1979); McKitrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction*, 76.

Republicans previously unwilling to fully unite with Radicals. They found themselves united with Radicals against Johnson.

Johnsonian Reconstruction and the congressional Reconstruction plans proposed by Sumner, Stevens, and Wade failed to strike a balance between the conservative and the liberal. The moderate middle ground lay unrepresented until Richard Henry Dana Jr. popularized the "Grasp of War" doctrine, which he claimed was "satisfactory enough to the radicals, since it would insure their continued control of Congress and the Presidency, yet it might also appeal to [conservative men]."[17] He developed his policy from the Prize Cases he argued before the Supreme Court two years prior.

Dana proposed his theory for Reconstruction in a speech delivered to a group of Republicans at a town hall meeting at Faneuil Hall in Boston, a city at the center of the black suffrage movement. On June 21, 1865, Dana presented his message, now commonly referred to as "The Grasp of War Speech," using language that paralleled the

this war is over, because the fighting has ceased."[19] The southern states persisted in the "grasp of war," and Dana maintained that the Union should ensure that the enemy is vanquished and not simply wounded:

> When he says he has done fighting, are you obliged to release him? Can you not hold him until you have got some security against his weapons? . . . Are you obliged to let him up to begin a new fight for your life? The same principle governs war between nations. When one nation has conquered another . . . the victorious nation does not retreat from the country . . . No; it holds the conquered enemy in the grasp of war until it has secured whatever it has a right to require. . . The conquering party may hold the other in the grasp of war until it has secured whatever it has a right to require.[20]

Dana argued that the weakened, but not enhol54.04195(t)-13.5551(y)16d275(t)0.4417717(w)2.f3821( )3.
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secession. We think the mere abolition of slavery is not enough, considering that it leaves the colored race disenfranchised, not recognized as citizens, with absolutely no rights of any kind secured to them, or the means of securing any completely in the hands of the white race."[22] Dana clearly feared re-enfranchisement of southern oligarchs without any degree of security for the North and freedmen, ominously predicting that Johnsonian Unionism would lead to a "collision of races."[23]

Dana disagreed with those who championed the Guarantee Clause as the basis for Reconstruction. "You look in vain in the municipal rules of a constitution to find authority for what we are doing now. You might as

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and Address together are regarded as the leading off in this movement."[26] Similarly, in private letter to written Bigelow, Dana boasted, "In Maine, they followed our lead boldly, and had a larger majority than ever. Pennsylvania, always a critical border state, adopted our doctrine boldly, and greatly increased its majority. So was it in Iowa."[27] The speech also appeared in the *Boston Post*, the *New York Times*, and the London (U.K.) *Times*.[28]

Other Republicans adopted the Grasp of War doctrine into their political ideologies and public speeches. Carl Schurz aligned politically with Dana. Born in Germany in 1829, Schurz emigrated from Europe in 1852. Like many German immigrants, Schurz believed in a more egalitarian America. As friend and campaigner for Abraham Lincoln, Schurz joined the Republican Party and ardently argued against the Fugitive Slave Law. He served as the American ambassador to Spain during the early years of Civil War. After successfully dissuading the Spanish from allying with the Confederacy, he returned to America and was commissioned as a brigadier general of Union volunteers in April, 1862. At the war's end, he served in the Johnson administration, surveying the war-torn South. After returning from his travels, he personally reported his findings to the President, who evidently realized the political damage it might cause for his administration and Party. Schurz feared Johnson might try to suppress his report; luckily, Radicals ordered Johnson to submit it to Congress. Congress received Schurz's work on December 19 and published a hundred thousand copies.[29] The report, certainly damaging to the President's program, concluded thusly:

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[26] Adams, *Richard Henry Dana*, 333-4.
[27] Bigelow, *Retrospections of an Active Life*, 206.
[28] Bigelow, *Retrospections of an Active Life*, 206; "Reconstruction; Speech of Hon. Richard H. Dana at

> I may sum up all I have said in a few words. If nothing were necessary but to restore the machinery of government in the States lately in rebellion in point of form, the movements made to that end by the people of the south might be considered satisfactory. But if it is required that the southern people should also accommodate themselves to the results of the war in point of spirit, those movements fall far short of what must be insisted upon. The loyalty of the masses and most of the leaders of the southern people, consists in submission to necessity. There is, except in individual instances, an entire absence of that national spirit which forms the basis of true loyalty and patriotism.[30]

