

The Civil War came quickly to Louisiana. In April 1862, federal gunboats commanded by David Farragut captured New Orleans for the North. The Stars and Stripes were raised over the federal mint, and the people awaited the arrival of General Benjamin Butler. He was to have command of the city.

Before Butler arrived, a Southerner named Mumford ripped the Union flag from its pole at the mint. When Butler arrived, he had Mumford publicly hanged in front of the mint. Butler was determined to keep order in the war-troubled city. When some of his soldiers stole goods from a private home, he had them hanged as well.

Butler said: "New Orleans is a conquered city . . . and by the law of nations lies subject to the will of the conqueror." To the people of New Orleans he became known as Beast Butler.

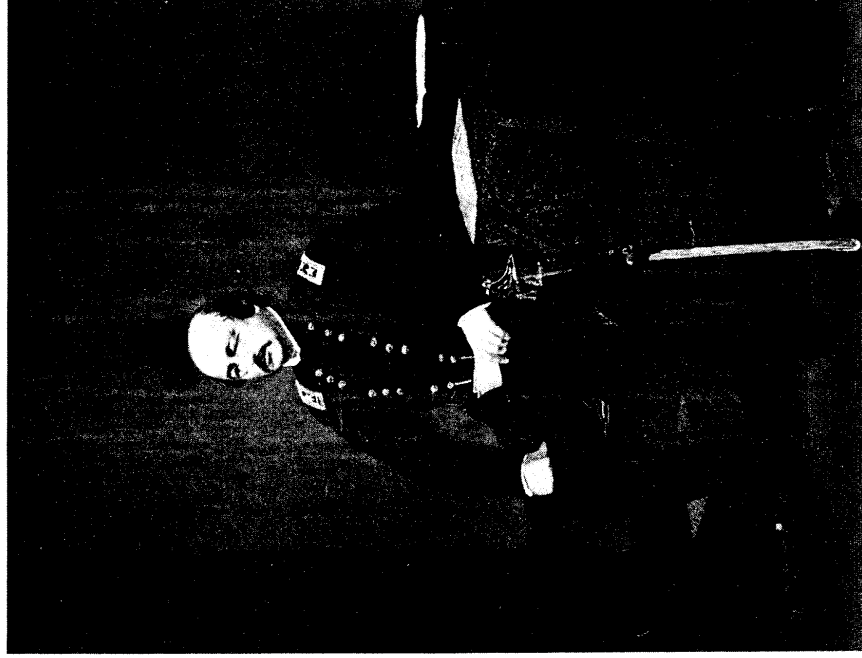
The firm hand of the Beast was felt throughout the city. Newspapers that printed articles critical of him were shut down. He insisted that ministers offer prayers for President Lincoln and not honor the Confederacy in their church services. Those who refused to obey had their churches closed. One of his most controversial actions was called the Woman's Order. Many of the women of New Orleans showed their disgust of federal troops by spitting at them and insulting them in other ways. Butler ordered that such women be treated as streetwalkers to be arrested or fined. People were outraged that women should be treated that way. Nonetheless, the order seemed to work, for Butler reported that the "she-rebels" had stopped their insults.

In July 1862, Congress passed a law saying that the property of rebels could be seized and used by the government. Butler ordered all citizens to register the property they owned and to declare whether they were loyal to the United States. Those who took the loyalty oath would not lose their property. A minister urged Butler not to enforce the taking of the oath because many people would be forced to lie to protect their property. Butler did not accept the advice. Eventually over 60,000 people took the oath, while about 4,000 registered as enemies of the United States. It was said that many who were still loyal to the Confederacy falsely proclaimed their loyalty to the Union.

While it was important to the North to win the war militarily, it was also important to bring conquered rebel states back into the Union. The political wounds of war had to be healed. Even as the war continued, politicians argued about how the South should be treated after the war.

The Beast and The "Bagger"

RECONSTRUCTION IN LOUISIANA



(State Historical Society of Wisconsin)

Benjamin F. Butler

A group of men in Congress known as the Radical Republicans wanted the defeated Southern states to be treated harshly for leaving the Union. President Lincoln preferred to be more lenient and forgiving. Plans for how the South should be treated were known as Reconstruction plans. Legally it was not clear whether the president or Congress should be in charge of Reconstruction. Lincoln tried to take charge.

