

Interpreting a Contested Election and an Armed Rebellion

Learning Objectives

- Learn how the causes and impacts of the Battle of Liberty Place were perceived by different groups.
- Gain awareness of the role of racism in Reconstruction era conflicts in Louisiana.
- Consider the factors that influence public acceptance of election results.
- Practice interpreting newspapers to identify biases and different points of view.

Introduction

Republican William Kellogg won the Louisiana governor's election in 1872. Many white Democrats refused to accept the result and insisted that Democrat John McEnery won the election. In 1874, a white supremacist group supporting McEnery called the Crescent City White League tried to take over the government by force and oust Governor Kellogg. The armed uprising involved 5,000 White League members fighting against 600 members of the racially integrated Metropolitan Police throughout downtown New Orleans. The White League took control of the Police Station in the Cabildo, the State Arsenal, and the State House. At least 35 people were killed and more than 65 were wounded. President Ulysses S. Grant sent federal troops to force the White League to surrender and return control to Governor Kellogg and the Metropolitan Police.

The violent uprising became known as the Battle of Liberty Place. Before and after the event, newspaper articles and other publications demonstrated how different groups viewed the political situation. By analyzing these primary source documents, you can learn how issues such as racism, arguments over federal and state control, and distrust in government influenced the political viewpoints of different groups during Reconstruction.

Instructions

1. Read the newspaper articles published before the Battle of Liberty Place. Compare attitudes toward the government and the group known as the White League from an article in a white-owned newspaper and a Black-owned newspaper.
2. Analyze the map, political cartoon, and article published after the Battle.
*Option: Split into groups, and have one group analyze the articles before the Battle, and another group analyze the materials after the Battle, and discuss.
3. Answer the questions and prompts to explore how different groups tell the story of the same event in different ways.
4. Refer to "Reconstruction – Additional Resources" for typed versions of the newspaper articles.

Newspaper Coverage of the White League Early 1874

Read this excerpt from an **article** titled "The White League—Its Significance. The Duty of the Colored Voter" published in a Black-owned newspaper, *Weekly Louisianian*, from July 4, 1874.

Questions:

- Underline the words and sentences that stick out to you.
- How does this article describe the White League?
- According to this author, what is the primary purpose of the White League?

Citation:

"The White League.--Its Significance. The Duty Of The Colored Voter." *Weekly Louisianian* (New Orleans, Louisiana), July 4, 1874: 2. *NewsBank: Black Life in America*.

"The White League" is the name selected by the Anti-Republican elements of Louisiana, to designate a political organization that rests on the distinction of race and color; ostensibly proposes to protect the rights of the white citizen, by organizing an exclusively white man's party, and, with such an organization, to conduct the approaching political campaign of the State. In order to understand the significance of the movement, we will admit the existence of certain evils growing out of the character of the laws and government of the State, since the era of reconstruction, and we concede that many members of this organization, believe not only that the distresses complained of, are referable to the dominancy of the Republican party in the State, but, inclusively and specially, to the dominance of the colored over the white vote. We further concede that the same parties, entertaining the above mentioned convictions, honestly but erroneously believe that the remedy and relief desired are to be found in the withdrawal from the colored voters of Louisiana, of the political control, heretofore supposed to be possessed by them over the State government. Another class of the adherants of the White League, while entertaining the purposes above expressed and adopting the indicated means for their accomplishment, are actuated, not by honest convictions, but by a bitter and unreasoning prejudice against the colored people, that will not permit them to see anything reasonable or creditable in the colored voter, or anything legitimate and equitable, in the exercise, by him, of either the political or civil rights, conferred and guaranteed by the Constitution and laws. These gentlemen may be sincere but they are neither just nor generous in their estimate and treatment of our race.

Read excerpts of this **article** from *The New Orleans Times*, a white-owned newspaper, published on September 2, 1874, which was 12 days before the Battle of Liberty Place.

RATIFICATION.

**An Immense Turn Out of the
Democracy, White Leagues
and other Organizations
Composing the Peo-
ple's Party.**

**Eloquent and Stirring Speeches
by Col. John McEnery, H. N.
Ogden, Esq., Judge Voor-
hies and others.**

Speech of Gov. McEnery.

The Governor said he was suffering from severe illness, and was an invalid; therefore, he said, his speech must necessarily be curtailed.