Schurz observed a lack of sincerity in southerners, which left him greatly concerned. The mentality of these citizens resisted any attempt at Reconstruction. Like Dana, Schurz considered the South still within the grasp of war and a potential enemy of the Union. As

what ought to be accomplished."[32] For Fessenden, the ability to ensure the safety of African-Americans rested upon a continued military presence in the South. He expounded upon this commitment during a briefing made by his committee:

> The Freedman's Bureau, instituted for the relief and protection of freedmen and refugees, is almost universally opposed by the mass of the population, and exists in an efficient condition only under military protection, while the Union men of the South are earnest in its defense, declaring with one voice that without its protection the colored people . . . could not live in safety. . . .Union men, whether of Northern or Southern origin, would be obliged to abandon their homes.[33]

In addition to Colfax and Fessenden, Senator George S. Boutwell and Representative

proved!”[35]

some of his fellow Republicans. He served in the Congress from March 4, 1853 until March 6, 1869. Benedict described Washburne's voting pattern as Conservative.[37]

John Broomall, the other Republican, was a native of Upper Chinchester Township, Pennsylvania, near the Delaware border. He studied law and opened a practice in nearby Chester, Pennsylvania. Before the Civil War, Broomall twice unsuccessfully competed for a Congressional seat. In 1856, he campaigned heavily in his state of Pennsylvania for John Frémont and the new-created Republican Party; Pennsylvania went on to elect the Democratic Party candidate, James Buchanan. On October 11, 1858 Broomall delivered a speech in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania titled "Last Gun: John M. Broomall and the People's Ticket!: the Friends of the People's Party and All Who Advocate Free Speech, Free Soil and Protection of American Industry." During the war, he fought for the Union. Following the Confederate Army's push into Pennsylvania, Broomall served as a Captain for six weeks in the 29th Regiment of the Pennsylvania Emergency Men. In the fall of the 1863, Broomall tried a third time for election into Congress; he won. He spoke at-length about the necessity and legality of confiscating rebel property during the war.[38] On April 20, 1864, Broomall elucidated his feelings about the Confederacy and Congress's relationship to the rebel states: "there are no limits to the power of the conqueror, no restraints upon his will but those arising from his own nature and the mollifying influence of Christian civilization. This is not only true during war but it remains so at and after its termination until civil wars or treaties are

made for regulating the future conduct of the parties."[39] He served in the Thirty-eighth, Thirty-ninth, and Fortieth Congresses. After leaving Congress he returned to his law practice, eventually receiving an appointment to a

from this investigation, and shall be much disappointed if the character of the people of Memphis for the observance of law and order shall not be entirely maintained."[46]

The Congressional committee proceeded to interview 170 witnesses. At the conclusion of the hearings, Washburne composed the Majority Report, while Shanklin penned the Minority Report. The majority summed up the incident thusly: "The outbreak of the disturbance resulting from collision between some policemen and discharged colored soldiers was seized upon as a pretext for an organized and bloody massacre of the colored people of Memphis, regardless of age, sex or condition . . . and led on by sworn officers of the law composing the city government, and others."[47] Washburne emphasized the importance of city officials in the violence: "The mob, finding itself under the protection and guidance of official authority . . . proceeded with the deliberation to commission of crimes and perpetration of horrors which can scarcely find a parallel in the history of civilized or barbarous people, and must inspire the most profound emotions of horror among all civilized people."[48] Shanklin's Minority Report accepted most of the facts presented by his Republi

were 'ragamuffins' and boys, armed with shotguns and the like, and all appeared drunk, with the exception of Winters himself, who . . . was the only sober man in the crowd. There is no doubt their sympathies were with the mob."[56] Police Chief Garret, like Sheriff Winters, proved likewise useless. After his officers crossed the boundary into lawlessness, Garret half-heartedly attempted to reclaim control of the situation.