Late in 1863, as the war continued, Lincoln said that all Southerners, except certain officers and officials of the Confederacy, would be pardoned for leaving the Union if they took a loyalty oath. Then, when the number of people having taken the oath equaled 10 percent of a state's voting population in the 1860 election, they could elect representatives to create a new state government. The new government would have to accept the permanent abolition of slavery. If these conditions were met, the president would recognize the government as legal. Congress, however, would have the authority to decide if representatives from the state should be allowed to take their seats in Washington.

Because New Orleans and about one-half of Louisiana were controlled by federal troops, the state was to be a testing ground for Lincoln's Reconstruction plan. General Nathaniel Banks had replaced Butler and, early in 1863, Lincoln urged him to help establish a new state government.

Banks pushed hard for voter registration. For many years before the war, there had been a large, nonslave black population in New Orleans. Among this group were well-educated property owners, but, because of their color, they had never been allowed to vote. A group of these people sent a petition to Banks. In it they said they had always been peaceful, taxpaying people and that they were loyal to the Union and believed they had the right to vote. Banks ignored their request and declared that only 21-year-old white males who took the loyalty oath could vote.

Banks insisted that all eligible voters should vote. People who wanted to be neutral were angered, but Banks said: "Indifference will be treated as a crime." A newspaper quoted his policy as: "Vote, fight, or leave!" In spite of his statements, Banks did not enforce his threats to punish nonvoters.

More than 10 percent of the eligible voters signed the loyalty oath, and the election was held in February 1864. Two months later representatives met to draw up a new state constitution.

Banks and Lincoln were pleased with the progress, and Lincoln recognized the newly elected state officials as legal. Many Louisianans refused to accept the new government. They said that much of the state was still in Confederate hands, and there was a Confederate state capital at Shreveport. Furthermore, the military, they believed, had forced the new government on them.

Some blacks and white Radical Republicans were displeased with the new government, because it did not permit blacks to vote. In a letter to the new governor of Louisiana, Lincoln said: "I barely suggest for your private consideration whether some of the colored people may not be let in, as for instance the very intelligent and especially those who have fought gallantly in our ranks." Although Lincoln's suggestion may seem mild, almost timid, allowing any blacks to vote would have been a dramatic step for any Southern state and most Northern ones as well. The new state government refused to allow blacks to vote.

Controversy over the new state government continued, but war-torn Louisiana faced economic and social problems as well as political ones. Cutting through all of the problems was racial tension. For years, slavery had defined the position of most blacks in Louisiana. For example, in 1830 a law made it illegal to teach slaves to read or write. Then, almost overnight, tens of thousands of slaves, most of whom were illiterate, were freed. Many came to New Orleans and other cities, while others remained in rural areas. Some were hired to work on plantations, but wages were low. Also, for many blacks, working on plantations was like returning to slavery. For ex-slaves in the cities, only a few jobs were available.

For a time, Louisiana, like some other Southern states, passed laws regulating the behavior of black people. In November 1865, Louisiana passed the Vagrant Law. According to this law, anyone who wandered about without a job could be arrested. Once arrested, the person could be hired out to work on plantations or to labor on public works, such as repairing the levees that held back flood waters. Technically, the law applied to both whites and blacks. Many Northerners, however, suspected that such laws were a veiled attempt to reinstate slavery.

Not all white Louisianans opposed black rights. Among this group of people were some white Radical Republicans. Many of the Radical Republicans in Louisiana had been born in the North and were called *carpetbaggers* by native white Louisianans. Supposedly, these North-

erners had packed their belongings in bags made of carpet material and hurried South to make money by meddling in political affairs. Louisiana's Radical Republicans disagreed about some black rights, but all agreed that blacks should be allowed to vote. Of course, if given the vote, it was likely that blacks would support the Republicans. The Congress had refused to seat Louisiana representatives elected under the 1864 constitution, largely because blacks were not allowed to vote. Therefore, Louisiana was not officially back in the Union. After Lincoln's death, President Andrew Johnson urged the white Democrats, then in control of Louisiana's government, to allow blacks who paid taxes and who could read the Constitution to vote. If that were done, Johnson believed Congress would accept Louisiana into the Union. However, the Democrats would not go along with the idea. They doubted that a majority of Louisiana whites would support black voting. Blacks were allowed to vote in only a few Northern states. Many Louisiana whites thought it was unfair to force the South to do something not required in the North.