The Republican, he said, had called him an incendiary, and accused him of having stirred up the people of North Louisiana to agitation. Of this he was guilty; and the same advice he gave to the people of the Red River parishes he now gives to the people of Orleans. The white people owed it to their dignity to get rid of the existing government, and he counseled them to do so at the coming election, "peaceably if you can, forcibly if you must." If a government is corrupt and impotent, and does not afford the needful protection to the citizens, they must take the law into their own hands and exert the privilege of self-preservation. He justified his speeches to the people of North Louisiana during his late tour, and told the people of Lincoln parish particularly that if the officials of the parish were Democrats, and guilty of the acts of the existing officers, he would hang them as quickly as Republicans. The Governor's speech lasted about half an hour, and it was largely a repetition of his speeches on former occasions, particularly at Baton Rouge.

The Resolutions.

On conclusion Mr. Eustis introduced Mr. A. C. Lewis, chairman of the Committee on Resolutions, who read the following paper:

1. *Resolved*, That the Democratic and Conservative parties do emphatically ratify the resolutions adopted by the Baton Rouge State Convention, and heartily endorse the nominations.

2. *Resolved*, That the de facto State government is an odious usurpation, originated in fraud and tyranny, and maintaining itself merely through Federal support.

3. *Resolved*, That Federal interference in State matters, except in rigid compliance with the Constitution and laws of the United States, cannot but be deprecated as subversive of our republican institutions.

4. *Resolved*, That it is wise and prudent to vote against the constitutional amendments suggested and desired by the Kellogg usurpation; and moreover, that the so-called Legislature, being itself a part of the usurpation, has no right whatever to submit to the people any amendment to the organic law.

5. *Resolved*, That the white people of Louisiana do not contemplate depriving the colored people of their political rights; that it is the interest of the whole people that peace and harmony should prevail, but it is a matter of profound conviction that this consummation can be attained only by an intelligent, conservative and responsible government.

Questions:

- What does McEnery urge people to do in his speech?
- According to this article, why are the Democrats and the White League upset with the current government?
- What are two differences between this article and the one in the *Weekly Louisianian*?

Citation:

"Ratification. An Immense Turn out of the Democracy, White Leagues and other Organizations Composing the People's Party." *New Orleans Times* (New Orleans, Louisiana) XI, no. 6399, September 2, 1874: [1]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

This article excerpt is from the Black newspaper *Weekly Louisianian* published in New Orleans on October 24, 1874.

THE TRUTH.

One of the anomalies of the 14th of September revolution is the disposition of the White League or People's party organs to consider the colored citizen as in leading strings, to be cajoled or coerced into compliance with the wishes of opponents by mere words or more active threats.

With the accomplishment of the revolution the White League leaders carefully telegraphed over the country their intentions and conduct towards the colored people, at the same time expressing their had daily statements of the acquiescence and general thankfulness of the colored masses over a change in the government created by themselves—through their votes,—and which, whatever its shortcomings, accorded in the main manhood and equal rights to the colored citizen. Against this we were told the colored people rejoiced, being thankful in the revolutionary upbuilding of a government whose corner-stone was "no room for negroes," and "this is a white man's government," characterized by acts of daily oppression in the country parishes, having their parallel only in the

Kuklux outrages of previous years.

Of course, the country did not believe these White League misrepresentations. Apart from this the colored citizens themselves, desirous at all times for peace and concord with their fellows, have sought by all honorable means to overcome the ceaseless opposition of their opponents; but they have been and still are refused. Overtures of union based on republican ideas of justice and tolerance for all men, of equal rights to every citizen, are indignantly spurned; and instead our people are offered the *absolute denial*, not only of their rights as men and citizens, but even the bare protection to life and security for property afforded in the enforcement of law, in the propositions of the White League, and at the same time menacingly told that if they do not accept it will be worse for them.

Questions:

- What is the main point of the article?
- How does this article address the ways that different groups interpret events?
- Based on these different sources, what is your impression of the White League and the Battle of Liberty Place?

Citation:

"The Truth." *Weekly Louisianian* (New Orleans, Louisiana), October 24, 1874: 2. *NewsBank: Black Life in America*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/apps/news/document-view?p=AAHX&docref=image/v2%3A12B767D21CB17968%40AAHX-12BEC27E7144A3F0%402405821-12BC00278935F4B8%401-12D620644DA345A0%40The%2BTruth>.