Lastly, the testimonies of many Memphians—some northerners and some military personnel—implored the committee to keep troops at Fort Pickering. General Stoneman claimed: "to execute orders which I receive from my superiors, I should deem it absolutely necessary to have a force, under my special control, of United States troops. . . . I am called upon everyday to use the federal troops for the execution of laws of the State of Tennessee."[57] Stoneman, during the riot, however, refused to send troops into the fray to disband the mob. During the questioning, he claimed he wanted to give Memphians a chance to regulate and govern themselves. Yet, he testified his ability to fulfill orders and maintain peace emanated from the troops stationed in the area. When asked by Washburne about the condition of the state of affairs if the army mustered out all remaining troops, Stoneman responded, "I should consider the state of affairs would not be a good one by any means."[58] United States Marshall Martin T. Ryder completely corroborated Stoneman's statements. When asked a similar question by the committee about the possible result of troop removal, Ryder succinctly replied, "I do not think it would be safe."[59] Brigadier General Benjamin P. Runkle of the Freedman's Bureau elaborated on Ryder's response when asked the same question: "They would make such

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[56] Majority Report in *Memphis Riots and Massacrk96ne3Ssa cs*

men as myself, such people as teachers of colored schools, and such business men as have been talked of in the papers, leave the city. They could not live here. I could not live in this town now without troops here. After the troops were mustered out they could

we'll show you, when we get things into our own hands. . . . True, we cannot vote now, but we have friends who can.'"[62] When Washburne followed up the question by asking about troop removal, Brooks explained, "As soon as I can I will sell my property; I am going to leave. I believe that [President] Johnson is going to manage so that we will not have any troops here. . . . I have lived here most of my life, I find it would not be safe for me to be here if the troops were withdrawn. And such are the expressions . . . of nineteen out of twenty Union men here."[63]

two decades before the latter ascended to the presidency. Brownlow believed Johnson to be an atheist and knew him to be a Democrat; these characteristics alone vilified Johnson in Brownlow's eyes. In 1845, Brownlow challenged the incumbent Johnson for his seat in the Twenty-ninth Congress and used the opportunity to criticize him throughout East Tennessee. Johnson achieved the governorship of Tennessee in 1853 and 1855, infuriating Brownlow.[6] On October 9, 1856, Brown berated Johnson publicly in Nashville near the Governor's home, saying: "I therefore pronounce your Governor, here upon his own dunghill, an unmitigated liar and calumniator, and a villainous coward. . . . He is a member of a numerous family of Johnsons, in North Carolina, who are generally thieves and liars; and though he is the best one of the family I have ever met, I unhesitatingly affirm, tonight, that there are better men than Andrew Johnson in our Penitentiary."[7] When Johnson endorsed the Breckenridge and Lane presidential ticket in 1860 from the *ad hoc* Southern Democrat Party, Brownlow had lambasted the Senator. Brownlow's personal and public detestation of Johnson immediately ingratiated him to many Republicans in Congress.

Second, Brownlow's unconditional Unionist position fit with the Radical concept of Reconstruction. The Radicals wanted to exact the spoils of war from the Confederate states and Brownlow, desperate for reunification, complied. His positions on the most pressing issues of the day evolved during his career. Tennessee historian James Patton writes of Brownlow's policies: "[He] was guided throughout his gubernatorial career by a determined and unremitting desire to restore the state as speedily as possible to its former

position in the Union. In his estimation the most reasonable and plausible method of achieving this end was by identifying his policy with that of congressional Radicals. . . In his gubernatorial policy there is clearly seen the reflection of events that were occurring in Washington."[8] His devotion to reunification coupled with this political enmity with

Unionist Democrats. Unlike Fowler, Patterson joined the Democrat caucus and voted along Unionist lines throughout his brief Congressional career.[10]

two franchised witnesses testifying allegiance, and

With the Congress largely under the control of moderates, the Tennessee Legislature and Governor Brownlow pushed for major civil rights legislation. Personally, the governor held racist attitudes towards African-Americans. Prior to the war, he famously discussed the future of American slavery with abolitionist Abram Pryne in a much-publicized and later published debate titled *Ought American Slavery Be Perpetuated?*. Brownlow favored the continuation of slavery. F

African-Americans including the right to testify in court and the abolishment of separate, harsher penalties and sentences compared to whites convicted of similar crimes.[17] Perhaps not all of the state legislators desired equality for political rather than ideological reasons, but Brownlow, the leader of the Tennessee Republican Party, clearly switched his opinions about African Americans. A year after his plans for recolonization appeared in the *Whig*, Brownlow found himself at the forefront black civil rights.

