

## SOUTH CAROLINA “RED SHIRTS” BATTLE PLAN (1876)

*Democratic Party paramilitary groups also emerged in South Carolina during the 1876 state and national campaigns. There, members of these groups called themselves the “Red Shirts.” Their official battle plan, which called for Democratic clubs armed with rifles and pistols, stated in part:*

Every Democrat must feel honor bound to control the vote of at least one Negro, by intimidation, purchase, keeping him away.

We must attend every Radical meeting. Democrats must go in as large numbers as they can, and well armed, behave at first with great courtesy and as soon as their speakers begin tell them that they are liars and are only trying to mislead the ignorant Negroes.

In speeches to Negroes you must remember that they can only be influenced by their fears, superstitions and cupidity. Treat them so as to show them you are the superior race and that their natural position is that of subordination to the white man.

Never threaten a man individually. If he deserves to be threatened, the necessities of the times require that he should die. A dead Radical is very harmless—a threatened Radical is often troublesome, sometimes dangerous, and always vindictive.

Every club must be uniformed in a red shirt and they must be sure and wear it upon all public meetings and particularly on the day of election.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In Dorothy Sterling, ed., *The Trouble They Seen: The Story of Reconstruction in the Words of African Americans* (Da Capo Press, 1994), 465.

## WHITE LEAGUE MASSACRE AT COUSHATTA (1874)

*In August 1874, the White League murdered six white Republicans and as many as 20 black witnesses in Coushatta, Louisiana. Following the massacre, Louisiana governor William Kellogg issued the following statement.*

Having felt it my duty to issue my proclamation offering a large reward for the apprehension and conviction of the murderers in the Coushatta outrage, and to the end that the law-abiding citizens of the State may fully comprehend the magnitude of the crime committed and be induced to render more active assistance to the officers of the law, I deem it proper to make the following statement :

These facts are gathered from reliable information received at the executive department :

On or about the 28th day of August, 1874, a body of persons, belonging to a semi-military organization known as the White League of Louisiana, assembled in the town of Coushatta, parish of Red River, in this State, *for the purpose of compelling by force of arms the State officers of that parish to resign their positions.*

These officers were men of good character, most of them largely interested in planting and mercantile pursuits. They held their positions with the full consent of *an admittedly large majority of the legal voters of the parish*, this being a largely republican parish, as admitted even by the fusion returning-boards.

The only known objection to them was *that they were of republican principles.* Frank S. Edgerton, the duly-qualified sheriff of the parish, in strict compliance with the laws of this State and of the United States, summoned a *posse comitatus* of citizens, white and colored, to assist him in protecting the parish officers in the exercise of their undoubted rights and duties from the threatened unlawful violence of the White Leagues. His posse, consisting of sixty-five men, *was overpowered by a superior force assembled from the adjacent parishes, and finally, after several colored and white men had been killed, surrendered themselves prisoners with the explicit guarantee that their lives would be spared* if the more prominent republicans would agree to *leave the parish* and those holding office would *resign their positions.*

These stipulations, though unlawfully exacted, *were complied with* on the part of the republican officials, who were then locked up in the jail for the night.

The following-named persons were among those so surrendering and resigning:

Homer J. Twitchell, planter and tax-collector of Red River, and deputy United States postmaster in charge of the post-office at Coushatta; Robert A. Dewees, supervisor of registration, De Soto Parish; Clark Holland, merchant and supervisor of registration, Red River Parish; W. J. Howell, parish attorney and United States commissioner; Frank S. Edgerton, sheriff of Red River Parish; M. C Willis, merchant and justice of the peace.