In early 1866, the Radical Republicans in Louisiana called a new constitutional convention. They believed they could create a constitution acceptable to Congress, and, with federal support, take control of the state government. The convention met in New Orleans; the outcome was a calamity. On July 30, a group of blacks, who were marching to attend the convention, got into a battle with a group of hostile whites. In the fighting, over thirty blacks were killed and at least one hundred were wounded. The police force was involved in the gunbattle against the blacks.

News of the killings in New Orleans spread quickly through the North. More and more people felt that such violence meant the federal government should adopt harsher Reconstruction measures. This feeling helped the Radical Republicans in the national elections of 1866. The Radical Republicans now controlled Congress and took over Reconstruction.

Early in 1867, Congress passed a number of laws governing Reconstruction. In accordance with these laws, the South was divided into five military districts, each commanded by a Union officer. No state would be readmitted to the Union unless it created a new constitution guaranteeing blacks the right to vote. Representatives to the new constitutional conventions had to be elected by both blacks and whites. In addition, those who had held civil offices in the

Confederacy, or had been officers of the Confederate army, were not allowed to vote.

General Philip Sheridan was appointed military commander of the district that included Louisiana. His use of power quickly angered many white Louisianans. For example, he ordered a reorganization of the New Orleans police force, which had been involved in the 1866 riot, so that one-half of its membership would be composed of former Union soldiers. Also, Sheridan would not enforce the segregation policy that had operated for many years on New Orleans' streetcars. Blacks had been only allowed to ride on special "star" cars. When some blacks tried to ride on white-only cars, the owners of the company asked Sheridan to enforce segregation. Sheridan refused the owner's request. The general also organized voter registration drives, and many more blacks than whites registered. This was not surprising because there were more blacks than whites in the state. Many white Louisianans were fearful of what would happen if blacks controlled the government. They were especially fearful of social integration, which they believed would force the races together. Concern increased when a black newspaper editor wrote: "We want to ride in any conveyance, to travel on steamboats, eat in any steamboat, dine at any restaurant, or educate our children at any school."

Some whites were frightened to the extreme. According to one opinion, furious blacks were going to rewrite the history of the state "in letters of blood, for they daily and openly threaten arson, rape, murder, rebellion, civil war, and the extermination of the whites." It is doubtful that blacks ever made such threats. It was, however, certain that many whites were afraid of what black political power would bring.

As directed by Congress, a new state constitution was written guaranteeing blacks the right to vote. Statewide elections, under military supervision, were held, and Henry Clay Warmouth, a white man, was elected governor. The Radical Republicans were now in control of Louisiana, and the state was readmitted to the Union in June of 1868.

Warmouth was regarded as a carpetbagger. Born in Illinois, he served in the Union army and later became involved in Louisiana politics.

The young governor, aged 26, had his hands full. Most white Louisianans did not support the Radical Republicans. They looked

with disdain at the new state government and its legislature that was about one-half black.

To oppose the Radical Republicans, many whites looked to the Democratic party, and some joined secret organizations. These organizations were dedicated to the return of white control of Louisiana. Secret meetings, codes, oaths, and handshakes were devised so that the groups could keep their operations a mystery to outsiders. At the time, the best known of these organizations was the Knights of the White Camelia. Governor Warmouth said he had received a death threat from the Ku Klux Klan, another secret white group.

One of the purposes of the secret groups was to prevent blacks from voting for Republicans. Often physical violence was used or threatened. As the presidential election of 1868 approached, there were many terrible battles between blacks and whites throughout the state. There was virtually no law and order in Louisiana. Fears of even greater violence led Warmouth and other Republicans to urge blacks not to vote in the coming election.

The threats and violence seemed to work. One member of the Knights of the White Camelia wrote: "The true white people of New Orleans are strong and confident of . . . complete success, not only in November, but forever after." At that time there was no secret ballot, and on election day one supervisor of registration said: "I am fully convinced that no man could have voted any other than the Democratic ticket and not been killed inside of twenty-four hours."

The Democrats obtained a huge majority of the state's votes. They did not win nationally, however, and General Ulysses Grant, a Republican and Union war hero, became president.

State officials had not been up for election in the November voting, but the results were a warning. Warmouth believed he and the Republicans could not remain in power unless they could prevent future elections from being decided by threats and terror. Warmouth's supporters in the legislature passed a law creating the Returning Board. This board, controlled by the governor, had the power to count election returns and throw out votes if they thought voters in an area had been frightened or terrorized in some way. Critics of Warmouth were disgusted. There was no legal way to prevent the board from simply throwing out Democratic votes in future elections.