The Massacre in Memphis evinced the utter lack of civil liberties for blacks in the South, which immediately grabbed attention nationwi

After the initial exposé, the *Tribune* published articles with even more partisan

Coupled with these articles from the *Tribune* and *Agitator*, *Harper's Weekly* of New York City published the sketches of Alfred Waud that illustrated the massacre. After emigrating from London, England in 1850, Waud found work as a sketch artist for *Harper's Weekly*. After his artwork gained considerable fame, particularly his sketches of the Battle of Bull Run, the magazine hired him to travel throughout the South to document the hardships of Reconstruction.[33] He visited most of the major southern cities, including Memphis. Three weeks after the event, on May 26 the first set of Memphis-inspired sketches appeared on the front page with an accompanying article about the riots. The caption below the first visual (figure 1) read, "Scenes in Memphis, Tennessee, During the Riot—Burning a Freedmen's School-House." The drawing depicts the

burning of a Freedmen's Bureau school, while about forty white men cheer and discharge

[33] Frederic E. Ray, *Alfred R. Waud, Civil War Artist* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), 12-13.

their rifles. The Select Committee later reported twelve schools burned down during the massacre, thus proving the accuracy of this rendering. In the background, another house slowly burns; the sky above the scene blackened from all the smoke.[34]

The second sketch (figure 2) showed the sheer violence of the massacre. The caption read, "Scenes in Memphis, Tennessee, During the Riot—Shooting Down Negroes on the Morning of May 2, 1866." Throughout the scene, African-Americans—men, women, and children—flee for their lives while white men shoot at the defenseless targets. Most of the men carry rifles, although one of the men brandishes a large sword. In the background, one of the homes burns and, as the owners escape the building, whites slaughter them. Strewn about the landscape, blacks lay face down, shot dead.[35]

Both of these sketches—although both captioned as views of the "riots"—

the lopsidedness of these attacks. Alfred Waud wanted the viewers to understand the white aggressors experienced no retaliation.

laws passed before readmission disenfranchised rebels, secured some civil rights for African-Americans, and reasserted control over police and local officials. Thaddeus Stevens commemorated the state's readmission six days later with a speech in Congress: "I do not pretend that she [Tennessee] is loyal. I believe this day that two thirds of her people are rank and cure rebels. But her statesmen have been wise and vigilant enough to

"The gentlemen has had his [time], and I can yield to no one."[46] Following his description of the violence, the Pennsylvanian reconnected his speech to the current debate: "This subject does possess some political and public significance. The great question now before the country is whether the people of the eleven States lately in rebellion are yet in a fit condition to be intrusted [sic] with a share in the government of the country. The *animus* and the spirit of the people enter into the inquiry. The details of this report and testimony go to that very spirit and that very *animus* of the leading people of the city of Memphis."[47] Broomall then challenged the motivations of the Kentuckian: "I do not wonder that the gentleman from Kentucky [Mr. Shanklin] likes to shield his friends. I do not wonder that peculiar means have been used . . . to prevent this report from getting before the country at all."[48] Ultimately, the representatives reached a compromise which allowed for one-thousand extra cop

deserted us onnecessarily five years ago, another look, and my resentment softens into pity. Ef I doubt his Democrisy, I look at that blessed commission, and am reassured, for a President who cood turn out a wounded Federal soldier, and apoint sich a man ez me, must be above suspicion."[52]

liberty and mobbing the defenseless."[55] Burleigh continued on with his speech, insisting that a vote for the Democratic Party equalled a vote for chaos and rebellion in the American South. Likewise, on September 8 the Chicago *Tribune* printed a report written by Thaddeus Stevens detailing Iowa's congressional campaign and the reconstruction policy of Andrew Johnson. Stevens deftly tied the Memphis Massacre and the reconstruction policies of the president: "They (the voters in Iowa) have heard the Memphis riots. . . . . They have heard the wails which have come up from all the parts of the South from the victims of a relentless and treasonable policy."[56] The *Tribune* printed speeches from Republican leaders and candidates frequently but was not the only newspaper engaged in such a partisan activity.