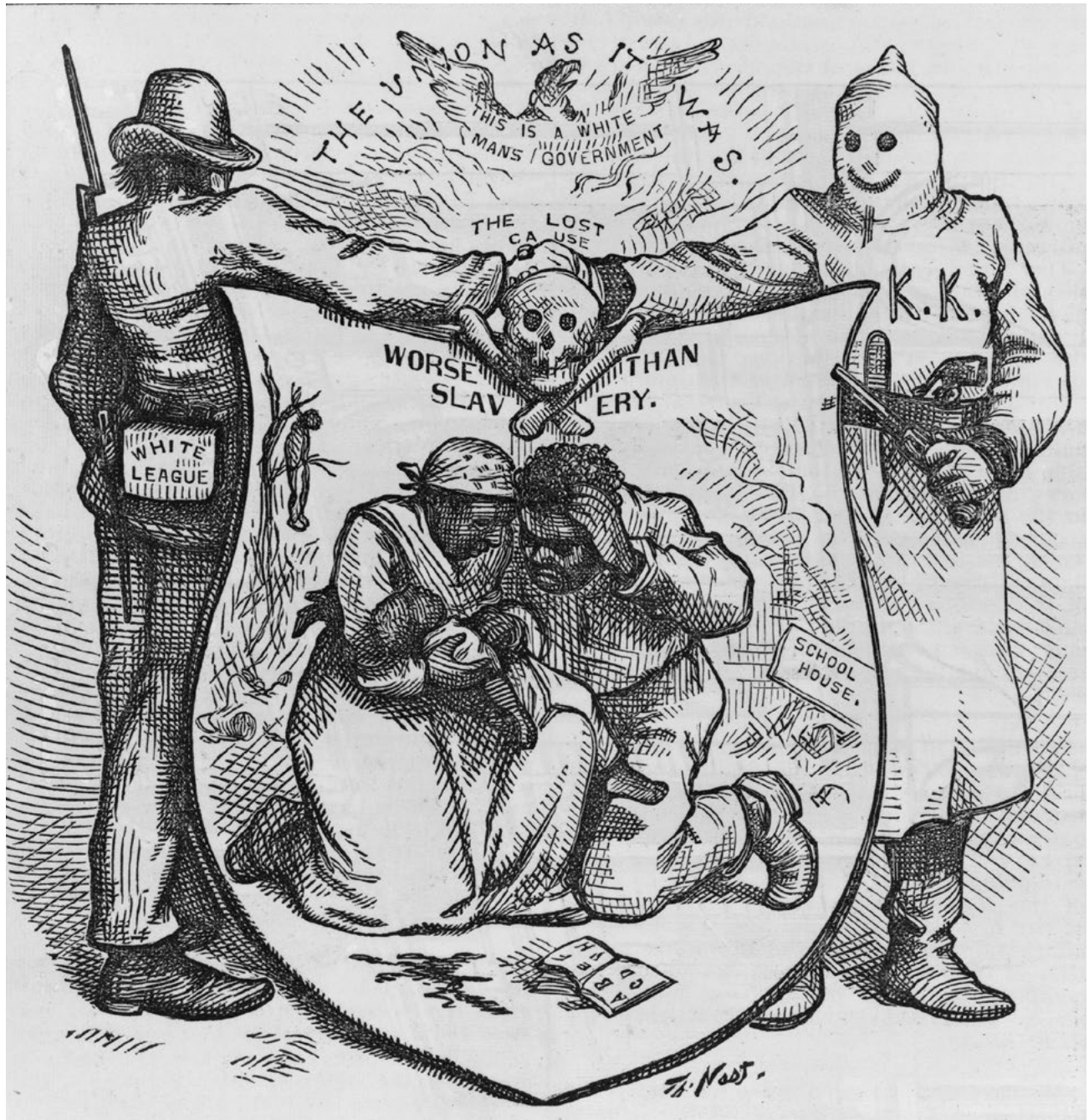
On the following morning, Sunday, the 30th day of August, these persons *were bound and conducted by an armed guard* to the McFarland plantation, just over the parish-line of Red River, within the boundaries of Bossier Parish, about forty miles east of the Texas line. *There they were set upon and deliberately murdered in cold blood.* Their bodies were buried near where they fell, without inquest or any formality whatever.

*On the night preceding the surrender a body of forty members of the White League of Caddo Parish, mounted and armed, left the city of Shreveport, and were seen riding in the direction of the place where the murder was subsequently committed.*

WILLIAM P. KELLOGG, Governor.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From Index to Reports of Committees of the House of Representatives for the Second Sessions of the Forty-Third Congress, 1874–1875, 1003, <http://books.google.com/books?id=pKUFAAAAQAAJ>.