Warmouth and the Republican-controlled legislature received much criticism. Like many other Southern Reconstruction governments,

Louisiana's was plagued by corruption. Legislators commonly took bribes to pass laws that helped particular people or businesses. Warmouth was often unfairly accused of corruption, but he did make money while in office. For example, he arranged for all of the state's printing business to be done by a company of which he was a major stockholder.

In one instance, the state senate was deadlocked by a vote of 17 to 17 in trying to decide on a new lieutenant governor. Warmouth offered one of the white senators a bribe of \$15,000 plus \$20,000 in state bonds if the senator would vote for Warmouth's candidate, a well-known black man named Pinchback. The senator agreed. The money was to be placed in a metal box and held by a banker until after the final vote. The vote was held and Pinchback won 18 to 16. When the senator picked up the metal box there was no money to be found.

Warmouth agreed that bribery was widespread but emphasized that there was no state law against bribery at that time. At one point Warmouth supposedly said: "I don't pretend to be honest. . . . I only pretend to be as honest as anybody in politics, and more so than those fellows who are opposing me now."

Warmouth gradually lost the support of the Radical Republicans. Like most white Louisianans of the time, he was not in favor of black social equality. He believed blacks should vote, and their support had helped him win elections, but he did not support other rights for blacks. When the legislature passed a law making it a crime to deny blacks equal service on steamboats, in restaurants, hotels, and other public places, Warmouth vetoed it. He said the law should not force the races to be together: "It ought to be carefully borne in mind that we can not hope by legislation to control questions of personal association." He said that such laws would create more racial tension and have bad long-term effects.

The governor recognized that he was losing black and other Republican support and did not run for the office again. He remained in Louisiana, however, and witnessed the confusion and tragedy of the remaining years of Reconstruction in Louisiana.

The battle for political control of Louisiana continued. Federal troops were often used to support Radical Republican governments. Racial tension and bloody confrontations were all too common. After Rutherford Hayes became president in 1876, federal troops

were withdrawn from the South and Reconstruction officially ended. In Louisiana, Radical Republican rule had ended forever, and the Democratic party became the major political power.

The major sources for this story were:

- Ficklen, John R. *History of Reconstruction in Louisiana*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1910.
- Harris, Francis B. "Henry Clay Warmouth, Reconstruction Governor of Louisiana." *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, April 1947, pp. 523-653.
- Taylor, Joe G. *Louisiana Reconstructed*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974.

ACTIVITIES FOR "THE BEAST AND THE 'BAGGER'"

Answer all questions on a separate sheet of paper.

Historical Understanding

Answer briefly:

1. In what ways did Lincoln's plan for Reconstruction differ from the plan of the Radical Republicans?
2. What was a carpetbagger?
3. What were two causes of racial tension between blacks and whites after the Civil War?
4. Describe three ways the federal government involved itself in Louisiana politics.

Reviewing the Facts of the Case

Answer briefly:

1. Who was General Butler? Why was he known as the Beast?
2. Who was General Banks? What did New Orleans blacks ask of him? How did he respond?
3. What was the Vagrant Law? Why was it passed?

4. Who was General Sheridan? Why was he unpopular among many Louisiana whites?
5. What was the Returning Board?
6. Who was Henry Warmouth? Why did he gradually lose black and Republican support?
7. What was the Knights of the White Camelia? Why was it created?

Analyzing Ethical Issues

There are a number of incidents in this story involving the following values:

- AUTHORITY:** a value concerning what rules or people should be obeyed and the consequences for disobedience.
- EQUALITY:** a value concerning whether people should be treated in the same way.
- LIBERTY:** a value concerning what freedoms people should have and the limits that may be justifiably placed on them.
- LIFE:** a value concerning when, if ever, it is justifiable to threaten or take the life of another.
- PROMISE-KEEPING:** a value concerning the nature of duties that arise when promises are made.

For each of the values above—authority, equality, liberty, life, promise-keeping—write a sentence describing an incident from the story involving that value, as illustrated by this example:

Life: *Warmouth claimed that his life had been threatened by the Ku Klux Klan.*

Expressing Your Reasoning

1. The question of who should be allowed to vote was raised constantly during the Reconstruction era. At different times the following categories of people were either allowed or denied the vote. (At that time, there was no significant consideration of giving the vote to women or people under the age of 21.) During Reconstruction, should any of the following categories of people have been denied the vote? Explain your reasoning for each group.