Pictures of the Memphis massacre continued to grace the pages of *Harper's Weekly*. Famed cartoonist Thomas Nast depicted the Memphis and New Orleans massacres in his work. Like Alfred Waud, Nast was also an immigrant; his family left Germany when Nast was six years old. Similarly, he established himself as a talented cartoonist during the Civil War. But his Reconstruction and Gilded Age artwork cemented him as the most famous of his time. Perhaps in response to his German egalitarianism, Nast aligned himself politically with the Radical

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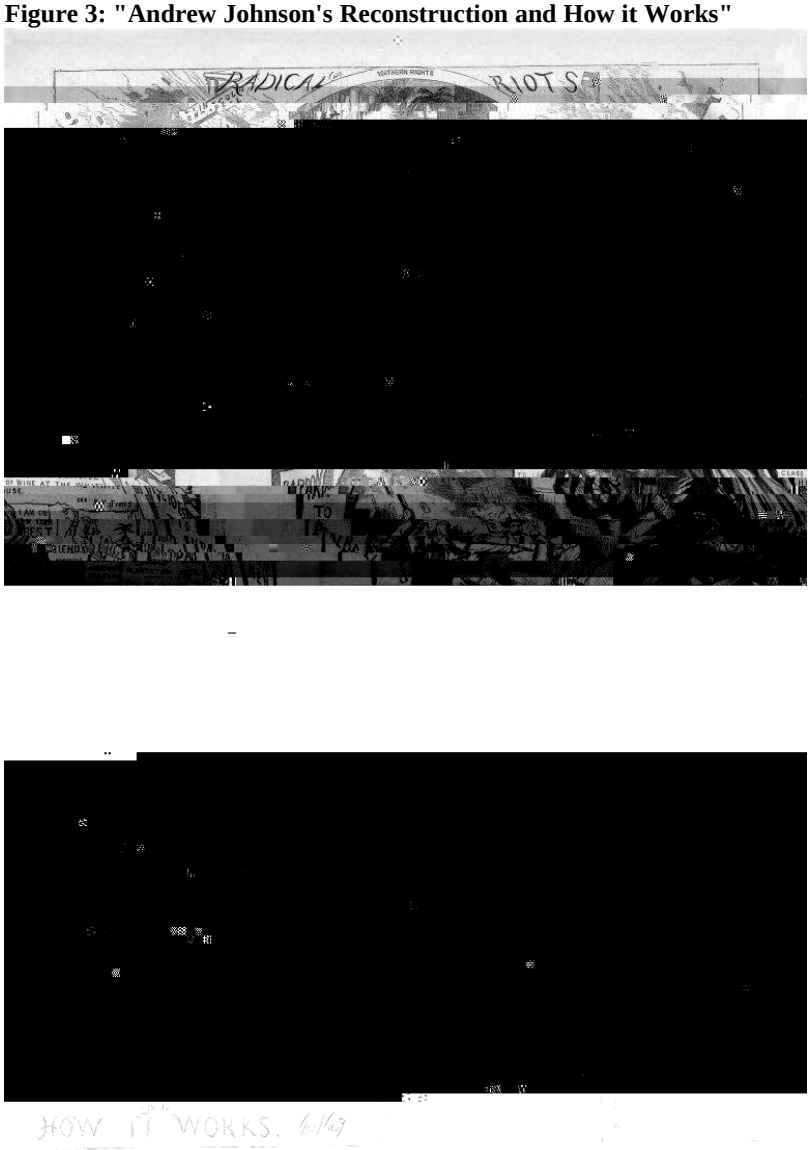
Thomas Nast's cartoon in the September 1 issue of *Harper's Weekly* (figure 3), which prominently featured the Memphis massacre and the deficiencies of presidential reconstruction, exemplified the characteristics of Nast satire. Nast titled the cartoon "Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction and How it Works" and loaded it with layers of commentary, sometimes explicit and sometimes subtle.

Figure 3: "Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction and How it Works"



marked Petroleum V. Nasby's last column before the forthcoming election. Like most of his previous editorials, Nasby pitched his party, h

moderates and conservatives. By comparison, the Democrats held just 25% of the seats in both chambers. With such a large faction, the radicals only needed swing votes from conservative and moderate Republicans to pass their legislation: sixteen in the House and six votes in the Senate.[72]

Table 1: Results of the 1866 Congressional Elections

House	Democrats	Conservative & Moderate Republicans	Radicals Republicans	Total
39, 1st Sess.	51	58	45	151
39, 2nd Sess.	50	51	86	187
Change	-1	-4	41	
Senate	**Democrats**	**Conservative & Moderate Republicans**	**Radicals Republicans**	**Total**
39, 1st. Sess.	14	16	17	47
Change	-1			

The mid-terms elections represented an important shift in the federal government. Americans resounding placed the authority to reconstruct the nation with Congress and the Republican Party, rather than with President Johnson and the Democratic Party. Without such a powerful swing in balance of power, Reconstruction would have looked quite different.