“WORSE THAN SLAVERY” (1874)



Wood engraving by Thomas Nast from Harper's Weekly (1864), Library of Congress

## ELECTION VIOLENCE IN MISSISSIPPI (1875)

*Robert Gleeds, an African American candidate for sheriff in Lowndes County, Mississippi, described the violence in his county that occurred on the eve of the 1875 election this way:*

In the latter part of the canvas the young men had a cannon and pistols, very much like an army. The election was wound up on the 2nd of November and on the night before in our city three buildings were set on fire and four men killed. Most of the colored people were run out of their houses during the night. It was the worst time we have ever had as far as an election was concerned.

The first fire broke out near my house. I went to work to get my family and as many of my things out as I could. Then a young man came to me and said, "They will kill you when this fire burns low." The next morning a man told me that he did not think it would be safe to go back and I went out in the country and stayed until Saturday after the election. Prior to the election we had a meeting at the courthouse. Dr. Lipscomb and Judge Simms, the candidate on the Democratic side were invited to speak and I had a few words to say myself. I asked, "What could we do? Was there any concession we could make that would secure peace and a quiet election?" Dr. Lipscomb said the way we would have it was by abstaining from voting altogether. Of course I couldn't concede that for others but I was willing to forego any sacrifice as far as I was individually concerned. I told him we used to ask for life and liberty but now if we could just be spared our lives so we could go peacefully along as men and human beings we would be satisfied . . .

It was the most violent time that ever we have seen.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In Dorothy Sterling, ed., *The Trouble They Seen: The Story of Reconstruction in the Words of African Americans* (Da Capo Press, 1994), 447–448.

## A BLACK REPUBLICAN LEADER ASKS FOR PROTECTION (1875)

Bolton, [Mississippi,] October 13, 1875

Gov. Ames:

I am here in Jackson and cannot leave. The white peoples is looking for me on every train and have got men on every road watching for me. They have sworn to take my life because I am president of the club at Bolton. I wish you would, if please, protect me. I am in a bad fix, with about 6 bales of cotton in the field and 150 bushel of corn to gather; no one to tend to it when I am gone. Tell me what to do, if you please.

Lewis McGee

President of Bolton's Republican Club<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In Dorothy Sterling, ed., *The Trouble They Seen: The Story of Reconstruction in the Words of African Americans* (Da Capo Press, 1994), 444.

## A TEACHER DESCRIBES VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION (1875)

*We have chosen to include certain racial epithets in this handout in order to honestly communicate the bigoted language of the time. We recommend that teachers review the section “Addressing Dehumanizing Language from History” on page xiv before using this material.*

*J. L. Edmonds, an African American schoolteacher, gave this account of the murder and intimidation before the 1875 election in Clay County, Mississippi:*

Where we appointed a meeting [the Democrats] would go there and speak as they pleased. They would take a cannon and load it up with chains and leave it with the mouth pointing toward the crowd of colored people. When they fired they had nothing in it more than powder, but when they were going to speak they would have it turned around and chains hanging around it.

They had a parade at West Point. I was standing on the corner talking and some of the colored men came up, and a colored man says, “I do not care how many are riding around, I am a Republican and expect to vote the ticket.” Just then a man walked up with a pistol and shot him. Pretty soon another colored man made some expression and he was shot at.