~Conclusion~
The Legacy of the Memphis Massacre

Historian George C. Rable explored the importance of the Memphis Massacre in his study *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction*. Rable noted the published report as evidence that the Republican Party wished to politicize the Memphis massacre. He also rightfully asserted "the outbreak provided the northern public with fresh evidence of southern treason and the need for federal protection of freedmen. Moderates and radicals alike agreed that the affair demonstrated the failure of President Johnson's lenient restoration policies and the necessity for black suffrage in the South."[1] He concluded his analysis by placing the Memphis Massacre in a national context:

> Nevertheless, the political impact of the riot was not nearly as significant as that of the later New Orleans riot. In part this was a matter of timing; the New Orleans conflagration took place in July, conveniently (for the Republicans) on the eve of a critical congressional election campaign. Also, the Memphis outbreak had little ostensible connection with politics. Memphis exploded because of demography, economics, and deep social conflict rather than for political reasons. The substantial black migration into south Memphis had strained the economic and social resources of the city beyond their limits.[2]

For Rable, the national importance of the Memphis Massacre was dwarfed by the violence in New Orleans.

Rable's analysis is flawed for two reasons. First, as this study has shown, the violence in Memphis was politically relevant nationally—despite the deserved attention paid to New Orleans riots— well into the fall of 1866. The congressional committee sent to investigate in Memphis, the publishing of the report generated by Republicans Elihu Washburne and John Broomall, and the constant evocation in speeches made by political

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[1] Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, 41.
[2] Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, 41-2.

leaders like Thaddeus Stevens months afterward show the importance of this event. Moreover, the media, months after the episode, continued to publish material corresponding to Memphis: newspaper editorials, cartoons drawn by Thomas Nast, and satire written by David Ross Locke. In an age when news traveled slowly, the May events in Memphis still mattered in November. Second, Rable suggests the massacre lacked a "connection with politics." In the aftermath of a war presumably fought over the subjugation of blacks by whites, race *was* politics. The murder of defenseless African-Americans at the hands of whites in a former-Confederate town run by ambivalent political leaders had serioued

peace and criminals."[3] The act ordered the constitutional reorganization of the Southern states based upon radical Republican ideology: a new constitution based on ratification by a majority of registered voters, universal manhood suffrage, and ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. Should Southerners break the laws expressly enforced by the

excluding race as a factor in the appointment of election officials and relying simply on the loyalty, determined by oath, of all office holders.[5]

In addition to justifying legislative acts, the Grasp of War doctrine influenced the amendments proposed to the Constitution. By mid-summer 1868, North Carolina, Louisiana, South Carolina, Alabama and Georgia passed the Fourteenth Amendment, after initially rejecting it. The Grasp of War doctrine forced former-Confederate states to reconstruct. On February 3, 1870, the states, including all the former Confederate states except Tennessee, ratified the Fifteenth Amendment, providing all male citizens of the United States with the right to vote, their regardless of skin color.[6]

Furthermore, the Grasp of War doctrine and the supporting legislative acts and constitutional amendments, the Memphis Massacre proved the radical Republicans claims that Presidential Reconstruction was a flawed policy. Through the publication of the investigatory report, exaggerated newspaper stories, cartoons, and satire, Republicans discredited President Andrew Johnson, his conservative plans for the South, and the Democratic Party, thus paving the way for a landslide victory for radical Republicans in the mid-term elections of 1866. Meanwhile, unconditional Unionists in Tennessee—some Republicans prior to the war and some not—reconstituted the state and preemptively aligned with the radicals in Washington, D.C. Led by Governor William Brownlow, a public enemy of Johnson's, the radical General Assembly quickly approved the Fourteenth Amendment and passed legislation in-keeping with national radical policy: disenfranchising any man associated with the rebellion, providing more rights to African-Americans, and abolishing the corrupt and racist Memphis police in favor of radical

[5] United States 40th Congress, *Statutes at Large*

Republican-appointed officers. This aggressive and progressive state government

Index of Important Persons

Allyn, Arthur– Captain of the 16TH U.S. Infantry stationed in Memphis

Battle-Axe – War correspondent for the Chicago *Tribune*

Broomall, John – Member of the Memphis Select Committee, representative from PA

Brownlow, William– Governor of Tennessee, 1865-69

Colfax, Schuyler – Speaker of the House, representative from IN, supporter of the Grasp of War

Creighton, John – Judge of the Recorder's Court, in

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