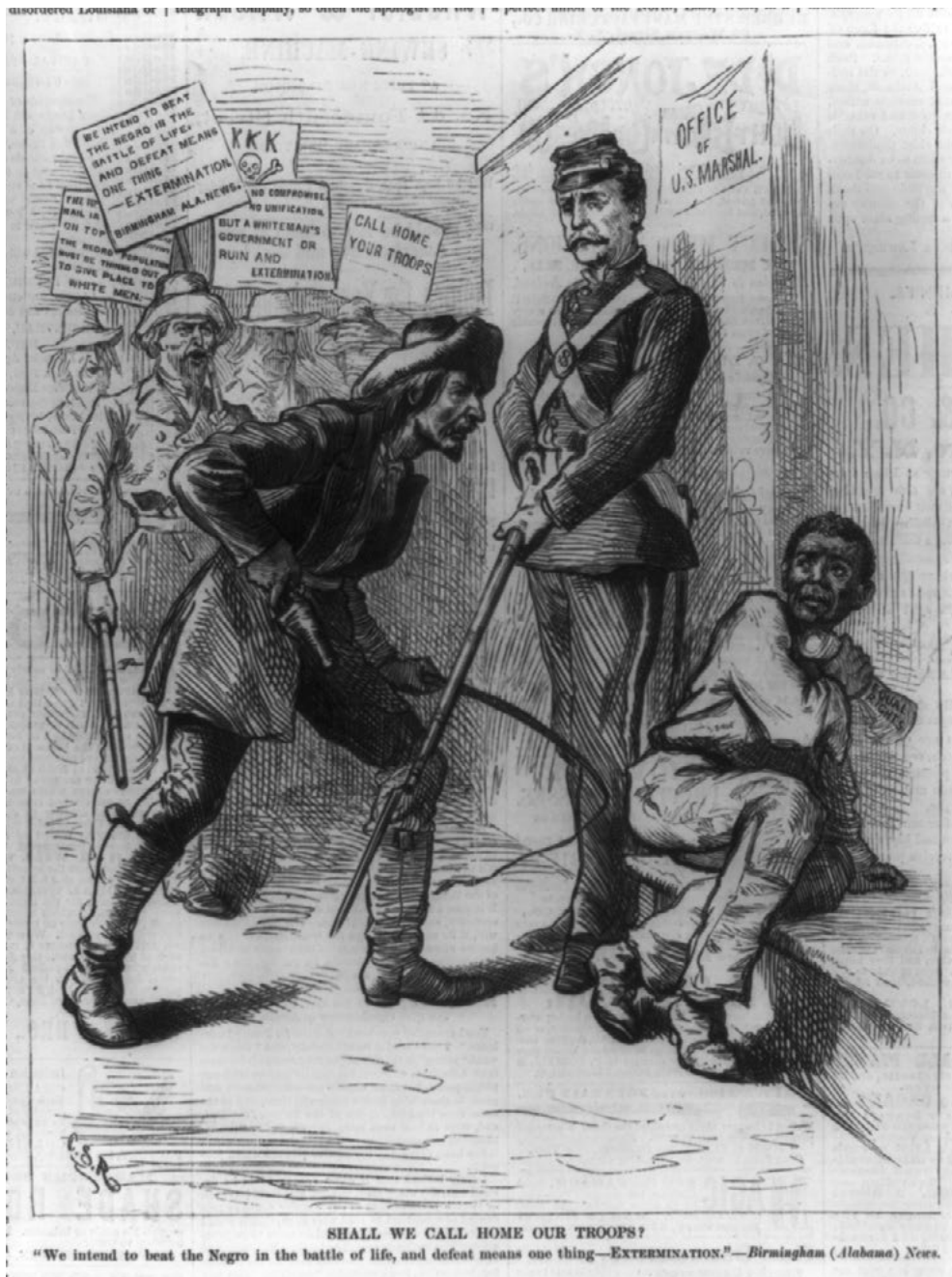
They had flags—red, white, and crimson flags. The whole street was covered. You could not hear your ears hardly for the flags waving and flapping over your head. They had one United States [flag] at the courthouse but most of the flags were just the old Confederate flags.

They said they were going to beat at this election. They said that at the meetings, on the stumps and at schoolhouses around the county. They said they would carry the county or kill every nigger. They would carry it if they had to wade in blood.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In Dorothy Sterling, ed., *The Trouble They Seen: The Story of Reconstruction in the Words of African Americans* (Da Capo Press, 1994), 450.

“SHALL WE CALL HOME OUR TROOPS?” (1875)

As Northerners debated how to respond to the growing violence in Mississippi, Harper’s Weekly printed this political cartoon. The caption reads: “Shall We Call Home Our Troops? ‘We intend to beat the Negro in the battle of life, and defeat means one thing—EXTERMINATION.’”



Wood engraving by C. S. R. from Harper’s Weekly (1875), Library of Congress